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What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools:

A Focus on English Language Learners

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Executive Summary

One out of every seven students in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is designated as an English language learner (ELL), and 30 percent of students in the entire district have been designated as ELLs at some point while enrolled in CPS.[1] ELL students face substantial challenges in school. They must learn to speak, read, and write English while they master content knowledge in a range of different subject areas, including English language arts, math, science, and social studies. Many of the policies, programs, and resources targeting the needs of ELL students focus on students in elementary schools. But a growing proportion of ELLs are middle and high school students who have distinctive needs that are often not well met (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel, & Herwantoro, 2005; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). The academic performance of ELLs in high school reflects their challenges. In general, they have lower grade point averages (GPAs) and earn fewer course credits in core academic subject than non-ELL students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011). They are also more likely to drop out of high school than their non-ELL peers (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

The sobering statistics for ELLs have focused policymakers and practitioners on improving the learning outcomes and graduation rates for high school ELL students. Many have turned to research demonstrating that ninth-grade course performance is highly predictive of whether students are likely to graduate. For the general population, the usefulness of indicators, such as GPA, attendance, course failures, and on-track status, for identifying students who are at risk of dropping out of school is well established; however, there is little evidence about whether these indicators can be used in the same way for ELL students as for the general population.

> Course performance in the ninth grade was a very strong predictor of graduation for students who entered CPS as ELLs and reached proficiency before high school and for students who entered high school still classified as ELLs.

This report examines whether ninth-grade course performance indicators are as predictive of graduation for ELLs as for the general population. To consider this question, we focused on a cohort of CPS ninth-grade students in 2004–05 and followed them for five years, until 2009, when most should have graduated. Because high school ELLs are a diverse group, we categorize them into two groups: **New ELLs** were first identified as ELLs in sixth grade or later and entered ninth grade as ELLs;[2] **long-term ELLs** were first identified as ELLs at some point prior to sixth grade and had not yet attained proficiency by their entry into ninth grade.[3] We also consider the performance of two groups of students who were at one time ELLs but achieved proficiency before entering high school: **Recently proficient** students were former ELL students who achieved proficiency between sixth and eighth grade; **long-term proficient** students were former ELLs who achieved proficiency before sixth grade. For the purpose of comparison, we also include students who were never eligible for ELL services, **never ELL** students, either because their native language was English or because they took the English language proficiency screening test when they began school in CPS and scored high enough to be considered proficient in English. Because achievement differs significantly across racial/ethnic groups, we describe the outcomes of students in each of these five ELL categories within their particular ethnic group. In other words, we compare Hispanic ninth-grade ELLs to Hispanic former ELLs and Hispanic students who were never ELLs. Similar comparisons are made for white and Asian students.

The report focuses primarily on Hispanic students because they represent the largest group of ninth-grade ELLs (both new and long-term ELLs) and former ELL students in Chicago; however, we also include the same set of analyses of course performance and graduation for white and Asian students. We report two key findings applicable to ninth-grade ELLs and former ELLs, regardless of race/ethnicity.

1. Ninth-grade course performance indicators predict graduation in much the same way for ninth-grade ELLs and former ELLs as for students who were never ELLs.

Course performance in the ninth grade was a very strong predictor of graduation for students who entered CPS as ELLs and reached proficiency before high school and for students who entered high school still classified as ELLs. The relationships between the ninth-grade indicators and graduation were similar for all groups. Students who earned high grades, failed few courses, attended class regularly, and were on-track by the end of ninth grade were far more likely to graduate than their peers who did poorly in their classes, missed many days of school, and were off-track. (Students who were considered on-track at the end of ninth grade failed no more than one semester course credit and accumulated at least five full-year course credits.)

2. Ninth-grade course performance was a much stronger predictor of graduation than either language proficiency level or interruptions in students' CPS education.

Research has suggested that ELL-specific indicators, such as proficiency level and breaks in student education, are useful for identifying ELL students at risk of dropping out. Although graduation rates varied by students' proficiency levels and whether they had interruptions in their CPS education, the predictive power of these ELL-specific indicators was far weaker than course performance indicators.[4]

This report also highlights the diversity of ELL and former ELL students: Differences in course performance and graduation rates highlight the distinctive needs and circumstances of each group. The next set of findings describes the performance of Hispanic students only. Findings for white and Asian students follow.

3. Long-term proficient students performed relatively well on ninth-grade indicators and had the highest graduation rate of any group of Hispanic students, including students who did not enter CPS as ELLs.

Hispanic students who entered CPS as ELLs and obtained proficiency before sixth grade performed better in their classes than most other groups, including students who had never been designated as ELLs. They also had the highest graduation rate of any group of Hispanic students considered in this study, including students who were never ELLs, suggesting that there was no lasting disadvantage for students who had at one point been designated as ELLs but had achieved proficiency well before entering ninth grade. Despite doing better in their classes than other groups of Hispanic students, long-term proficient students can be characterized as having only moderately good course performance. They had a C+ average, failed an average of two classes, and missed a week and a half (seven days) of school each semester. Only two thirds were on-track by the end of their first year in high school. Sixty-eight percent graduated from high school within four years.

4. Recently proficient students had middle-tier performance on ninth-grade indicators, and their graduation rates reflected this performance.

Hispanic students who gained proficiency in the middle-grade years performed somewhat below their long-term proficient peers on ninth-grade indicators, although their course performance was about the same as students who were never ELLs. They had a C average, failed between two and three classes by the end of their freshman year, and missed nearly nine days of school each semester. Only 60 percent graduated within four years.

5. Long-term ELLs had the worst course performance and graduation rates of any Hispanic group.

Hispanic students who had been enrolled in CPS since the elementary grades and were still classified as ELLs when they entered high school had the worst course performance of any group of Hispanic students: They failed more classes (nearly three classes), had the lowest GPAs (C–), and missed the most days of school (an average of nine days each semester); only about half were on-track by the end of their ninth-grade year (55 percent). Correspondingly, long-term ELL students also were less likely to graduate than other students within their same ethnic group; only 52 percent graduated within four years.

6. New ELLs did as well as or better than any other group in their ninth-grade classes, but they graduated at lower rates than all other groups except long-term ELLs.

Hispanic students who were new to CPS in the middle or high school grades and entered ninth grade as ELLs performed as well as, and in some cases slightly better than, long-term proficient students in their classes. They had between a C and C+ GPA, failed just under two classes on average, and missed about six days of school each semester. Two thirds were on-track by the end of their ninth-grade year. Despite their relatively strong course performance, new ELLs graduated at substantially lower rates than all other groups except long-term ELLs: Only 57 percent graduated from high school in four years.

7. Ninth-grade ELLs (new ELLs and long-term ELLs) were less likely to graduate than other students who had similar grades and attendance in ninth grade.

Although course performance was highly predictive of graduation for ninth-grade ELLs, these students graduated at lower rates at each level of course performance than former ELLs or students who were never ELLs. The most important factor associated with lower graduation rates of new and long-term ELLs was the kind of schools these students attended: They were more likely to go to lower performing high schools, where fewer students graduated overall. This suggests that ELL students may need additional support to successfully manage the system of high school choice in CPS. A second factor associated with lower graduation rates of new ELLs was that they were more likely to begin high school after the age of 14. There is a great deal of research showing that students who begin ninth grade at older ages are less likely to graduate (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Allensworth, 2005; Roderick, 1994). For students who are 15 or 16 years old when they begin ninth grade, graduating in four years means staying in school until age 19 or 20, when many of their same-age peers have already left high school. This suggests a need for schools to consider students' trajectories when they enter high school and potentially develop strategies for accelerating students' progress.

In general, patterns in course performance among the five ELL categories of white students were somewhat similar to those of Hispanic students: Long-term proficient students generally had the best performance, followed closely by recently proficient students and new ELLs. Long-term ELLs and students who were never ELLs had the weakest course performance. Among Asians, students who were never ELLs had the best course performance of any group, followed closely by both groups of former ELLs and new ELLs. Long-term ELLs had the weakest course performance. For both white and Asian students, patterns in graduation rates generally followed patterns in course performance, except new ELLs had the lowest graduation rates of any group, followed closely by long-term ELLs.

Despite similarities among Hispanic, white, and Asian students in patterns of course performance and graduation rates, Hispanic students, regardless of ELL status, performed well below white and Asian students in their courses, and they graduated from high school at far lower rates. For example, among white students, each ELL group had GPAs that were about one-half point higher than their Hispanic counterparts, and their graduation rates were between 13 and 23 points higher. Among Asian students, GPAs for each ELL group were between 0.7 and 1 point higher than their Hispanic counterparts, and graduation rates were between 18 and 29 points higher.

High school grades have been shown to be a strong predictor of college persistence and graduation (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Geiser & Santelices, 2007; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Allensworth, 2006). Given the importance of earning high grades in high school, our findings suggest that Hispanic students may be much less well prepared for educational opportunities beyond high school than white and Asian students. Future research on early warning indicators must move beyond an emphasis on high school graduation and toward an emphasis on college readiness. It also must focus on the distinctive needs of and barriers faced by high school ELLs and former ELLs, particularly those who are Hispanic, as they navigate the path toward college readiness.

Chapter 1

Introduction

More than 5.3 million students in this country are English language learners (ELLs) (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs [NCELA], 2011). Representing 10.8 percent of the preschool through 12th-grade student population, ELL students are the fastest growing demographic group of students in the United States. Since 1998, the number of ELLs enrolled in schools has increased by 51 percent, compared with only a 7 percent increase for the preschool through 12th-grade population overall (NCELA, 2011). Nearly all 50 states have experienced growth in their ELL population in the past decade, but five states (California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois) are home to 70 percent of all ELL students (de Cohen & Clewell, 2007). Despite a growing presence in schools, the ELL student population was often overlooked prior to the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Many states, including Illinois, did not include ELL students' outcomes as a part of their state reporting or accountability systems. Since the passage of NCLB, there is much greater attention to the academic achievement of ELL students.

> ELL students are the fastest growing demographic group of students in the United States.

ELL students face substantial challenges in school. They must learn to speak, read, and write English while they master content knowledge in a range of different subject areas, including English language arts, math, science, and social studies. Many of the policies, programs, and resources targeting the needs of ELL students focus on students in elementary schools. But a growing proportion of ELLs are middle and high school students who have distinctive needs that are often not well met (Capps et al., 2005; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). The academic performance of ELLs in high school reflects their challenges. In general, they have lower GPAs and earn fewer course credits in core academic subject than non-ELL students (NCES, 2011). They are also more likely to drop out of high school than their non-ELL peers (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

As policymakers and practitioners have focused their efforts on improving the learning outcomes and graduation rates of ELL students, many have turned to research establishing the importance of ninth-grade course performance as highly predictive of whether students are likely to graduate. Early evidence of this came from a 2007 report from the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) titled *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools* (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Allensworth and Easton showed that students who were on-track at the end of their freshman year were four times more likely to graduate than students who were off-track. Other ninth-grade indicators such as semester absences, GPA, and course failures also were shown to be similarly predictive of graduation. These course performance indicators were far more predictive of graduation than either test scores or background characteristics (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

In response to these and similar findings, schools and districts have begun to implement early warning systems that allow them to identify at-risk students at earlier points in their high school career. Understanding whether early warning system indicators show similar predictive trends in graduation for subgroups of students, such as ELLs and students with disabilities, as for the general student population is essential, given the higher dropout rates of these groups. The original *What Matters* report included both ELLs and students with disabilities in its analyses but did not specifically test whether course performance indicators could be used in the same way to identify students in these groups who may be at risk of dropping out. A subsequent report verified that ninth-grade course performance was highly predictive of graduation for students with disabilities and that these indicators could be used to identify students with disabilities who were at risk of dropping out of high school (Gwynne, Lesnick, Hart, & Allensworth, 2009).

In this report, we examine whether ninth-grade course performance is as predictive of graduation for ELL students as for the general population of students. For consistency with the two previous reports, we focused on a cohort of first-time ninth-grade students from 2004–05 and followed these students over a period of five years, until 2009, when most should have graduated from high school.

Because high-school-aged ELL students are a diverse group, understanding and acknowledging these differences is essential before drawing conclusions about students' outcomes. In the next section, we describe important subgroups among the ELL high school student population.

ELL Students in High School

ELL students in high school fall into one of two groups. The first group includes students who immigrated to the United States at older ages. Many of these recent arrivals had adequate formal schooling in their home country and are literate in their native language. They often do well in bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, although it may take them several years to achieve proficiency (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2003; Olsen & Jaramillo, 1999). Other students who immigrated to the United States at older ages may have experienced interruptions in their formal education prior to enrolling in U.S. schools because of political, social, or economic circumstances in their native country (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2007; Walsh, 1999). As a result of these interruptions, many of these students may not have developed literacy in their first language, making academic proficiency in English even more difficult to achieve (Freeman et al., 2003; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).[5]

The second group consists of students who have been in U.S. schools for many years but have not yet acquired sufficient skills to exit ELL status (Freeman et al., 2003; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). These students, referred to as long-term ELLs, may have developed conversational English skills, but their overall literacy skills, and in particular their academic language skills, in both English and their native language, tend to be limited (Menken & Kleyn, 2009; Menken, Kleyn, & Chae, 2007). These students also may have experienced breaks in their education as a result of travelling back and forth between the United States and their family's country of origin. Moreover, their U.S. education is often characterized by a number of school changes, resulting in transitions in and out of ESL programs, bilingual programs, and mainstream classrooms (Freeman et al., 2003; Menken et al., 2007).

Many of the statistics describing ELL students' academic performance do not differentiate between recently arrived ELLs and long-term ELLs, a distinction that is important for understanding and addressing the different needs of these two groups. Publicly reported statistics also overlook a third group of students, those who were at some point identified as ELLs but who have since achieved proficiency.[6] Understanding how former ELLs perform after they exit an ELL program is essential for assessing the overall success of policies and practices targeting the needs of ELL students. For example, a school might make remarkable progress with its ELL students, so that many students attain proficiency in a given year. These students are removed from the category of ELL, and their achievement gains are not included in statistics on ELL students the following year because they are no longer considered ELL students. Students who have yet to achieve proficiency may be a distinct group; for example, some may have experienced higher rates of mobility or long absences away from school. These factors also would put them at high risk of not graduating. By only including these students in ELL statistics, it could appear that the district is doing a poor job of educating ELLs when in fact it is very successful with most ELLs.

Our Study

This report looks at the ninth-grade course performance of new, long-term, and former ELL students who were first-time ninth graders in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) in 2004 to determine whether their freshman-year course performance was as predictive of graduation as it was for the general population. We also examine whether other indicators specific to the ELL population were as predictive of graduation as course performance was. Finally, we examine factors other than course performance, such as background characteristics and the kinds of schools students attended, that were associated with lower graduation rates of new and long-term ELLs.

The report proceeds in six chapters. In Chapter 2, we present a descriptive overview of the ELL population in CPS. We also look at background characteristics of new, long-term, and former ELL students who were first-time ninth graders in 2004. In Chapter 3, we describe these students' performance in their ninth-grade courses. We examine on-track status, course failures, absences, and GPA. In Chapter 4, we report four-year graduation rates and look at the relationships between course performance indicators and graduation rates to discern if course performance is as predictive of graduation for ELL students as it is for the population as a whole. We also examine several ELL-specific indicators to determine whether they can be used to identify students who are at risk of dropping out of high school (e.g., English proficiency level), and we compare their predictiveness with that of course performance. In Chapter 5, we look at other factors that explain lower graduation rates of ninth-grade ELL students compared with a group of former ELL students. Other factors include background characteristics, the kinds of schools attended, and educational aspirations. In Chapter 6, we discuss the implications of this research for improving the educational outcomes of ELL students.

Chapter 2

ELL Students in CPS

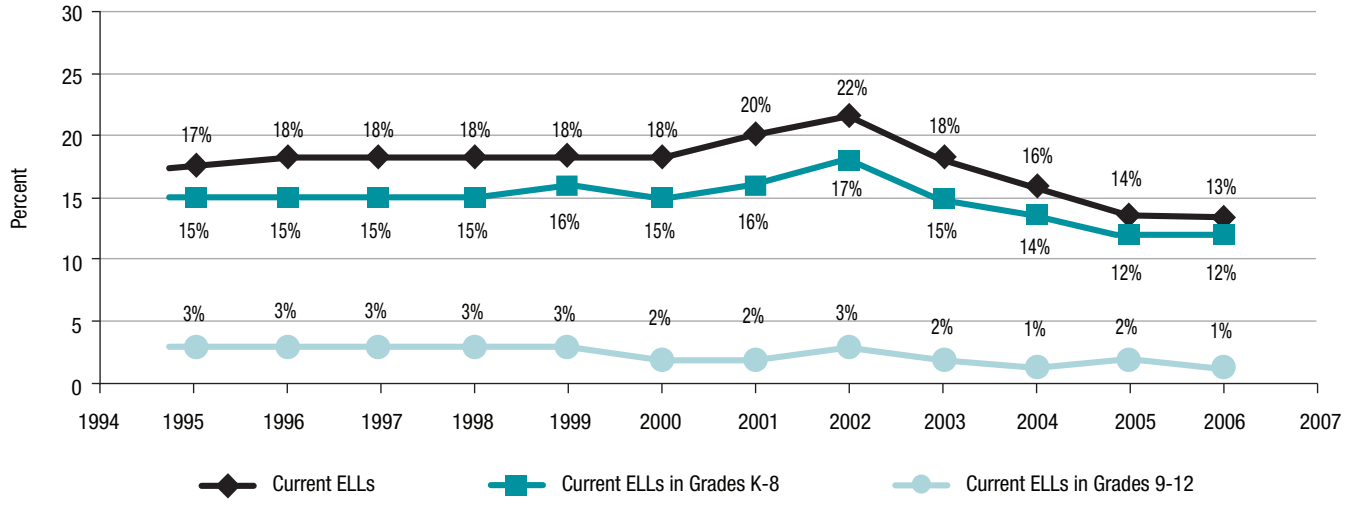
Overview of ELLs in the Chicago Public Schools

> During the 2010–11 school year, there were 63,156 students identified as ELLs enrolled in Grades PK–12 in the Chicago Public Schools.

