
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: House Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Anne Bordonaro, Division Director, Federal and Education Support Programs

Subject: EL Education in Vermont – Follow-up

Date: April 12, 2022

What is the average length of time for ELs to achieve proficiency in VT?

- Averages to proficiency are not very informative and could potentially be deceptive because each individual student has a unique array of factors influencing their trajectory such as previous educational background, circumstances surrounding their arrival in U.S. (adoption, country/age of adoption, previous trauma, previous educational background), their age, other factors such as special education needs, etc.
- Vermont's ESSA state plan dated March 2017 calls for students who start at the lowest level of proficiency (level I) to become proficient (succeed at level 5) within 5 years with students starting at higher levels of proficiency having less time. However, many of our EL students are not meeting this goal, and the past two years of COVID substantially slowed EL students' progress toward proficiency since students did not have consistent access to instruction and peers.
- We have only begun to track data on progress of students toward their proficiency growth targets since 2018. It is represented on the Annual Snapshot <https://schoolsnapshot.vermont.gov/snapshot/academicproficiency?organizationid=eee2db64-033e-4c01-a21d-adbd5d63f357&tab=english%20language%20proficiency>
- This information tells us percentage of students who met their annual growth targets by district not how long it took each student to do so.

Do students become less expensive to support as they gain proficiency?

We don't have enough data on student performance or experience with weights and EL cost data collection to answer this question at this time. In addition, it is very hard to determine differences in how much instructing EL students costs at each level of proficiency because other factors also come into play (as they do in terms of time to proficiency) such as previous educational background, circumstances surrounding their arrival in U.S. (adoption, country/age of adoption, previous trauma, previous educational background), their age, other factors such as special education needs, etc. However, some information may be helpful:

- Federal laws require the tracking of EL students' academic progress for two years after exiting EL services and rescreening and reentry into services if there is evidence that EL proficiency is insufficient for the level of school performance expected of them or

desired by them for them to access and perform comparably to their “never-EL peers” in these areas (for example, higher level academic coursework, CTE center coursework, Early College, etc.). This tracking is not a specially funded activity since the students are not identified ELs during this time, meaning students would not generate the EL weight or extra categorical aid during these two years of tracking.

- EL proficiency may be equally, if not more challenging, as students become more proficient because they must acquire academic or “content” English, which often requires the EL teachers to work with their students’ non-EL teachers to assist them to support the EL students in their classrooms. For students in middle and high school, there are many more such teachers to support. It also requires professional development for these content educators.
- From a pedagogical perspective, academic or “content” English may be more challenging to teach and learn and progress may not be linear from Level 1 to 5. Academic English, particularly for older students at higher proficiency levels, is often considered to be significantly more onerous than general English teaching – dealing with academic genre increases the necessity for context/topic-specific lexis (e.g., specialized vocabulary), understanding the features of academic language and text structure, and the requirement for higher levels of accuracy, in say, academic writing. Getting students beyond what is widely known as the “intermediate plateau” requires considerable effort from both learner and teacher, especially when confounded with socio-cultural issues embedded in higher level learning and academic genres (e.g., understanding of the socio-cultural and historical context of literary or popular references).