CPS has one of the largest ELL student populations of any district in the country.[7] During the 2010–11 school year, there were 63,156 students identified as ELLs enrolled in Grades PK–12. Most of these students were enrolled in elementary schools (91 percent), with only 9 percent enrolled in high schools (CPS, 2011a).[8] Although the ELL population in CPS has historically hovered around 20 percent of the total student population, in recent years this percentage has declined: By 2006, ELL students were only 14.3 percent of all students (see Figure 1).[9]

FIGURE 1

Percentage of CPS students who were English language learners from 1995 to 2006



Most ELLs in CPS are Hispanic, although their representation is not equally distributed between elementary and high schools. In 2004–05, when the sample of students described in this report were first-time freshmen, the proportion of high school ELLs who were Hispanic was 67 percent, and the proportion of elementary ELLs who were Hispanic was 85 percent.

Despite the predominance of Hispanic students, there were more than 60 different languages and 45 native countries on record for ELL high school students in 2004–05.[10] After Spanish, the most common native languages for high school ELL students in CPS were Polish, Cantonese, Arabic, and Urdu. After the United States and Mexico, the most commonly recorded countries of origin were Poland and China. In addition to the 67 percent of high school ELLs who were Hispanic, 18 percent were white, 12 percent Asian, and 3 percent African American. This contrasted sharply with the CPS high school population as a whole, where nearly 50 percent of students were African American, and 38 percent were Hispanic.

ELL Students in Ninth Grade in CPS High Schools

This report describes the academic performance of high school ELLs and former ELLs who were first-time freshmen in 2004 and follows them for five years (until 2009), when they would be expected to have graduated. We use data from this cohort to be consistent with the sample used in the original report, *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools* (Allensworth & Easton, 2007), and a subsequent report on students with disabilities produced for the National High School Center, *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools: A Focus on Students with Disabilities* (Gwynne et al., 2009).

As discussed in the Introduction, high school ELLs are a diverse group. They include students who recently arrived in the United States as well as students who have been here for much longer periods but are still not proficient in English by the time they enter ninth grade. Although long-term ELLs often have a history of poor academic performance, many recently arrived ELLs do well in school. Distinguishing between these two groups of ninth-grade ELLs is essential to gain an accurate picture of ELL students' performance.

In addition to looking at the outcomes of students who are designated as ELLs in ninth grade, we also consider the academic performance of students who were once ELLs but are proficient by ninth grade. Within this group of former ELL students, there may be important differences between those students who achieved proficiency more recently and those who have been proficient for longer periods. For example, research has shown that when students achieve proficiency and are exited out of an ELL program, they may still struggle for several years to achieve the same level of success as their non-ELL counterparts or students who had exited out of ELL services many years before.

To address the issues described above, we categorized first-time freshmen in 2004 into five groups. The first two groups include students who were ELLs in their ninth-grade year—that is, their score on the annual proficiency exam indicated that they had not yet achieved proficiency when entering ninth grade. **New ELLs** refers to ninth-grade ELLs who were first identified as ELLs in sixth grade or later.[14] **Long-term ELLs** refers to ninth-grade ELLs who were first identified as ELLs at some point prior to sixth grade; therefore, these students would have been in at least their fourth year of receiving services (assuming normal grade progression).[15]

The next two groups include students who once were ELLs but achieved proficiency before the end of eighth grade. Research shows that students who have been proficient for more than three years perform differently in high school than students who have been proficient for three years or less (Sánchez, Ehrlich, Midouhas, & O'Dwyer, 2009). Therefore, for this study, we include one category of former ELL students who achieved proficiency between sixth and eighth grades, which we call **recently proficient** students, and another category of former ELL students who achieved proficiency before sixth grade, which we call **long-term proficient** students.

The last group of students includes those who were never eligible for ELL services, either because their native language was English or because they took

the English language proficiency screening test when they began school in CPS and scored high enough to be considered proficient in English. We refer to these students as **never ELL** students. Table 1 describes each of these five groups in terms of their entry point into CPS, their grade level upon achieving proficiency, and their overall representation in the cohort.

TABLE 1

Number and Percentage of First-Time Ninth Graders in 2004 in Each ELL Category

		Grade of Entry into CPS	Proficient in Elementary Grades	Proficient in Middle Grades	Proficient in Grade 9	Number of Students	Percent
Grade 9 ELL Students	New ELL	6–9	N/A	No	No	1,343	4.3%
	Long-Term ELL	K–5	No	No	No	1,026	3.3%
Former ELL Students	Recently Proficient	K–7	No	Yes	Yes	3,200	10.2%
	Long-Term Proficient	K–5	Yes	Yes	Yes	3,121	9.9%
Never ELL	Never ELL	K–9	Yes	Yes	Yes	22,707	72.3%

Overall, 28 percent of first-time ninth-grade students in 2004 had been identified as ELLs at some point in their CPS schooling. Nearly 8 percent were ELLs in ninth grade, including 4.3 percent who were new ELLs and 3.3 percent who were long-term ELLs. About 10 percent of students were recently proficient students, and another 10 percent were long-term proficient students. The remaining three fourths of first-time ninth-grade students in 2004 had never been identified as ELL.

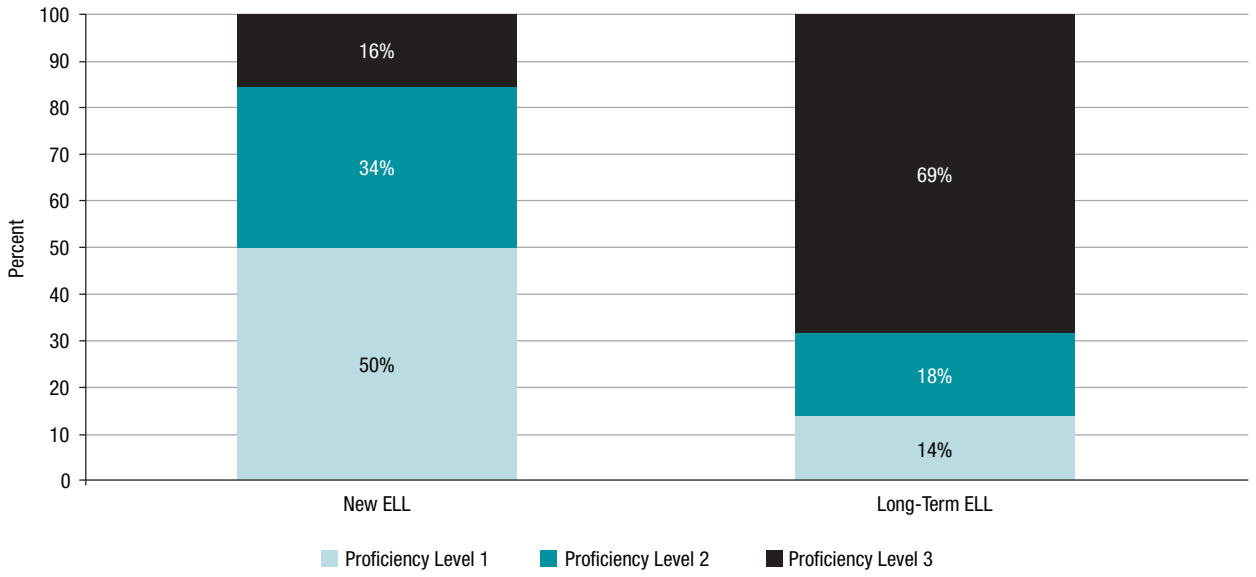
It is important to note that our designation of students as ninth-grade ELLs is based on their proficiency scores—these students had not achieved proficiency when they started ninth grade in 2004–05. Their designation as ELL is not a reflection of who was actually receiving ELL services. Parents of ELL students could choose to refuse ELL services for their child. And, in 2004, students were permitted only to receive ELL services for up to five years, unless they had an individualized education program (IEP) stating they should continue to receive services (see the sidebar titled "Identification of ELL Students and Services Provided"). Fifty-five percent of the long-term ELLs in our sample had been identified as ELLs for at least five years by 2004–05, and the percentage of these students who may have had an IEP stating they were entitled to continue receiving services is not known. Unfortunately, the CPS data system in 2004 had no indicator of who was enrolled in an ELL program.

Proficiency Levels of Ninth-Grade ELL Students

In 2004, CPS categorized ELL students into proficiency levels of 1, 2, 3, or 4, with 1 being the lowest level of proficiency, 2 and 3 successively higher levels of proficiency, and 4 indicating that a student had achieved proficiency and was no longer eligible for ELL services.[16] New and long-term ELLs entered high school with levels of proficiency very different from each other. As shown in Figure 2, about half of new ELLs were at the lowest level of proficiency (Level 1). A smaller group of new ELLs (35 percent) were at Level 2, and only 16 percent were at Level 3. By contrast, almost 70 percent of long-term ELLs were at Level 3, the highest level of proficiency while still receiving ELL services, when they began high school.

FIGURE 2

Proficiency levels of new and long-term ELLs



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6.

Race and Ethnicity

Table 2 describes the race/ethnicity for each of the five categories of students. Nearly 85 percent of long-term ELLs and former ELLs were Hispanic. New ELLs were less likely to be Hispanic; although, at 63 percent, it was still the predominant ethnicity of new ELLs. By contrast, nearly three fourths of first-time ninth graders in 2004 who had never been identified as ELLs were African American. Because there are substantial differences in student outcomes across racial/ethnic groups, we compared outcomes for each of the five ELL categories within their particular ethnic group. In other words, we compared Hispanic ninth-grade ELLs to Hispanic former ELLs and Hispanic students who were never ELLs. Similar comparisons were made for white and Asian students. Because there were so few African-American students in the ELL categories, they are not included in the remainder of this report. In the next section, we describe the background characteristics for each of our five groups of students within Hispanic, white, and Asian racial/ethnic groups.

TABLE 2

Race/Ethnicity of First-Time Ninth Graders in 2004–05, by ELL Category

		White	African American	Hispanic	Asian
Grade 9 ELL Students	**New ELL**	16.6%	5.8%	63.3%	14.3%
	Long-Term ELL	9.5%	1.2%	84.1%	5.3%
Former ELL Students	**Recently Proficient**	7.7%	0.9%	85.6%	5.9%
	Long-Term Proficient	7.6%	0.4%	82.2%	9.8%
Never ELL	**Never ELL**	9.5%	73.0%	15.7%	1.8%

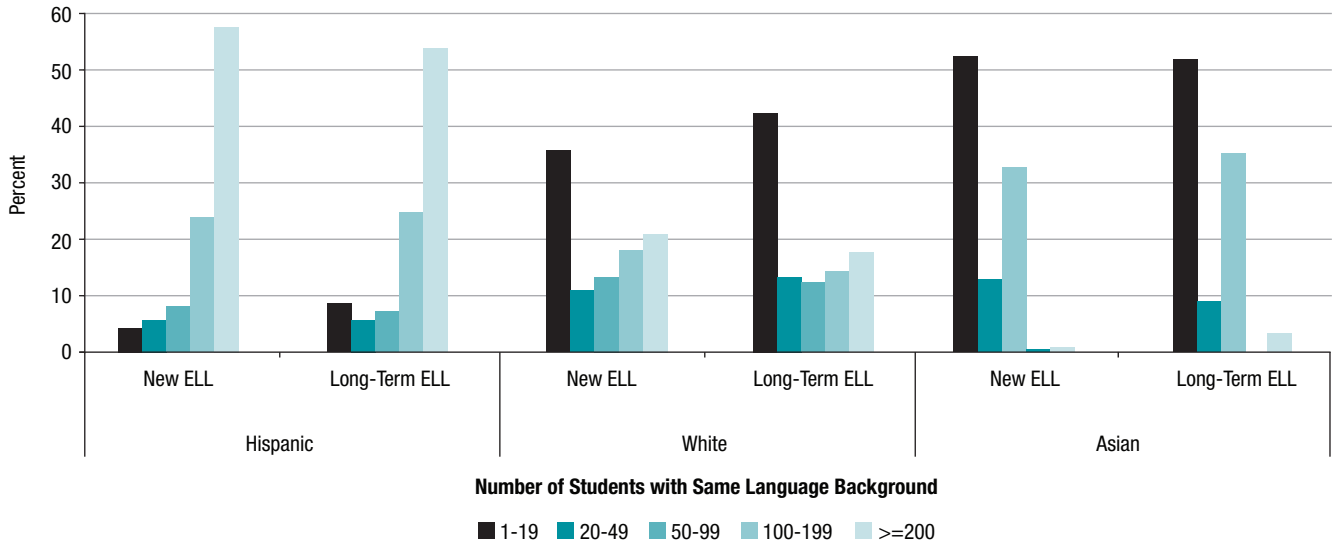
Note: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELLs in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELLs before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Language Populations in High Schools

As described in the sidebar titled "Identification of ELL Students and Services Provided," English language support services differ depending on the size of a language population in a school: Schools with fewer than 20 ELL students speaking the same native language are only required to offer a transitional program of instruction, and schools in which there are more than 20 ELL students with the same language background are required to offer transitional bilingual education. Although ninth-grade ELL students represented only 8 percent of the overall ninth-grade population in 2004, this group was dominated by a single language group: Spanish speakers. Because Hispanic ELLs tended to be concentrated in a small number of schools—65 percent of the total Hispanic ninth-grade ELL population was enrolled in 12 schools—most Hispanic ELLs who were first-time ninth graders in 2004 attended a high school where there was a sizable number of Spanish-speaking ELLs. In fact, more than 50 percent of Hispanic new and long-term ELLs were enrolled in a high school where there were at least 200 or more Spanish-speaking ELLs, and another 25 percent were in schools where there were 100 to 199 other Spanish-speaking ELLs (Figure 3). By contrast, ninth-grade ELLs who were white or Asian were much more likely to be in schools where few other ELLs spoke their same native language. For example, almost 36 percent of white new ELLs, 42 percent of white long-term ELLs, and more than 50 percent of all Asian ninth-grade ELLs were in schools where there were fewer than 20 other students who spoke their same language.

FIGURE 3

High school language population for new and long-term ELLs



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grades 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Identification of ELL Students and Services Provided

Identification

All students who enroll in CPS must have a parent or legal guardian fill out a Home Language Survey, which includes two questions: (1) Is a language other than English spoken in your home? and (2) Does the student speak a language other than English? If the answer to either question is yes, the student must be screened using the state-mandated English language proficiency screening test.

Illinois is part of the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium and has adopted the WIDA English language proficiency standards and assessments. In 2011, the screener was the Pre-IPT Oral English Language Proficiency Test for students in preschool, the WIDA MODEL K for students in kindergarten, and the WIDA ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT®) for students in Grades 1–12 (CPS, 2011b).[11] After students are identified as ELLs, their progress toward proficiency is measured annually using the ACCESS for ELLs® language proficiency assessment (Kenyon, 2006).[12] However, in 2004 when the students included in these analyses were enrolled, CPS used the Language Proficiency Test Series (LPTS) for its annual assessment of proficiency (A. Acevedo, personal communication, October 18, 2011; D. Zendejas, personal communication, January 20, 2011; Illinois State Board of Education, 2005a).

Students who score below the level considered to be English proficient are eligible for and must receive services to support their learning of the English language and grade-level content, unless a parent refuses those services. In 2004, all students identified as ELLs, including those whose parents refused services, were tested annually for the next three years using the LPTS, until ACCESS became available in 2005–06. If a student was not proficient by the end of those three years, he or she could continue to receive services through extensions for up to two more years. After those five years, only students with an individualized education program (IEP) that specified continued ELL services would receive them. Beginning in 2006–07, federal law required that ELL students continue to receive services until they demonstrated proficiency. Within CPS, scores on the annual proficiency assessment are the only exit criteria used to determine whether ELL students have achieved proficiency in English (A. Acevedo, personal communication, October 18, 2011).

Services Received

Schools are required by Illinois state law to provide ELL students with one of two programs, Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) or Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI), depending on the number of ELL students in their school with the same language background, unless parents refuse the services. In schools where there are at least 20 ELL students with the same home language, a TBE program is offered. Under this program, students receive content-area classes in their native language and ESL instruction, although other content classes may be taught in English with native language supports. As ELL students' English proficiency improves, they spend more instructional time learning academic subjects in English. A part-time TBE program is also offered for students who have achieved a specified level of English language proficiency. In this program, native language instruction decreases when ELLs are able to participate more fully in the school's general instructional program (CPS, 2011b). In schools where there are fewer than 20 students enrolled with the same home language, a TPI is offered. In this program, students receive ESL services every day and additional support in the general instructional program. In addition, students may receive native language instruction in content-area classes when possible (CPS, 2011b).

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) provides examples of ways in which districts can provide bilingual supports to students, either while receiving ELL services or transitioning out of ELL. These include developmental bilingual education, dual language/two-way immersion, and sheltered English instruction (ISBE, 2005b; ISBE, 2011).[13] Districts and schools have considerable flexibility in what they do to support their ELL students; CPS employs developmental and two-way immersion programs within the district.

Background Characteristics of Hispanic Students

We end this chapter by looking at the background characteristics of Hispanic students in each of our five ELL categories (for the same description of white and Asian students, see sidebar titled "Background Characteristics of White and Asian Students"). We describe gender, special education status, free or reduced-price lunch status, age upon entering high school, interruptions in CPS education, country of origin, and the type of schools students were attending. Many of these factors have been associated with outcomes such as poor course performance and low graduation rates (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Understanding how students in each of five ELL groups differed on these background characteristics gives us some insight into who may have been at risk for school failure and/or dropping out.

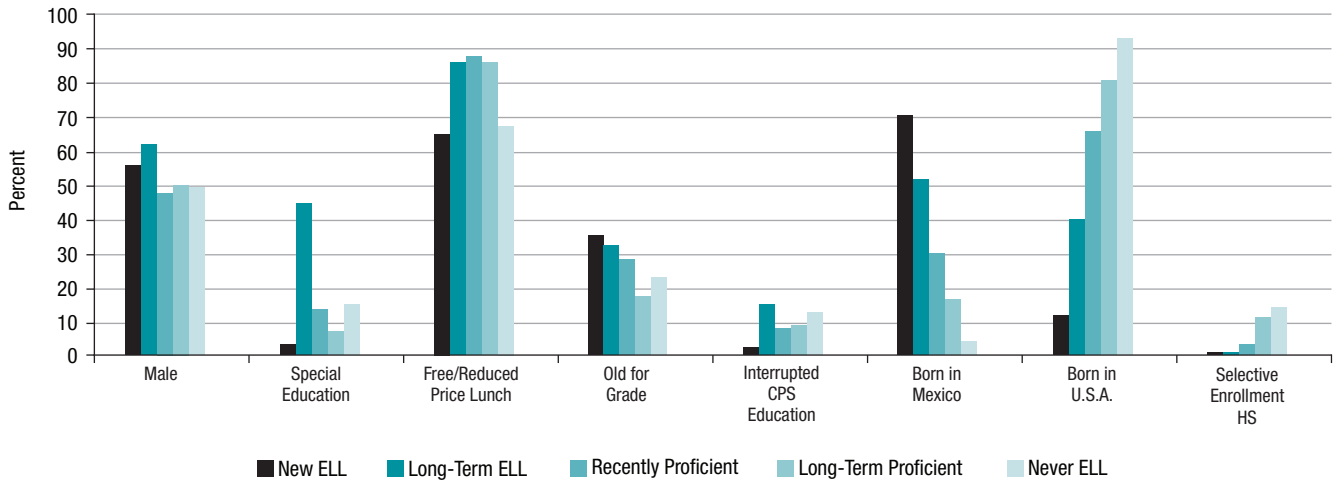
Gender, Special Education Status, and Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Status. The first three groups of bars in Figure 4 report the percentage of Hispanic students who were male, the percentage of students who were identified as having a disability, and the percentage of students who received free or reduced-price lunch in each of our five ELL categories. We find that long-term ELL students were more likely to receive special education services than any other group, but particularly more so than new ELL students. This is not surprising, given research documenting the higher-than-expected rates of special education identification among ELL students in the United States (Sullivan, 2011). A higher proportion of long-term ELLs were male; this also may be linked to the higher rates of long-term ELLs who were identified with special needs because twice as many males as females are identified as having special needs (Data Accountability Center, 2010). Finally, new ELL students were less likely to receive free or reduced-price lunch than long-term ELLs and either group of former ELL students. Because new ELLs typically lived in neighborhoods with levels of poverty very similar to those of students in the other four ELL groups, their lower likelihood of receiving free or reduced-price lunch may have been due to lack of information about how to navigate the educational system rather than lower rates of poverty.

Age upon Entering High School and Interruptions in CPS Education. The next two groups of bars in Figure 4 report the percentage of students who entered high school after the age of 14 and the percentage of students who experienced an interruption of at least one year in their CPS education, both of which are risk factors for dropping out of school. New ELLs were more likely to be older than 14 years of age when they started ninth grade. Entering high school older than 14 typically is indicative of having been retained; however, for new ELLs, this also may be an indication of interrupted education prior to enrolling in CPS or the result of placement policies for newly arrived ELL students. Unfortunately, we have no information about students' prior educational experiences, when they first entered the United States, or specific reasons for placement decisions. Long-term ELLs and recently proficient students also were more likely to be older than 14 when they entered ninth grade compared with long-term proficient and students who were never ELLs, but they were less likely than new ELLs.

New ELL students were the least likely group to have had a break of one or more years in their CPS education, but this is mostly due to fewer years in CPS from which they could have taken a break.[17] The group that had the highest likelihood of having an interruption in their CPS education was long-term ELLs—those who had been in the CPS system for many years and were still receiving ELL services.

FIGURE 4

Background characteristics of Hispanic students, by ELL category



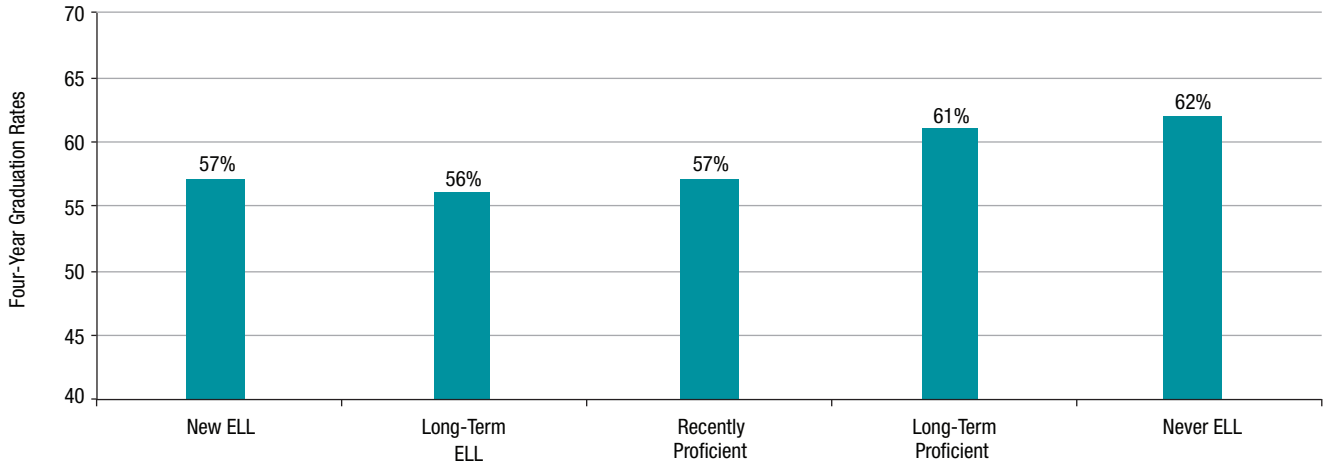
Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Country of Origin. Research has shown that first- and third-generation immigrant youth graduate from high school at lower rates than second-generation immigrant youth (Allensworth, 1997). Not surprisingly, new ELL students were more likely to be first-generation immigrants. Among Hispanic students, almost 90 percent of new ELLs were born outside of the United States, and 71 percent were born in Mexico. Around half of long-term ELLs were first-generation immigrants born in Mexico. Most former ELLs and students who were never ELLs were born in the United States.

Type of School Attended. In terms of school experiences, ninth-grade ELLs (both new and long-term ELLs) were less likely to attend academically selective schools than former ELLs and students who were never ELLs: Only 1 percent of ninth-grade ELLs attended selective-enrollment schools compared with 11 percent of long-term proficient and 14 percent of students who were never ELLs. Even when comparing nonselective schools, we find that ninth-grade ELLs attended high schools with lower graduation rates than their non-ELL peers: The graduation rate for schools attended by new, long-term ELLs and recently proficient students was about 57 percent, compared with schools with average graduation rates of 61 percent for long-term proficient and 62 percent for never ELL students (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5

Four-year graduation rates of nonselective-enrollment high schools attended by Hispanic students, by ELL category



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Overall, we find that long-term ELLs and new ELLs were more likely to have characteristics associated with higher rates of school failure or dropping out. Long-term ELL students were more likely to be male and to have identified disabilities. They also were somewhat more likely to have experienced interruptions of a year or more in their CPS education. New ELL students were more likely to enter high school at older ages. Both new and long-term ELLs were more likely to be first-generation immigrants than other groups. Most importantly, long-term ELLs and new ELLs were more likely to attend academically weaker schools than students in other groups. In Chapter 5, we explore whether these characteristics put ninth-grade ELLs at greater risk of dropping out of high school than other students. In the next chapter, we examine students' course performance in their ninth-grade classes; Chapter 4 looks at the relationship between course performance and graduation.

Background Characteristics of White and Asian Students

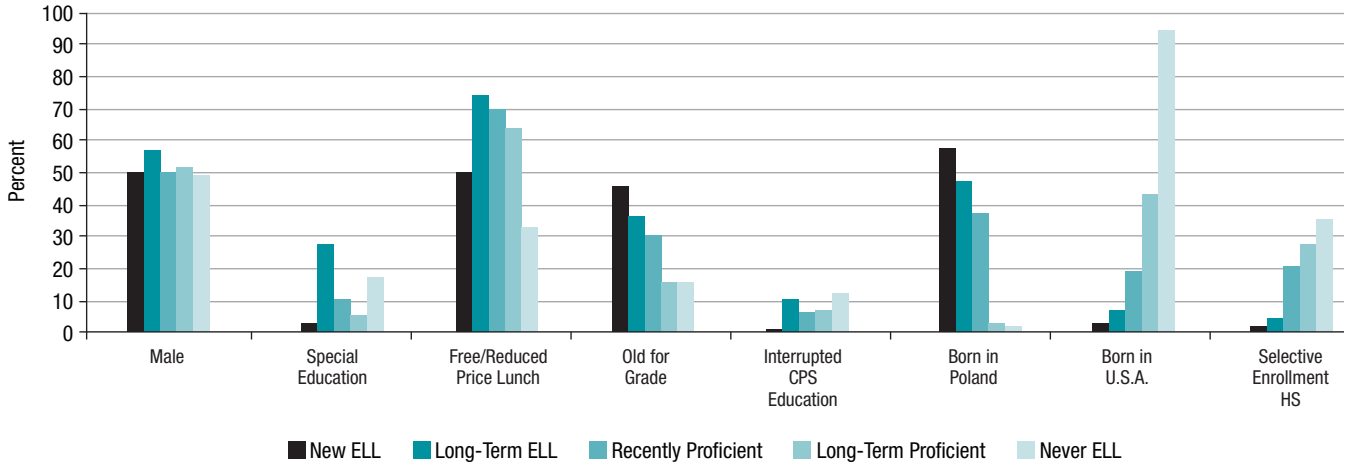
As with Hispanic students, ninth-grade ELLs who were white or Asian differed from former ELLs and students who were never ELLs in ways that may have put them at higher risk of dropping out (see Figures 6 and 7). Long-term ELL students were more likely to have identified disabilities, and among white students, long-term ELL students also were more likely to be male. New ELLs were more likely to enter high school at older ages, and both long-term and new ELLs were much more likely to be first-generation immigrants.

Long-term and new ELLs also had much lower rates of enrollment in selective-enrollment schools, with less than 5 percent enrolled in these schools. By contrast, anywhere from 20 to 50 percent of other groups were enrolled in selective schools. The differences in graduation rates across nonselective high schools were not as drastic for white and Asian students as they were for Hispanic students. However, new ELLs, and to a lesser degree long-term ELLs, did attend neighborhood schools with lower graduation rates than former ELLs who were proficient by ninth grade (see Figure 8).

Unlike Hispanic students, Asian and white long-term ELLs were not the most likely group to have experienced a break of a year or more in their education; for white students, it was students who were never ELLs, and for Asian students, it was long-term proficient students.

FIGURE 6

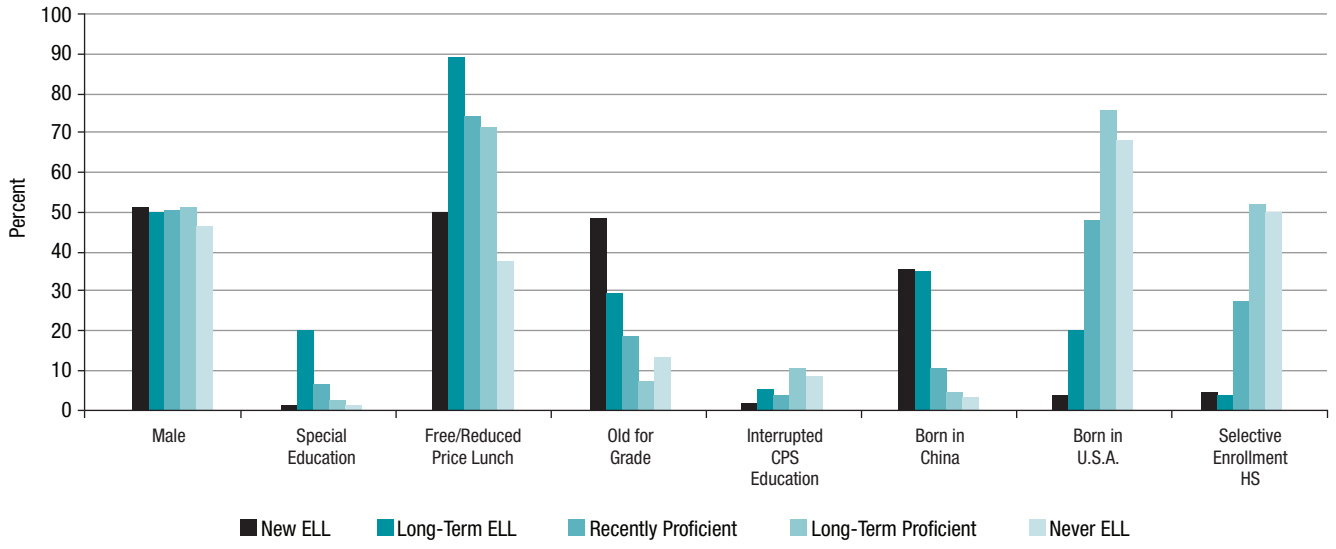
Background characteristics of white students, by ELL category



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

FIGURE 7

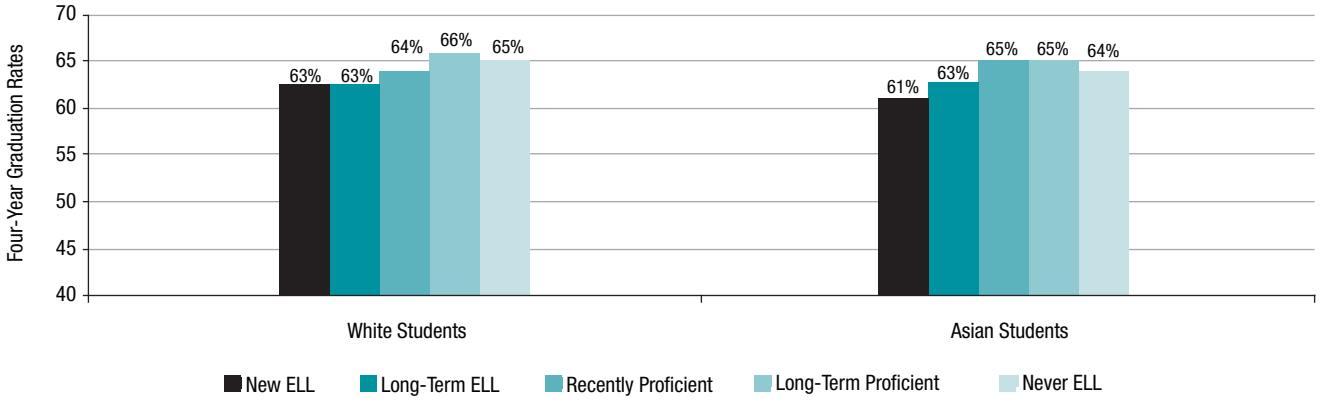
Background characteristics of Asian students, by ELL category



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

FIGURE 8

Four-year graduation rates of nonselective-enrollment high schools attended by white and Asian students, by ELL category



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Chapter 3

Course Performance During Ninth Grade

In this chapter, we take an in-depth look at how students in each ELL category performed in their courses during their ninth-grade year in 2004–05. We examine four indicators of course performance: ninth-grade GPA, semester course failures, average semester absences, and on-track status. In the next chapter, we look at the relationship between each of these four indicators and graduation from high school. We focus on Hispanic students because they represent the largest group of ninth-grade ELLs and former ELL students, but we also briefly describe course performance of white and Asian students.

> Among Hispanic students, new and long-term proficient ELLs had the best course performance of any group.

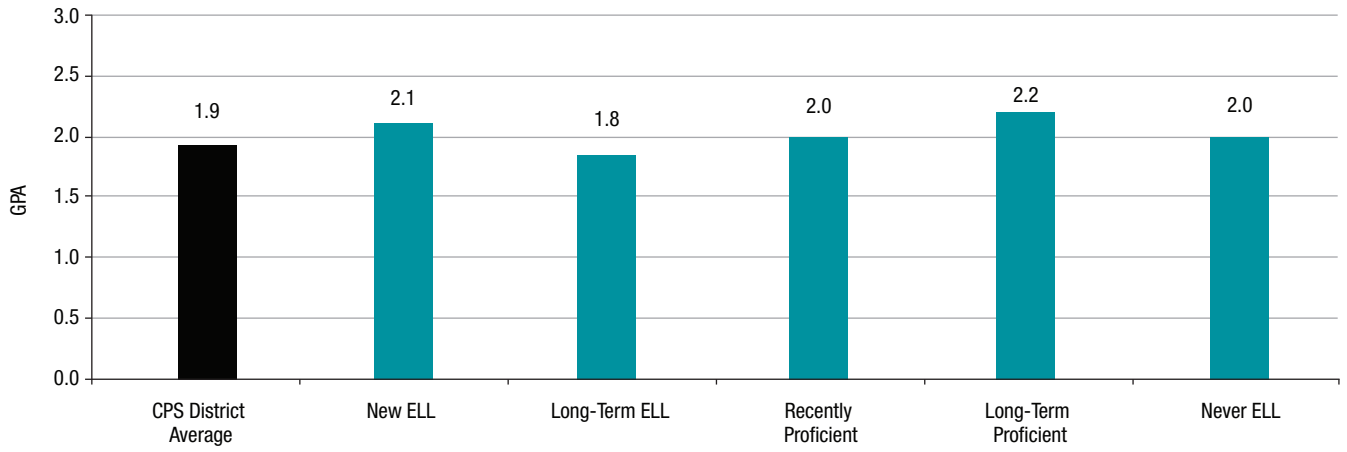
In general, we find that all five groups of Hispanic students performed as well as or better than the typical CPS student. Within the five ELL categories, new ELLs had the best overall course performance, followed closely by long-term proficient students. New ELLs failed the fewest courses and had the best attendance, and new ELLs and long-term proficient students had the highest GPAs and the highest on-track rates. Long-term ELLs had the weakest course performance of any group. Recently proficient students and students who were never ELLs performed similarly in their classes, and their course performance fell between the best performing and lower performing groups.

GPA

Figure 9 displays freshman GPA for Hispanic students in each of our five groups. The teal bars report freshman GPA for each of the five ELL categories, and the black bar on the left depicts GPA for all first-time ninth graders in CPS in 2004. New ELLs and long-term proficient students had slightly better than a C average (2.1 and 2.2 respectively) by the end of their freshman year. Recently proficient students and students who were never ELLs had slightly lower GPAs on average, with a 2.0. Long-term ELLs had the lowest GPAs on average, with a 1.8. All five groups of students had similar GPAs to the CPS district average of 1.9, although their GPAs were modestly higher with the exception of long-term ELLs.

FIGURE 9

Ninth-grade GPA for Hispanic students in each ELL category



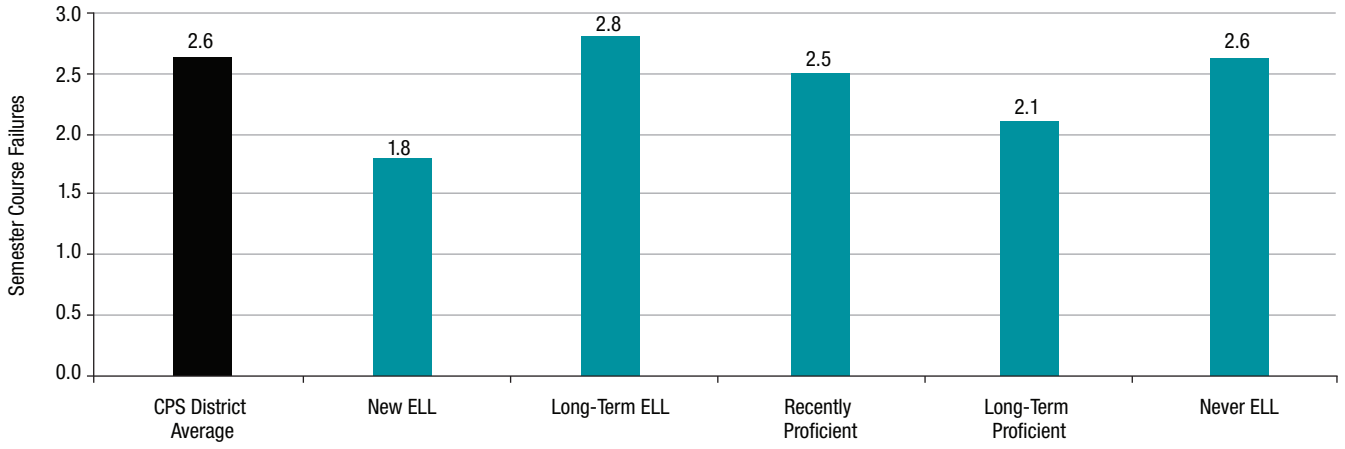
Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Course Failures

Figure 10 displays the number of semester course failures for Hispanic students in each of the five ELL categories. CPS ninth graders generally take seven courses each semester for a total of 14 semester-long courses per year. New ELLs failed the fewest classes (1.8), followed by long-term proficient students who failed an average of 2.1 courses during their freshman year. Recently proficient students had failure rates that were similar to students who were never ELLs, with averages of 2.5 and 2.6 respectively. Long-term ELLs had the highest number of semester course failures, with an average of 2.8. New ELLs and former ELL students failed fewer courses than the average CPS student (2.6).

FIGURE 10

Semester course failures for Hispanic students in each ELL category



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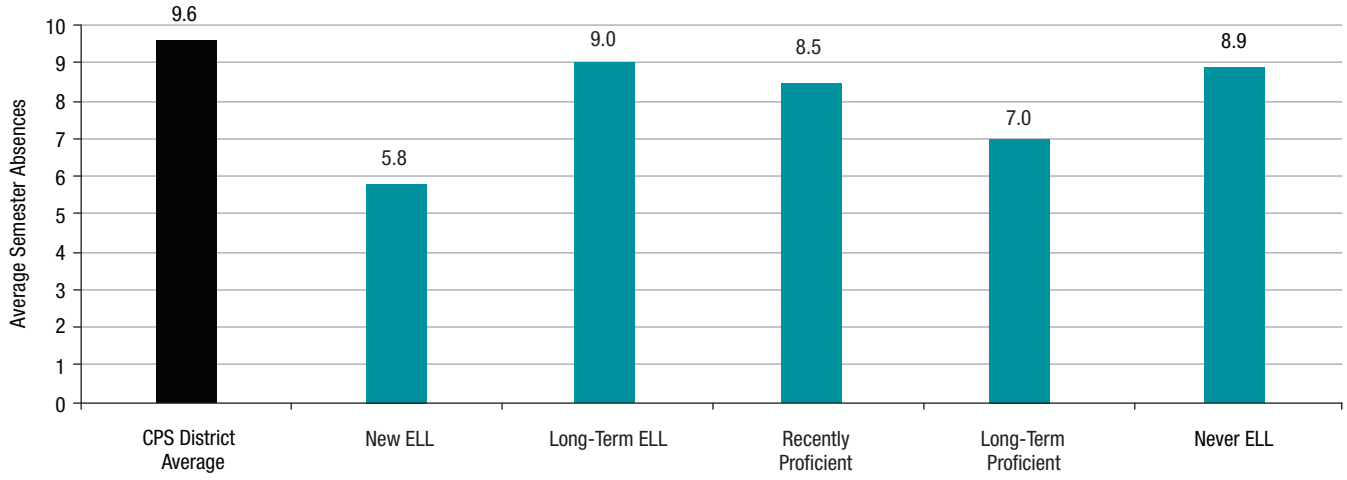
Absences

Absences among Hispanic students are shown in Figure 11. Similar to the pattern described for the previous two indicators, new ELLs had the lowest absence rates, missing about six days of school each semester. Long-term proficient students had the next best attendance, missing about a week and a half of school, or seven days, each semester. On average, recently proficient students were absent an additional day and a half per semester (8.5 days). Long-term ELLs and students who were never ELLs had the highest number of semester absences, missing an average of nine days each. All five groups of students missed less school on average than the typical CPS student who missed nearly two weeks each semester (9.6 days).

FIGURE 11

Average semester absences for Hispanic students in each ELL category



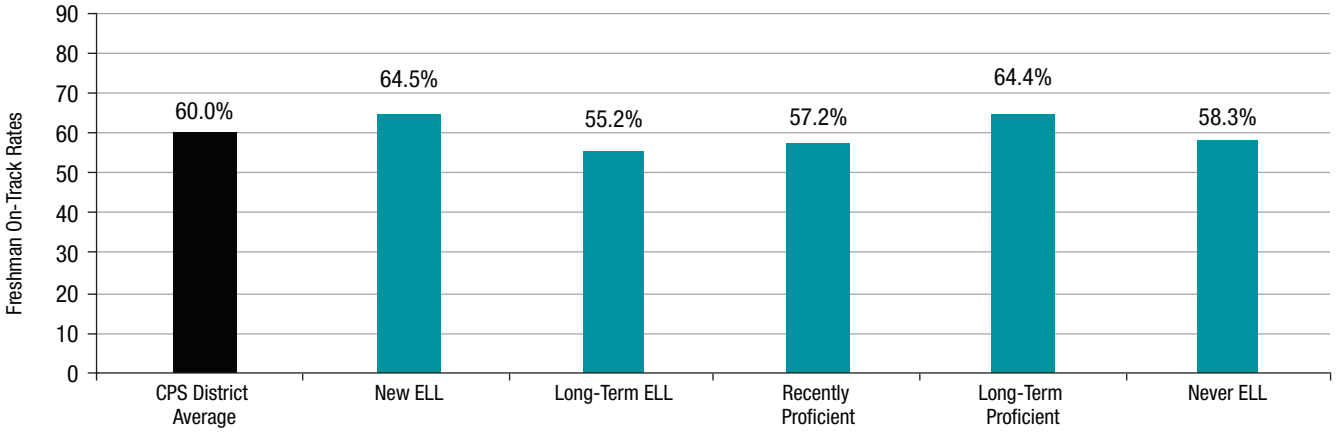
Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

On Track

Figure 12 shows ninth-grade, on-track rates for Hispanic students in each of the five ELL groups. A student is defined as being on-track for graduation if, by the end of the first year of high school, he or she has accumulated five full-year course credits (10 semester credits) and has no more than one semester F in a core subject (English, math, science, or social science). About two thirds of new ELLs and long-term proficient students were on-track by the end of their ninth-grade year. Recently proficient students and students who were never ELL students were less likely to be on-track, with 57 and 58 percent on-track respectively. Long-term ELLs were the least likely to be on-track by the end of their freshman year, with only 55 percent on-track. Three of the five groups—long-term ELLs, recently proficient students, and those who were never ELL students—were slightly less likely to be on-track than the CPS district average (60 percent).

FIGURE 12

On-track rates for Hispanic students in each ELL category



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Performance of White Students on Ninth-Grade Indicators

Among white students, patterns of course performance among the five groups of students were similar to Hispanic students: Long-term proficient students generally had the best performance, followed closely by recently proficient students and new ELLs. Long-term ELLs and students who were never ELLs had the weakest course performance, although differences in course performance among the five groups of white students tended to be small, and all five groups of white students had stronger course performance than any of the five Hispanic groups or the district overall.

Figure 13 shows ninth-grade GPA, and Figure 14 shows average absences for each of the five groups of white students. Former ELL students and new ELLs had a B– average (2.6); long-term ELLs and students who were never ELLs had a C+ average (2.3). In terms of absences (see Figure 14), former ELL students missed about one week of class each semester, and new ELLs missed about a half-day more (5.9 days). Long-term ELLs and students who were never ELLs missed two and half days more, around 7.5 days per semester. Figures showing on-track rates and course failures for each group of white students are included in Appendix A.

FIGURE 13

Ninth-grade GPA for white students in each ELL category

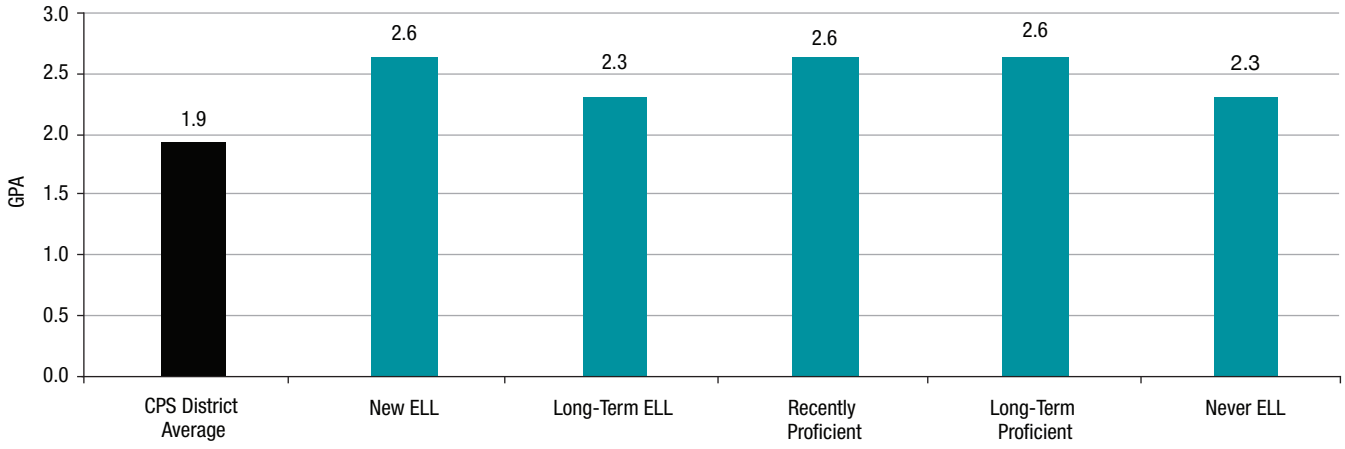

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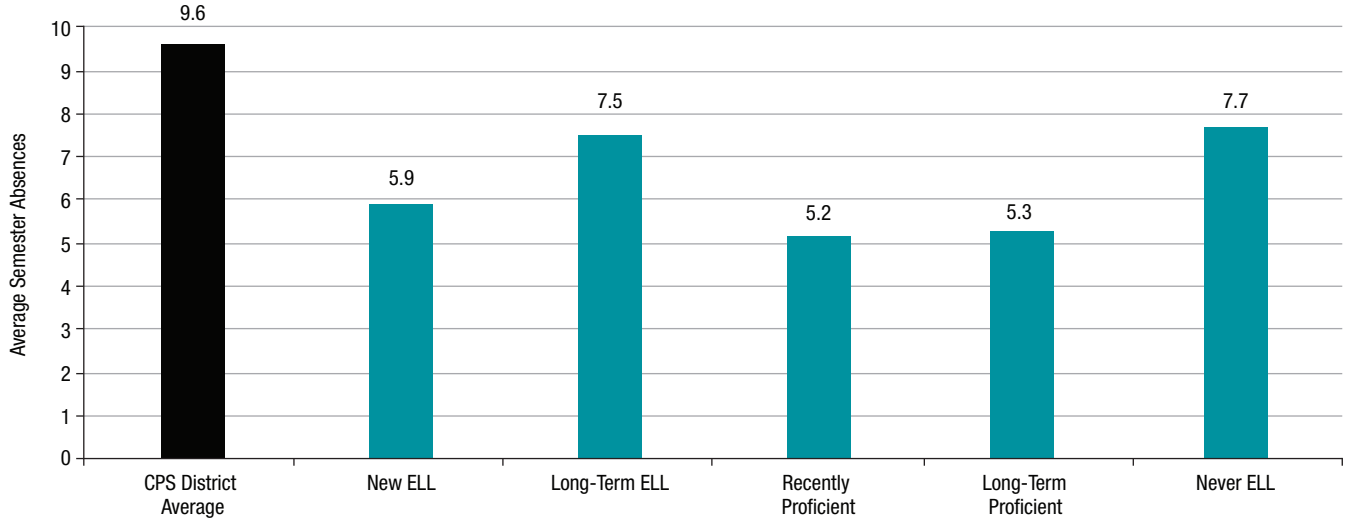
FIGURE 14

Average semester absences for white students in each ELL category



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Performance of Asian Students on Ninth-Grade Indicators

Among Asians, students who were never ELLs had the best course performance of any group, followed closely by both groups of former ELLs and new ELLs. Long-term ELLs had the weakest course performance. Students who were never ELLs had a B average (3.0) in their freshman-year classes, both groups of former ELLs had GPAs of 2.9, and new ELLs had a GPA of 2.8 (see Figure 15). Long-term ELLs had about a C+ average (2.5). The same pattern is evident when we look at absences. Students who were never ELLs missed the fewest number of days, fewer than three days each semester. Recently proficient students missed an average of three days, and new ELLs and long-term proficient students missed 3.6 days. Long-term ELLs missed a full day more (4.6 days) (see Figure 16). Despite their weaker performance relative to other Asian students, Asian long-term ELLs did far better in their classes than any group of Hispanic students and similar to or better than most groups of white students. Figures showing course failures and on-track rates for each group of Asian students are included in Appendix A.

FIGURE 15

Ninth-grade GPA for Asian students in each ELL category

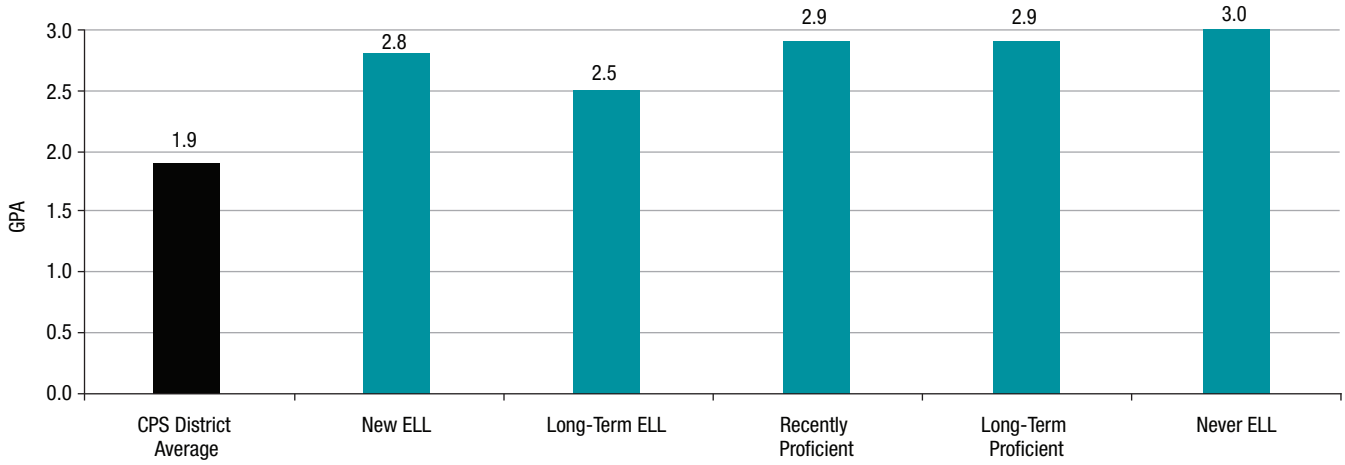

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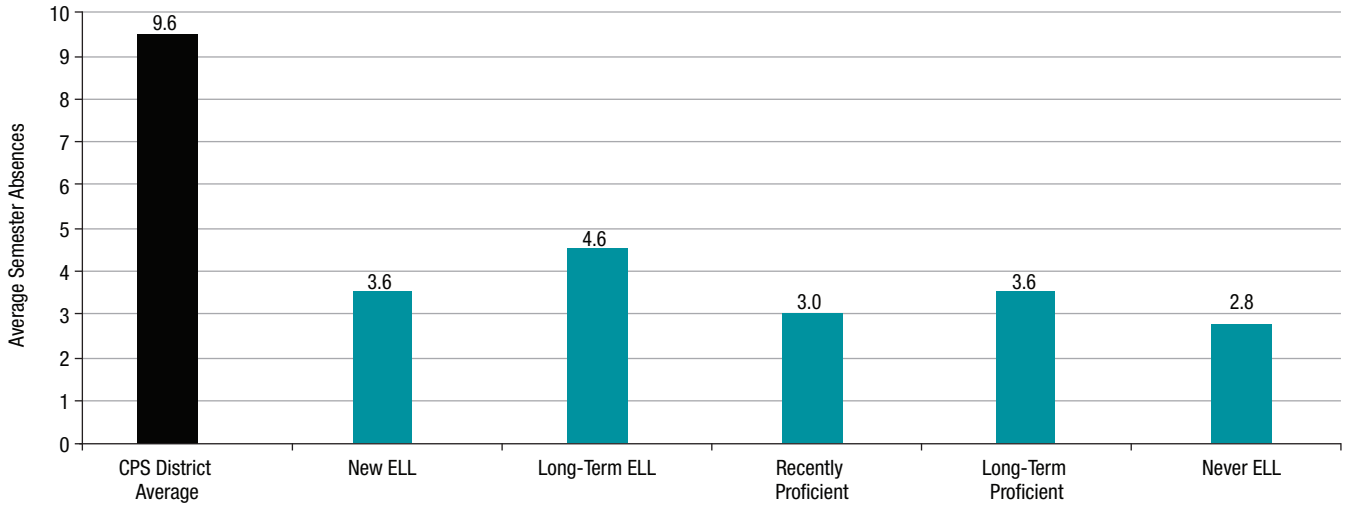
FIGURE 16

Average semester absences for Asian students in each ELL category



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An In-Depth Look at New ELLs

Throughout this chapter, we have shown that among Hispanic students, new ELLs did as well as or better in their ninth-grade classes than long-term proficient students and students who were never ELLs. They also did quite a bit better than long-term ELLs and recently proficient students. Overall, they failed the fewest classes, and they had the highest on-track rates and the second highest GPA.[18] What drove the relatively strong course performance for new ELLs? Were they actually doing better in their classes or were other factors affecting their performance? For example, if new ELLs took classes that were substantially different and easier than classes taken by other students, their grades might have been higher as a result.

Course-Taking Patterns for Ninth-Grade ELL Students

Research has shown that in some districts, ELL students often end up in the "ELL track" in high school. Although their courses are intended to improve English language proficiency and academic achievement, they are often much less challenging than courses taken by non-ELL students (Parrish et al, 2006). Other research has shown that ELLs are far less likely to take a college preparatory curriculum and more likely to be enrolled in remedial classes than non-ELL students (NCES, 2011).

In CPS, all students take a college preparatory curriculum in which few remedial classes are offered. At each grade level, courses in English language arts (ELA), math, science, and social science are designated as required for graduation. ELA is the only subject area in which the required class for ELL students is different from the required class for non-ELL students. For ninth-grade ELL students, the required ELA class could be ESL I, II, or III, depending on the proficiency level of the students. For non-ELL students, the required ELA class in ninth grade is Survey of Literature. In math, the required class for all ninth-grade students was Algebra I. In social studies, it is World Studies, and in science, either Earth Science or Biology.

Students whose eighth-grade test scores were below national norms were also required to take an additional English and/or math class. These classes, which we refer to as support classes, focused on basic skills and were meant to double the instruction time in English and/or math for students with weak academic skills. The most common ELA support classes were Reading in Language Arts, Communication, and Reading Workshop. The most common support class in math was Algebra Problem Solving.

As expected, new ELL students took different ELA classes than students in the other four groups (see Figure 17). (See Appendix B for additional information on how we coded classes for this analysis.) Approximately 80 percent of new ELLs were enrolled in an ESL course for ninth-grade English, and only 20 percent took the non-ESL required English class (Survey of Literature).[19] By contrast, nearly 100 percent of former ELLs and students who were not ELLs took the non-ESL required ELA class. Although long-term ELL students had not reached English proficiency by ninth grade, they were unlikely to take ESL English language arts classes—only 17 percent did so. The remainder took the non-ESL required ELA class.

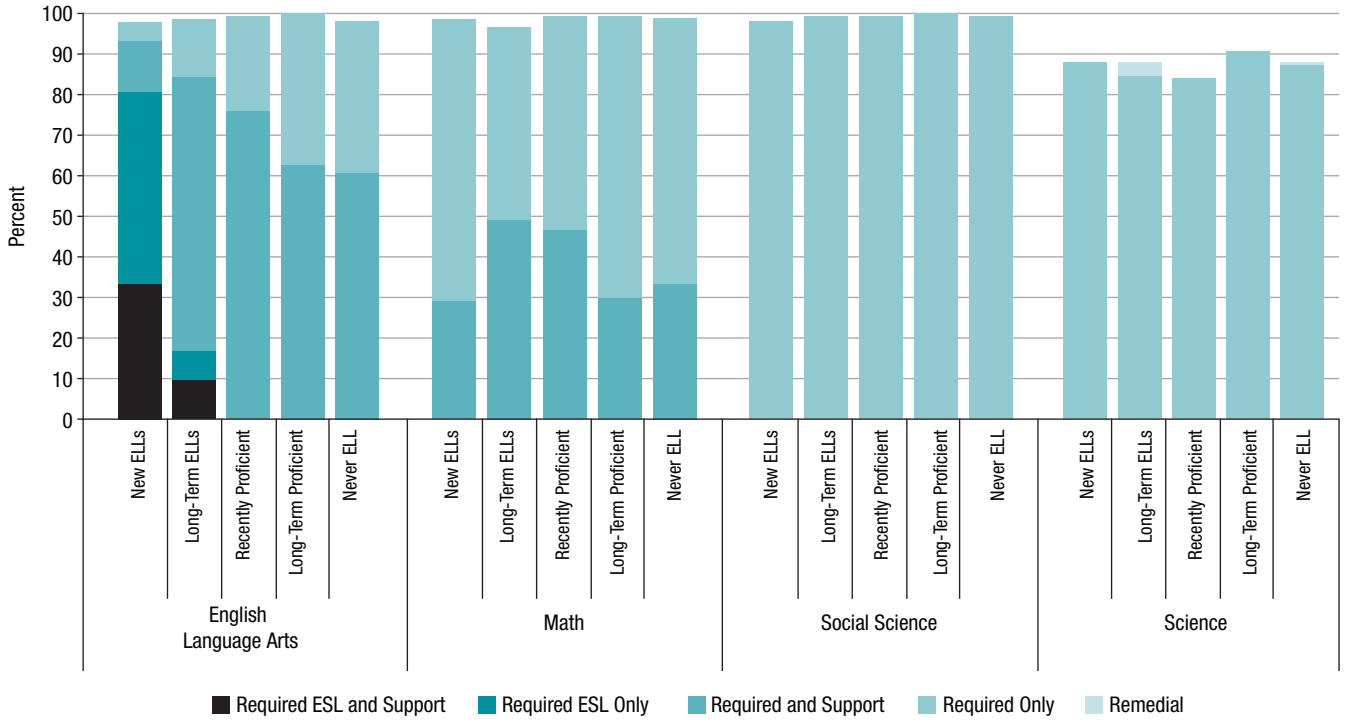
Many of the students in each of the five categories took both a required ELA course and a support ELA course. Recently proficient students and long-term ELL students were most likely to take a support class, with about three fourths of students in each category taking a support ELA course.

In math, social science, and science, new and long-term ELLs took classes that were very similar to other students: Nearly 100 percent of students in each of the five ELL categories took at least one semester of the required ninth-grade math class (Algebra I) and the required social science class (World Studies). Twenty-nine percent of new ELLs also took a math support class in addition to their Algebra course, which is similar to the percentages of long-term proficient students and students who were never ELLs who took a support class in math. Long-term ELLs and recently proficient students were somewhat more likely to take a support class in math, with nearly 50 percent of these students enrolled in such a class: Students in these categories were more likely than others to have below-average eighth-grade math scores. Overall, fewer students took a science class during their freshman year compared with other contents areas, but the kinds of classes that students took were very similar across each of our five categories.

Figure 17 shows that new ELLs took the same required math, social science, and science classes that other students took. By comparing grades that new ELLs received in classes that were also taken by most other students, we have a better sense of their performance relative to other groups. In English Language Arts (ELA), new ELLs took very different required classes than other students took: Approximately 80 percent took ESL as their required ninth-grade ELA class, whereas most other students took Survey of Literature as their required class. If ELA grades of new ELLs were disproportionately higher than ELA grades of other groups, this could indicate that ESL classes significantly boosted the overall GPAs of new ELLs.

FIGURE 17

Types of English language arts, math, social science, and science classes taken by Hispanic students, by ELL category



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Language Support

Figure 18 shows the amount of language support new ELLs and long-term ELLs may have received in their core-content classes (math, social science, and science) during their ninth-grade year. The bottom portion of each bar shows the percentage of classes in each content area that could be identified as using ESL instruction, bilingual instruction, or native language instruction, as determined by course titles.[20] About 10 percent of content classes taken by new ELL students offered one of these kinds of language supports, compared with only 2 to 3 percent of classes taken by long-term ELLs.

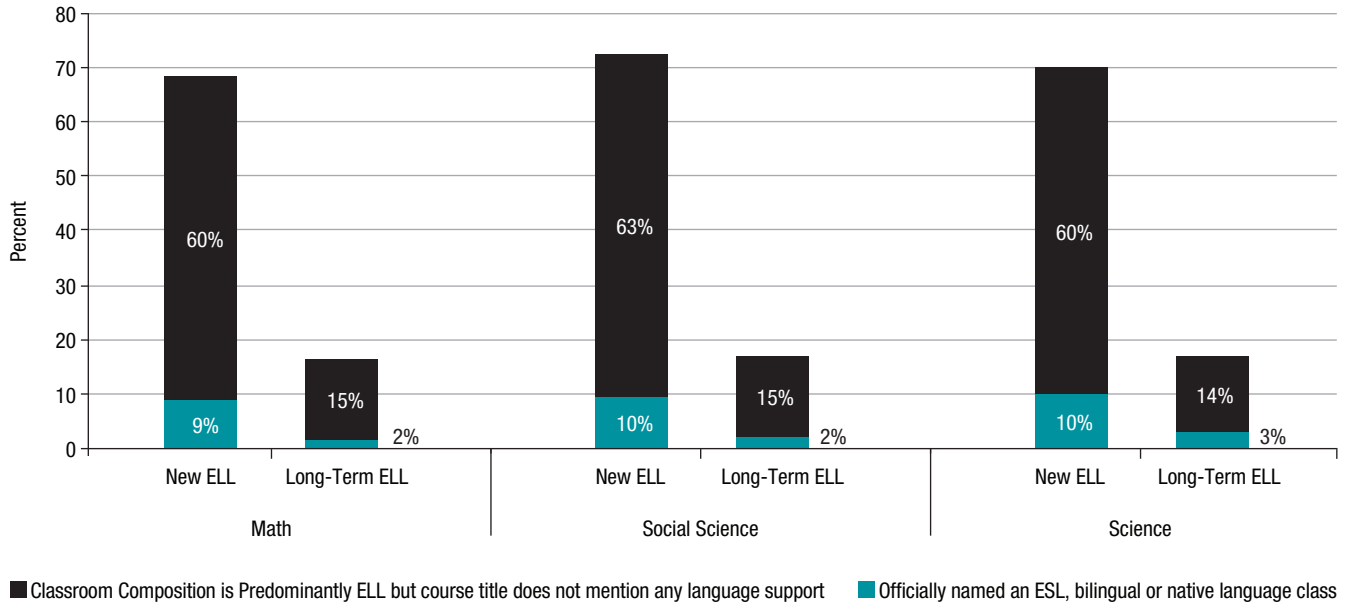
Because so few classes were officially designated as offering any kind of language support for ELL students, it seems likely that the student information system in use at the time did not always reliably indicate whether a content course was taught using an instructional approach designed to meet the needs of ELL students. To address this shortcoming, we looked at the composition of every classroom in which new and long-term ELL students were enrolled. Classes that had an ELL student enrollment of 80 percent or more were identified as "predominantly ELL" classrooms. This method has obvious limitations: Unfortunately, we had no information about the credentials of teachers who taught these classes, and there was no way to be certain any sort of language support was actually offered in predominantly ELL classrooms. Furthermore, some forms of language support such as pull-out and push-in service would not have occurred in predominantly ELL classrooms. But because course titles showed so few classrooms with language support, this method seems like a somewhat better indication of the extent to which schools may have tried to meet ELL students' needs by grouping them together within the same classroom.

The top portion of each bar shows the percentage of additional classes in each content area that were predominantly ELL. Across all three content areas, approximately 60 percent of classes attended by new ELLs whose course titles did not indicate the use of any language support were identified as predominantly ELL classrooms. Far fewer classes taken by long-term ELL students were composed of at least 80 percent ELL students.

Overall, these findings suggest that long-term ELL students had access to far less language support than new ELLs in their content-area classes. Although many long-term ELLs would have exited the ELL program by their ninth-grade year because of CPS policy restricting ELL services to five years for most students (see sidebar titled "Identification of ELL Students and Services Provided"), none of these students had achieved proficiency by the time they entered ninth grade, suggesting that the language needs of these students were not being met.

FIGURE 18

Language support available to Hispanic ninth-grade ELLs in content classes

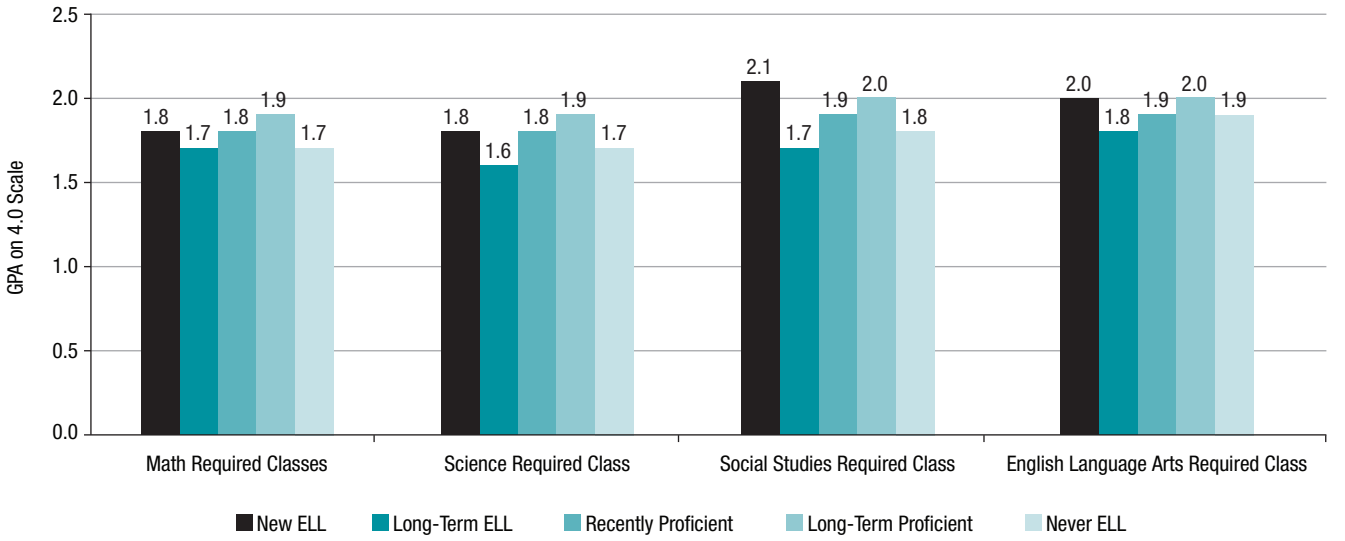


Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6.

Figure 19 shows the average grades that Hispanic students in each of our five ELL categories received in their required math, social science, science, and ELA classes. In general, grades across math, social science, and science subjects followed the same pattern observed with overall GPA. In ELA, new ELLs earned slightly higher grades than in their other classes (except social science class), but other groups did as well, suggesting that ESL classes were not likely to have disproportionately boosted the overall GPAs of new ELLs.

FIGURE 19

Average grades in required math, science, social studies, and English classes taken by Hispanic students



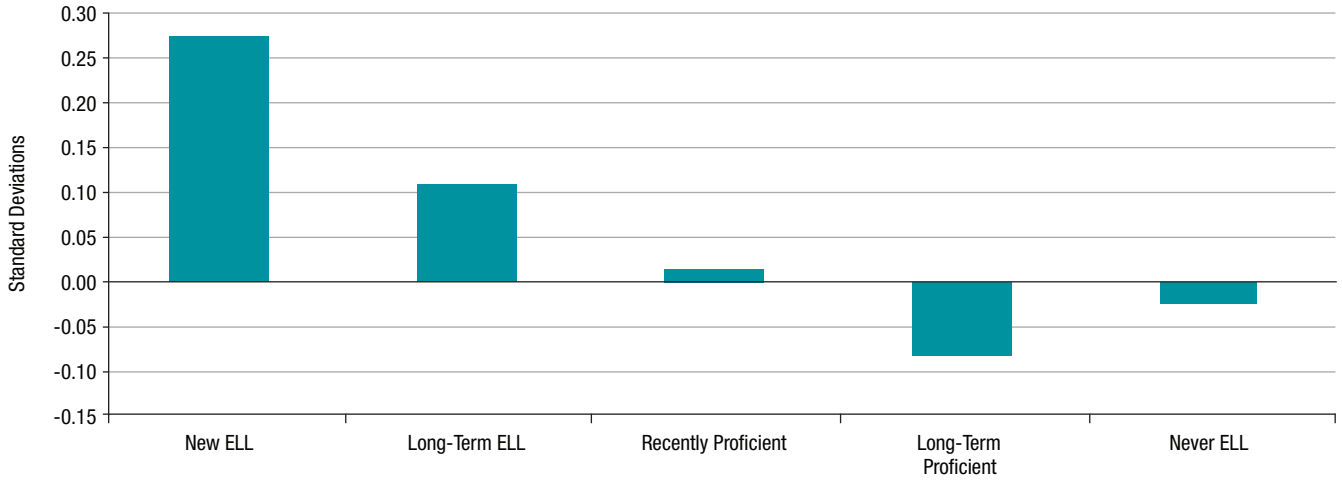
Notes: (1) Eighty percent of new ELLs and 20 percent of long-term ELLs took ESL as their required ninth grade ELA class; all other students took Survey of English as their required ELA class.
(2) New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

It is possible that teachers used different grading practices for ELL students, giving them an artificial boost to grades in all of their courses. Although there is no way to definitively determine whether this is the case, we *can* explore whether the grades that new ELLs earned were consistent with the effort they put in their classes. We have already seen, for example, that new ELLs went to class more often than students in the other four groups (Figure 11). They missed a full day less each semester than long-term proficient students and between 2.5 to 3 days less than recently proficient students, long-term ELLs, and students who were never ELLs.

New ELLs also reported a much stronger commitment to studying during their ninth-grade year than students in other groups (Figure 20).[21] They were significantly more likely to report prioritizing studying and setting aside time for homework than students in each of the other ELL categories. Allensworth and Easton (2007) showed that both attendance and study habits are strong, positive predictors of higher grades and fewer course failures, even more so than cognitive ability. Teachers tend to reward students for doing what is asked of them, such as coming to class regularly and doing their homework. The kinds of noncognitive skills, such as persistence and tenacity, that lead to good behavior and strong work effort are also likely to be the reasons grades are such strong predictors of high school graduation and success in college.

FIGURE 20

Self-reported commitment to studying for Hispanic students, by ELL category



Notes: (1) Self-reported commitment to studying is a measure created using four items from the 2005 CCSR biennial survey of CPS students. Students were aked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statments: a) I set aside time to do my homework and study; b) I try to do well on my schoolwork even when it isn't interesting; c) If I need to study I don't go out with my firneds; and d) I alsways study for tests. The measure has been standardized so that 0 represents the typical study behavior for all Hipsanic students.
(2) New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

After we accounted for students' absences and study behavior, there was no difference between new ELLs and long-term ELLs in their overall GPA. In other words, the differences in grades were what we would expect based on the differences in attendance and study habits. And new ELL students' grades were somewhat lower than former ELL students and students who were never ELLs. This suggests that teachers were not giving out easier grades to new ELLs; nor were students taking easier classes—they were earning higher grades than other groups because they were working harder.[22]

In the next chapter, we explore whether performance was a good predictor of graduation within four years, for all categories of ELL students.

Chapter 4

Early Warning Indicators for High School Graduation

In this chapter, we report graduation rates for students in each of the five ELL groups, and we look at the relationship between ninth-grade course performance and graduation to determine whether these indicators were as predictive of graduation for ninth-grade ELLs and former ELLs students as they are for the general population of first-time ninth graders in 2004 (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). We also consider whether other factors can be used to predict high school graduation for ninth-grade ELLs and former ELL students. These factors include English proficiency levels and whether students experienced interruptions in their CPS education prior to high school. Finally, we compare the predictiveness of ELL-specific indicators to the predictiveness of general course performance indicators to determine which are more useful for identifying students who may be at risk of dropping out among ELLs. Again, we focus on Hispanic students in this chapter, but we also briefly describe findings for white and Asian students. In each figure, the teal bars describe outcomes for each of the five groups of Hispanic students, and the black and gray bars describe outcomes for the district as a whole, regardless of ethnic group.

> Course performance indicators were much more predictive of graduation than ELL-specific indicators, such as proficiency level or interruptions in education.

As we show in the rest of this chapter, there were substantial differences in graduation rates across the five Hispanic ELL groups. Among Hispanic students, long-term proficient students had the highest rates of graduation and long-term ELLs had the lowest rates. New ELLs had lower graduation rates than all other student groups except long-term ELLs, despite doing better in their classes than most other groups. Nevertheless, course performance in the ninth grade was a very strong predictor of graduation for all ELL groups. Students who earned high grades, failed few courses, attended class regularly, and were on-track by the end of ninth grade were far more likely to graduate than their peers who did poorly in their classes, missed many days from school, and were off-track. In fact, the overall predictive power of these course-performance indicators was much higher than other ELL-specific indicators that are commonly cited as good predictors of high school success, such as students' proficiency level or having experienced interruptions in their CPS education.

Four- and Five-Year Graduation Rates Among Hispanic Students

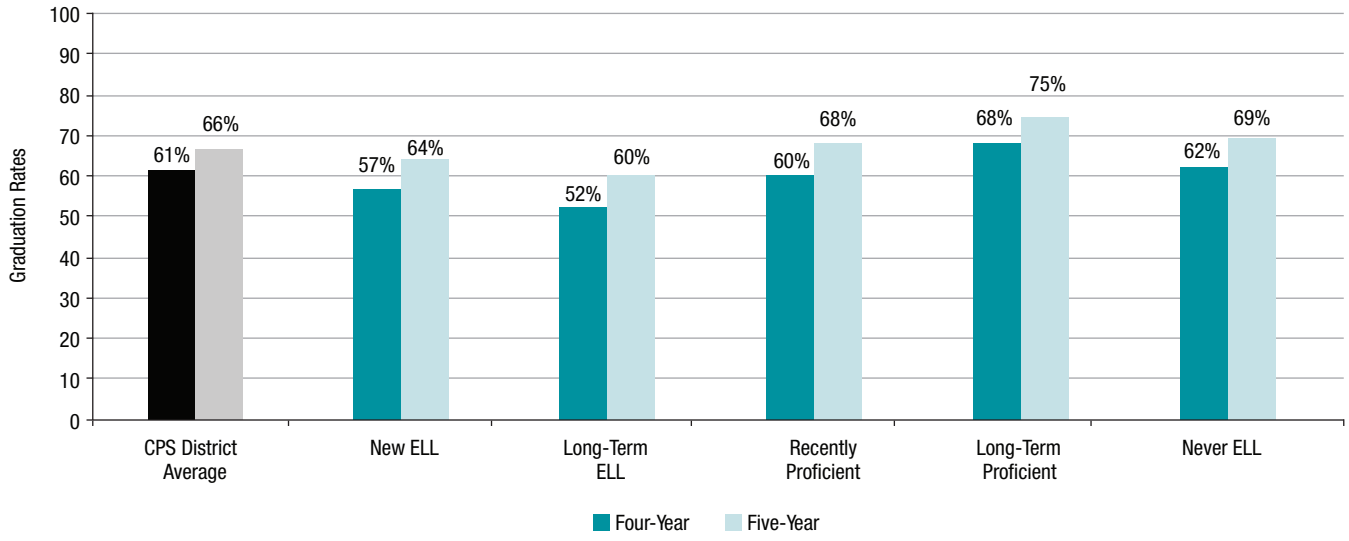
Figure 21 shows four- and five- year graduation rates for each group of Hispanic students. Although we focus on four-year graduation rates throughout this chapter, it is worth noting that the increase in the percentage of students graduating in five years, compared with four years, was greater for Hispanic students than for the district as a whole. Across the five categories of Hispanic students, the percentage of students graduating in five years was 7 to 8 percentage points higher than the percentage of students graduating in four years. For the district as a whole, the five-year graduation rate was only 5 percentage points higher.

Long-term proficient students were the most likely to graduate, with 68 percent graduating in four years. This graduation rate was well above the district average of 61 percent. Sixty-two percent of students who were never ELLs and 60 percent of students who were recently proficient graduated within four years.

Although Hispanic students who were new ELLs performed better in their ninth-grade courses than other Hispanic students, their graduation rates were lower than most other groups of students, except long-term ELLs, with 57 percent graduating within four years. Long-term ELLs were the least likely to graduate, with only 52 percent graduating within four years; their low graduation rates mirror the lower levels of course performance they showed in ninth grade.

FIGURE 21

Four- and five-year graduation rates for Hispanic students, by ELL category



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

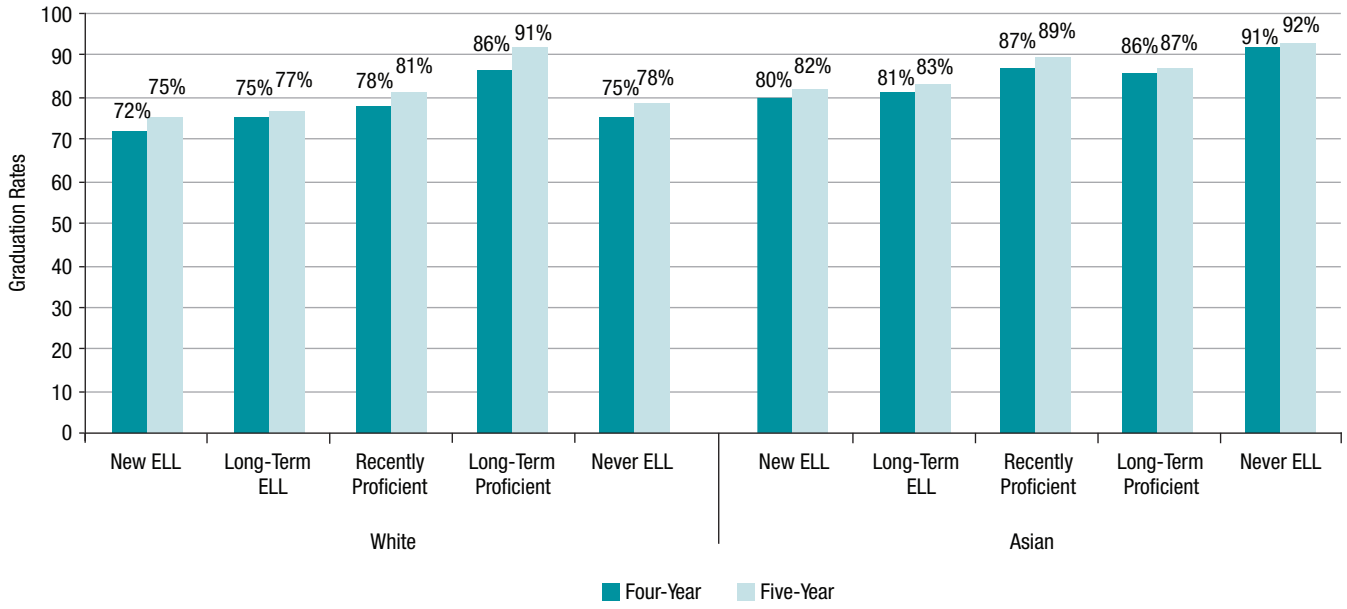
Graduation Rates of White and Asian Students

Four-year graduation rates were higher for white and Asian students than for Hispanic students. However, for both groups, there were differences in graduation rates depending on ELL status (see Figure 22). For white students, the patterns were somewhat similar to Hispanic students in that long-term proficient students were the most likely to graduate in four years (86 percent). Recently proficient students graduated at somewhat lower rates (78 percent), closely followed by students who were never ELLs and long-term ELLs (both 75 percent). Unlike Hispanic students, new ELLs had the lowest graduation rates of any group (72 percent).

Among Asian students, patterns were somewhat different. Students who were never ELLs had the highest graduation rates: 91 percent graduated in four years. Former ELLs had the next highest rates, with 87 percent of recently proficient students and 86 percent of long-term proficient students graduating in four years. As with white students, new ELLs had the lowest graduation rate (80 percent) followed by long-term ELLs (81 percent). Thus, across all ethnic groups, new ELLs were less likely to graduate than would have been expected based on their ninth-grade performance.

FIGURE 22

Four- and five-year graduation rates for white and Asian students, by ELL category



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Using Course-Performance Indicators to Predict Graduation Among Hispanic Students

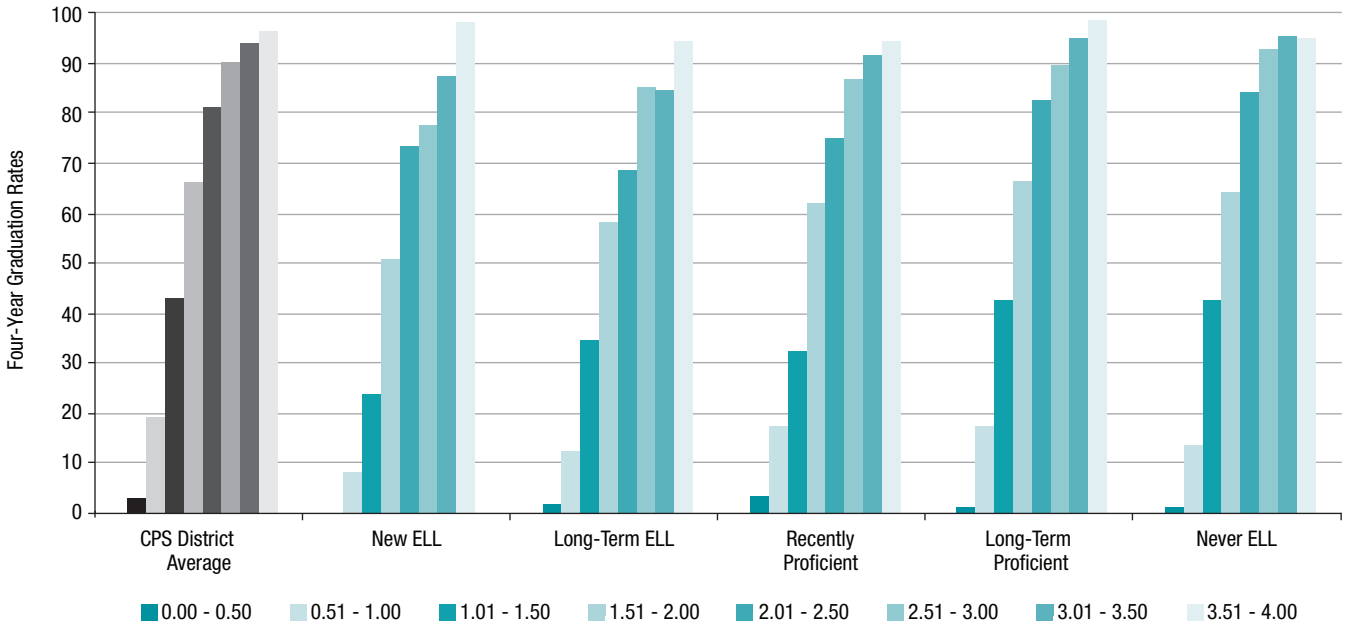
For ninth-grade ELLs and former ELLs, as well as for students who were never ELLs, course performance in the ninth-grade year is a very good predictor of whether students ended up graduating or dropping out of high school. Across all five groups of Hispanic students, those who were on-track at the end of their freshman year, passed their classes, got high grades, and had strong attendance records were much more likely to graduate than their Hispanic peers who did not do well in their courses. The relationships between each indicator and graduation were similar for each of the five groups, as they were for the population as a whole. However, graduation rates were not the same across groups; for new and long-term ELLs, graduation rates were generally lower at each level of course performance than for former ELLs, students who were never ELLs, and the district as a whole.

GPA

Ninth-grade GPA is a strong predictor of whether students eventually graduate from high school in four years (see Figure 23). In general, students with a B average (3.0) or better in ninth grade were very likely to graduate within four years, and those with D average (1.0) were not likely to graduate within four years. The relationship between GPA and graduation was similar for each of the five categories of students as it was for the district as a whole. However, at each GPA level, new and long-term ELLs were less likely to graduate than long-term proficient students, students who were never ELLs, and in most cases, recently proficient students. For example, among students with a GPA between 1.51 and 2.00, only 51 percent of new ELLs and 58 percent of long-term ELLs graduated in four years compared with 62 percent of recently proficient students, 66 percent of long-term proficient students, and 64 percent of students who were never ELLs.

FIGURE 23

Four-year graduation rates, by ninth-grade GPA for Hispanic students



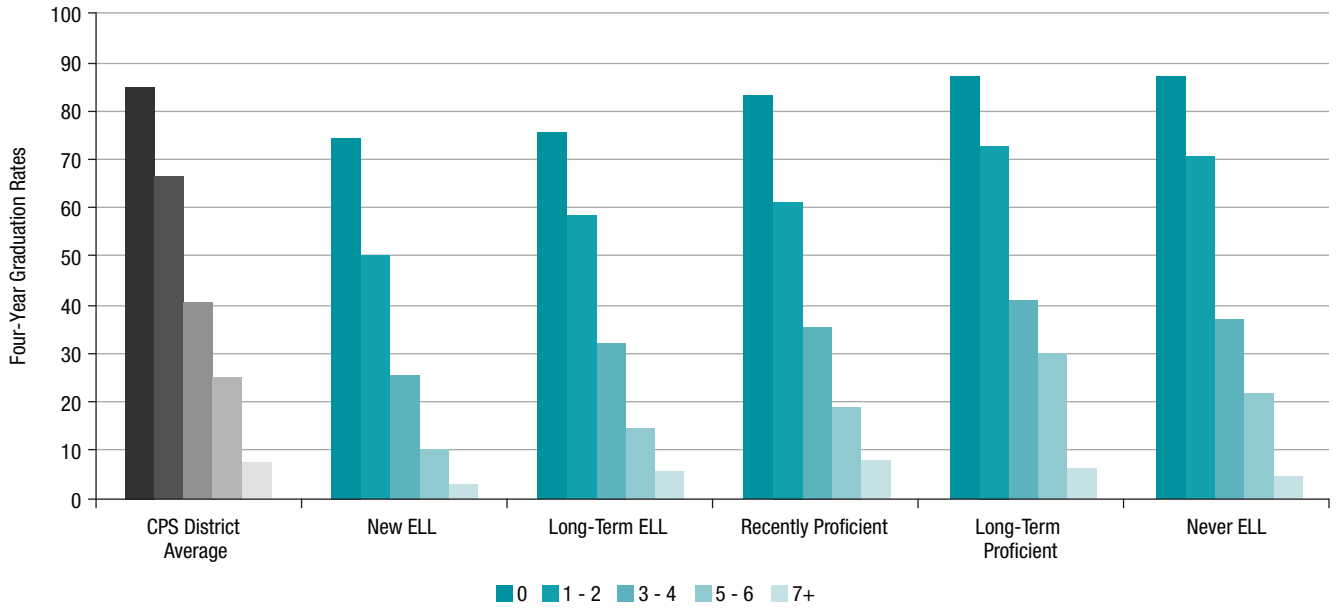
Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Course Failures

Course failures were also highly predictive of graduation from high school for each group of Hispanic students (see Figure 24). Among all five groups, students who failed more classes were less likely to graduate than students who failed few or no classes. Yet, at each level of course failure, new ELLs and long-term ELLs were less likely to graduate than recently proficient students, long-term proficient students, or students who were never ELLs. For example, among students who failed three or four classes during their freshman year, only 26 percent of new ELLs and 32 percent of long-term ELL students graduated, compared with 35 percent of recently proficient students, 41 percent of long-term proficient students, and 37 percent of students who were never ELLs.

FIGURE 24

Four-year graduation rates, by number of ninth-grade semester course failures for Hispanic students



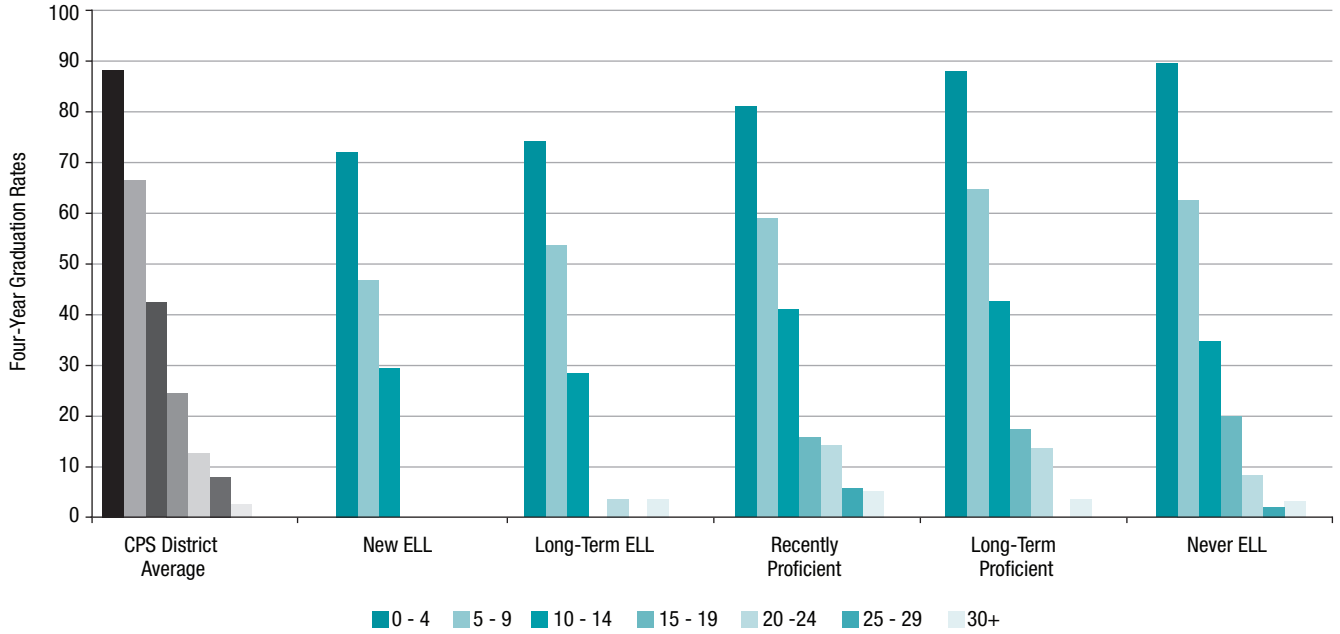
Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Absences

The number of days students missed school in ninth grade also can readily be used to identify students who are likely to graduate and students who are at risk of dropping out (see Figure 25). Across all five groups, 70 percent or more of students who missed less than a week of school (0–4 days) graduated in four years. Each additional week of absence in ninth grade was associated with a substantial decrease in graduation rates. For example, fewer than half of all students who missed between two and three weeks of school (10–14 days) graduated in four years, although there was substantial variation across groups: 30 percent of new ELLs and 28 percent of long-term ELLs graduated within four years, compared with 41 percent of recently proficient students, 43 percent of long-term proficient students, and 34 percent of students who were never ELLs. Similar to previous patterns for GPA and course failures, new ELLs and long-term ELLs tended to have the lowest graduation rates at each level of absence.

FIGURE 25

Four-year graduation rates, by days absent in ninth grade for Hispanic students



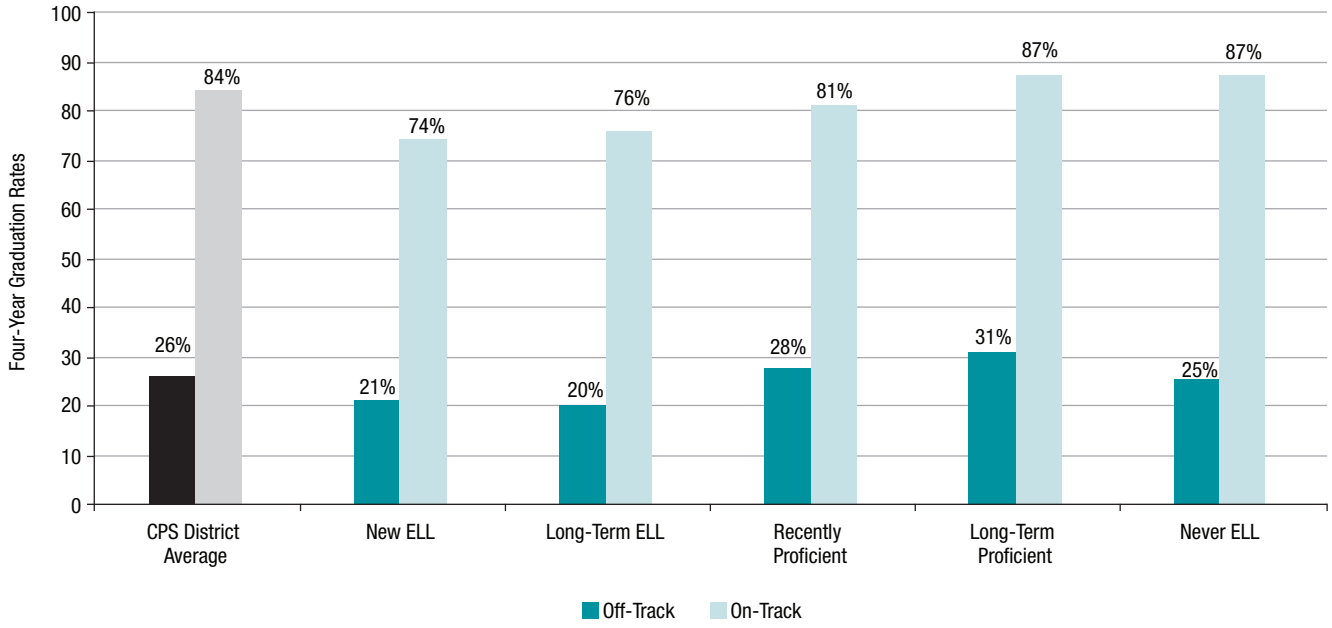
Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

On-Track

Figure 26 illustrates that, across the board, there was a strong relationship between a Hispanic student's ninth-grade on-track status and his or her likelihood of graduating four years later. For all five categories of students, those who were on-track at the end of their freshman year were 2.5 to 3.5 times more likely to graduate than off-track students. Nevertheless, new ELLs and long-term ELLs had lower graduation rates than students in other groups with the same on-track status.

FIGURE 26

Four-year graduation rates, by on-track status for Hispanic students



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

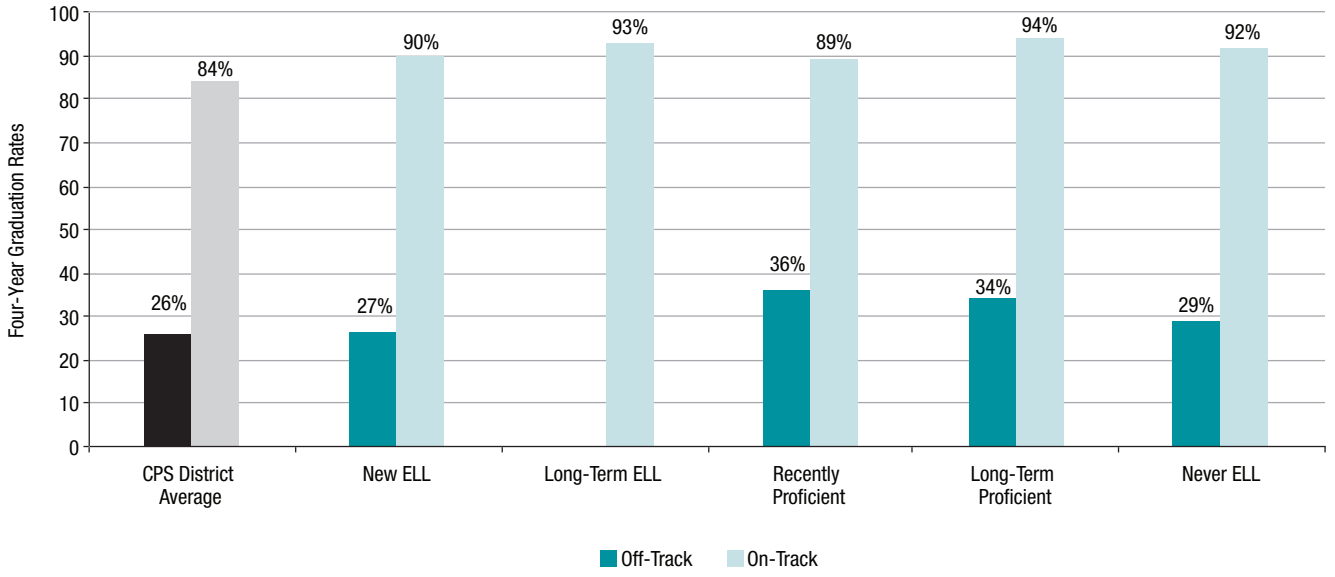
Using Course-Performance Indicators to Predict Graduation for White and Asian Students

Figures 27 and 28 show four-year graduation rates for white and Asian students by on-track status and GPA. Because of small numbers of students across each level of performance, white and Asian students have been combined in these figures. Similar to the findings reported for Hispanic students, ninth-grade course performance was a very good predictor of graduation for all five groups of white and Asian students. Overall, higher performance on the freshman indicators was associated with higher graduation rates.

As with Hispanic students, graduation rates for new ELLs who were white or Asian were generally lower at every level of performance than those of other ELL groups, although differences were not quite as large as they were for Hispanic students. For example, among students who were on-track at the end of the freshmen year, 90 percent of new ELLs and 93 percent of long-term ELLs graduated in four years, compared with 89 percent of recently proficient students, 94 percent of long-term proficient students, and 92 who were never ELLs (see Figure 27). Among students who were off-track, differences in graduation rates by ELL group were larger: Only 27 percent of new ELLs graduated, compared with 36 percent of recently proficient students and 34 percent of long-term proficient students. In addition, graduation rates were fairly similar between the five groups for students with a GPA of 2.51 or better (see Figure 28). Among students who had a 2.01 to 2.50 GPA, however, new ELLs had much lower graduation rates. (Figures showing the relationship between course failures, absences, and graduation for white and Asian students are included in Appendix C.)

FIGURE 27

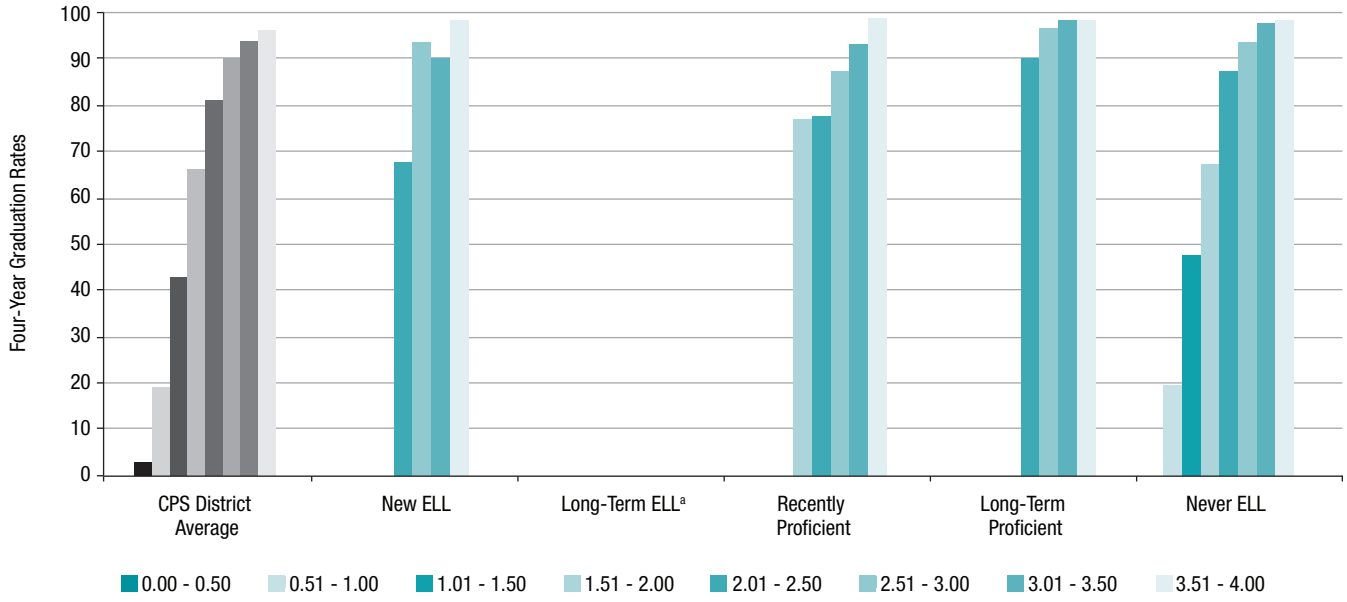
Four-year graduation rates, by on-track status for white and Asian students



Notes: (1) New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.
(2) Rates are only reported for categories that contain at least 25 students.

FIGURE 28

Four-year graduation rates, by ninth-grade GPA for white and Asian students



Note: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.
[a]Rates are reported only for categories that contain at least 25 students.

Using Other Indicators to Predict Graduation

In the previous section, we showed that ninth-grade course-performance indicators were strong predictors of graduation for ninth-grade ELLs and former ELLs, regardless of their race or ethnicity. Students who came to class regularly, earned good grades, and were on-track by the end of their freshman year were much more likely to graduate in four years than their peers who missed class often, performed poorly in their classes, and were off-track by the end of freshman year. In addition to testing whether course-performance indicators were good predictors of graduation for ELL students, it is also important to explore whether other indicators, such as those specific to ELL students, might be better predictors of graduation. For example, among ELL students, lower levels of English proficiency have been linked to lower GPAs, higher rates of grade retention, and higher rates of dropping out of high school (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). And ELL students who experienced interruptions in their formal education prior to entering U.S. schools are more likely to have worse academic outcomes than those who did not experience such interruptions (Freeman et al., 2003). Although we do not know whether students experienced breaks in their education prior to enrolling in CPS, we do know whether they left CPS for a year or more at some point after their initial enrollment. In this section, we explore whether these are significant predictors of graduation for this cohort of students, and we compare their overall predictiveness to ninth-grade course-performance indicators.

Figures 29 and 30 show that there were differences in graduation rates based on a ninth-grade ELL student's proficiency upon entering high school and former ELL students' proficiency when they entered CPS. However, these differences are modest when compared with differences in graduation rates based on ninth-grade course performance, meaning that proficiency level was not highly accurate as an early warning indicator. Figure 29 shows graduation rates for new and long-term ELLs by their proficiency level upon entering high school. (Hispanic, white, and Asian students are combined in Figures 29–31.) Students who entered high school with the lowest level of proficiency (Level 1) were significantly less likely to graduate than students with higher levels of proficiency (Levels 2 or 3)—the graduation rate for students with the lowest level of proficiency was 56 percent, compared with just over 60 percent for the other two groups. Among former ELL students, graduation rates also differed depending on their proficiency level when they were first identified as ELLs (see Figure 30). Students with the lowest level of English proficiency when they entered CPS were less likely to graduate than students with a proficiency level of 2, although their graduation rates were not significantly different from students with a proficiency level of 3.

Interruptions in students' CPS education also predicted whether students were likely to graduate within four years (see Figure 31).[23] Among ninth-grade ELLs and former ELLs, those who experienced an interruption in their education of one of more years were much less likely to graduate (53 percent) than students who never experienced an interruption in their CPS education (67 percent).

FIGURE 29

Four-year graduation rates, by level of proficiency when entering high school for ninth-grade ELLs

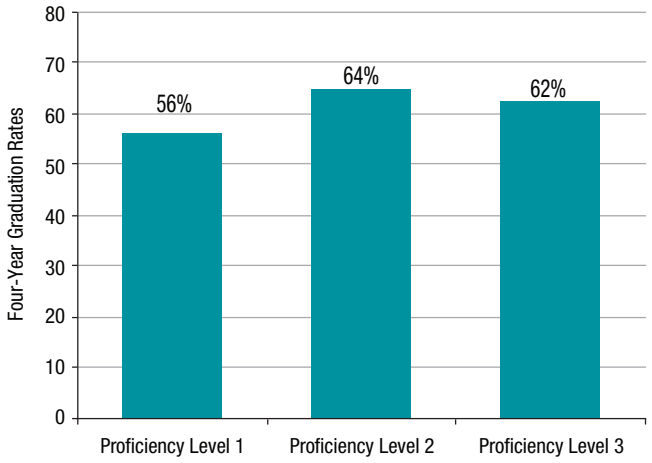


FIGURE 30

Four-year graduation rates, by initial level of proficiency for former ELLs

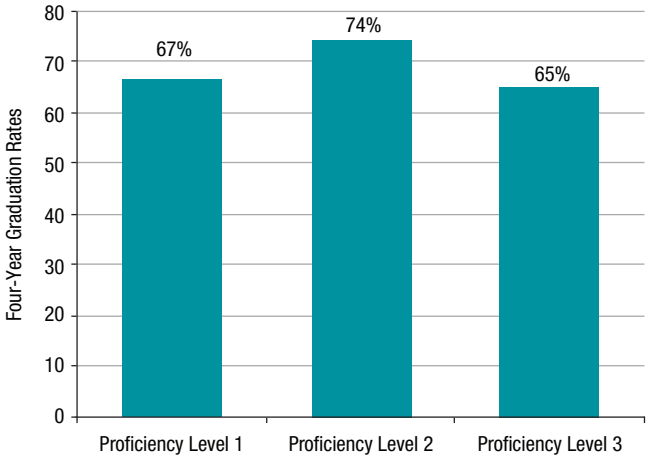
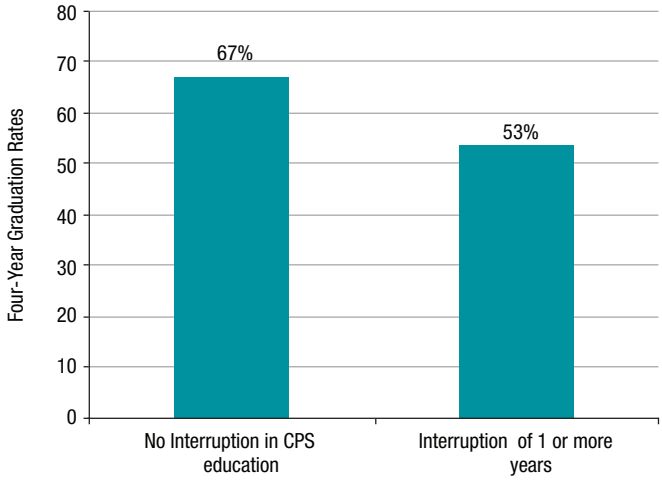


FIGURE 31

Four-year graduation rates, by break in CPS education for ninth-grade ELLs and former ELLs



Despite the fact that graduation rates differed significantly by proficiency levels and whether students experienced an interruption in their CPS education, the overall predictive power of these ELL-specific indicators is much lower than that of course performance indicators. Table 3 shows the predictiveness for each indicator, which is the percentage of students whose outcome (either graduation or dropping out from high school) we were able to correctly predict using that indicator.

When we used proficiency level upon entering high school to predict graduation for new and long-term ELLs, we were able to correctly predict the outcomes of 60 percent of all students; however, using proficiency level resulted in inaccurate predictions for 40 percent of students.[24]

TABLE 3

Predictiveness of ELL-Specific Indicators and Course Performance Indicators for Ninth-Grade ELLs and Former ELL Students	
Indicators	**Prediction of Eventual Graduation (Percentage Correctly Classified)**
Proficiency level upon entering HS (Recently Proficient and Long-Term ELLs only)	60%
Proficiency level when first identified (Former ELLs only)	67%
Interrupted education	65%
On-Track	81%
GPA	82%
Number of Fs	80%
Absences	78%
GPA and interrupted education	82%
GPA and background characteristics, including test scores	83%

Initial proficiency of former ELLs and whether students had breaks in their CPS education were similarly poor predictors of graduation. By contrast, the predictiveness of course-performance indicators for ninth-grade ELLs and former ELL students was much higher. The on-track indicator correctly identified the later outcomes of students 81 percent of the time. GPA had the highest overall predictiveness at 82 percent. Absences were slightly less predictive than the other three indicators because they did not differentiate between students who came to school regularly and did well in their classes from those who came to school but did poorly in their classes (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). There was no improvement in the prediction rate when we combined GPA with interrupted education, and when we combined GPA with other background characteristics (e.g., male, socioeconomic status [SES], prior school mobility), the prediction rate improved by only 1 percentage point over using GPA alone. When we know students' ninth-grade GPA, knowing their background information—including test scores, proficiency level, and whether they had an interruption in schooling—does not give us more information about their likelihood of graduating.[25]

A good indicator is one that is able to make sharp distinctions between groups of students in terms of their outcomes. The on-track indicator is a very good example. On average, students who are on-track by the end of their freshmen are **four times** more likely to graduate than students who are off-track (Allensworth & Easton, 2007), allowing us to predict with a high degree of certainty who is likely to graduate from high school four years later and who is not likely to graduate. By contrast, ninth-grade ELL students' proficiency level is not a strong predictor of graduation. Graduation rates for students who entered high school with a proficiency level of 2 were only slightly higher than graduation rates of students with a proficiency level of 1 (64 percent versus 56 percent). In other words, students with a proficiency level of 2 were only 1.14 times more likely to graduate than students with a proficiency level of 1. Given how well course-performance indicators predicted outcomes of ninth-grade ELLs and former ELL students, we conclude that schools can reliably use grades, course failures, absences, and on-track status to identify students who may be at risk of dropping out. It is important to remember, however, that new ELL students and long-term ELL students, especially those who were Hispanic, had lower graduation rates at every level of performance than their peers. This suggests that other factors beyond course performance, but distinctive to the situations of ninth-grade ELLs, lowered their rates of graduation. In the next chapter, we explore why this may be so.

Chapter 5

Explaining Differences in Graduation Rates Between Hispanic Ninth-Grade ELLs and Long-Term Proficient Students

In the previous chapter, we found ninth-grade course-performance indicators were just as predictive of graduation for ninth-grade ELLs and former ELLs as they were for students who were never ELLs. However, among Hispanic students, ninth-grade ELLs had lower graduation rates at each level of course performance than former ELLs and students who were never ELLs. The gap in graduation rates was generally largest when comparing ninth-grade ELLs with long-term proficient students. For example, as we showed in Figure 26, 87 percent of long-term proficient students who were on-track at the end of their ninth grade graduated from high school, compared with only 74 percent of on-track new ELLs and 76 percent of on-track long-term ELLs.[26]

> Although course performance was a highly significant predictor of graduation, the schools that new and long-term ELLs attended also contributed to their lower rates of graduation.

In this chapter, we examine how background characteristics, educational expectations, and the schools that students attended may explain the lower graduation rates of Hispanic current ELL students compared with long-term proficient students. We find that while differences in background characteristics and educational aspirations account for a portion of the gap in graduation rates, differences in the schools that students attended was the most important factor explaining why Hispanic long-term and new ELLs graduated at lower rates than long-term proficient students.

Factors Influencing Graduation

Among Hispanic students, new and long-term ELLs differed from long-term proficient students in a number of ways that may have put them at greater risk of dropping out of high school. For example, as we saw in Chapter 2, they were more likely to have entered high school at older ages and more likely to be male, factors that have been associated with higher rates of dropping out (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Long-term ELLs were more likely to receive special education services, also putting them at higher risk of dropping out (Gwynne et al., 2009).

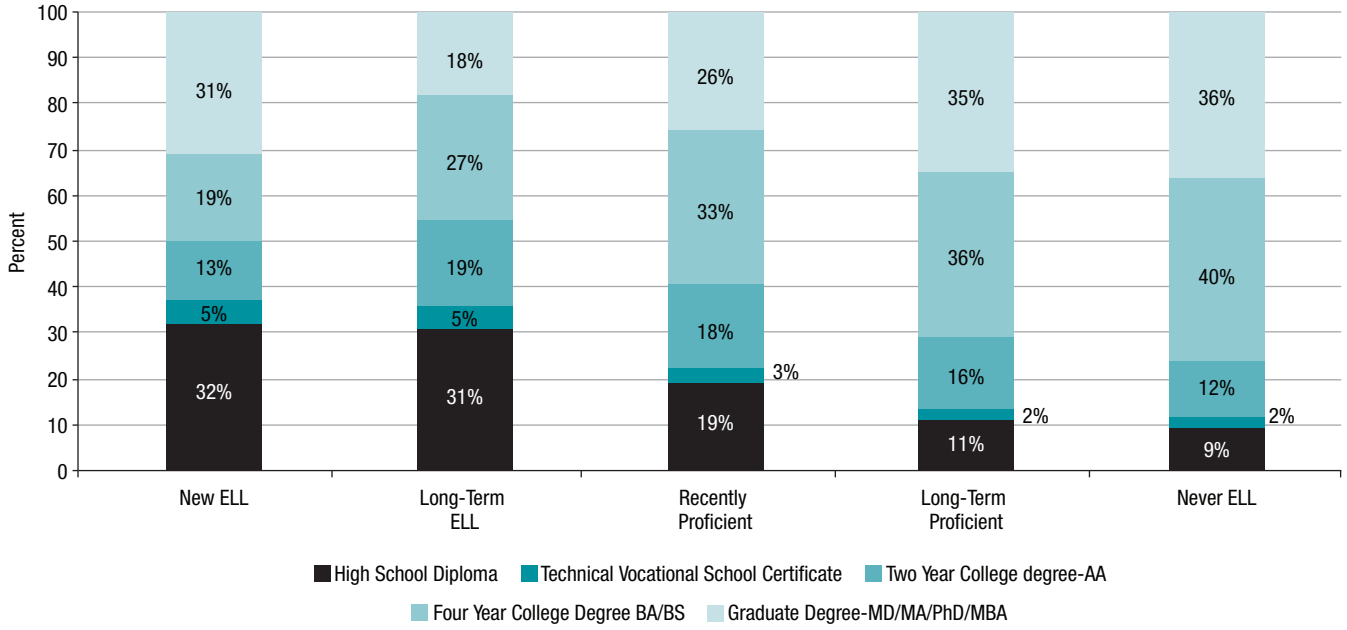
Both new and long-term ELL students were less likely to attend academically strong schools, which also could have affected their graduation rates. As shown in Chapter 2, these students were much less likely to attend selective-enrollment schools than long-term proficient students. And even the nonselective high schools that new and long-term ELL students attended were academically weaker than those attended by long-term proficient students.

Other factors also may have placed ninth-grade ELL students at greater risk of dropping out. For example, a majority of both new and long-term ELLs were first-generation immigrants who were born outside of the United States. Long-term proficient students were more likely to be second- (or higher) generation immigrants, with more than 75 percent born in this country. Research has shown that second-generation youth graduate from high school at higher rates than either first- or third-generation immigrant youth (Allensworth, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

There are a number of reasons why immigration status may be related to educational outcomes. One potential explanation is that students coming from different countries may have different educational aspirations than students born in the United States. Although almost 90 percent of Hispanic students in CPS who were never ELLs planned to continue their education beyond high school when they were in ninth grade, only about 70 percent of ninth-grade ELLs said they planned to continue beyond high school. Ninth-grade ELLs were also much less likely to aspire to a four-year college degree than other groups of students (see Figure 32).[27]

FIGURE 32

Educational aspirations of Hispanic students, by ELL category



Notes: (1) Data come from the biannual CCSR Survey of CPS Students, which was administered in the spring of 2005, when the students in our sample were in the spring semester of their ninth grade year. Students were asked, "What is the highest level of education YOU plan to complete?"
(2) New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Explaining the Gap in Graduation Rates

To what extent did differences in background characteristics, academic performance, behavior, and aspirations explain the gap in graduation rates between long-term proficient students and either new or long-term ELLs? To answer this question, we conducted analyses in which we estimated the degree to which the gap in graduation rates would be diminished if long-term proficient students had exactly the same characteristics and experiences as new ELLs or long-term ELLs (see Appendix D for additional details).

Figure 33 shows the difference in graduation rates that would have been expected if Hispanic long-term proficient students had the same characteristics as Hispanic new ELLs. The black bar shows that the initial gap in graduation rates was 11.4 percentage points between new ELLs and long-term proficient students. Each successive bar shows how the gap changes if we take into account differences in students' characteristics. A bar that is substantially shorter in height than the previous bar identifies a characteristic of new ELLs that was particularly important for explaining their lower graduation rates compared with the rates of long-term proficient students.

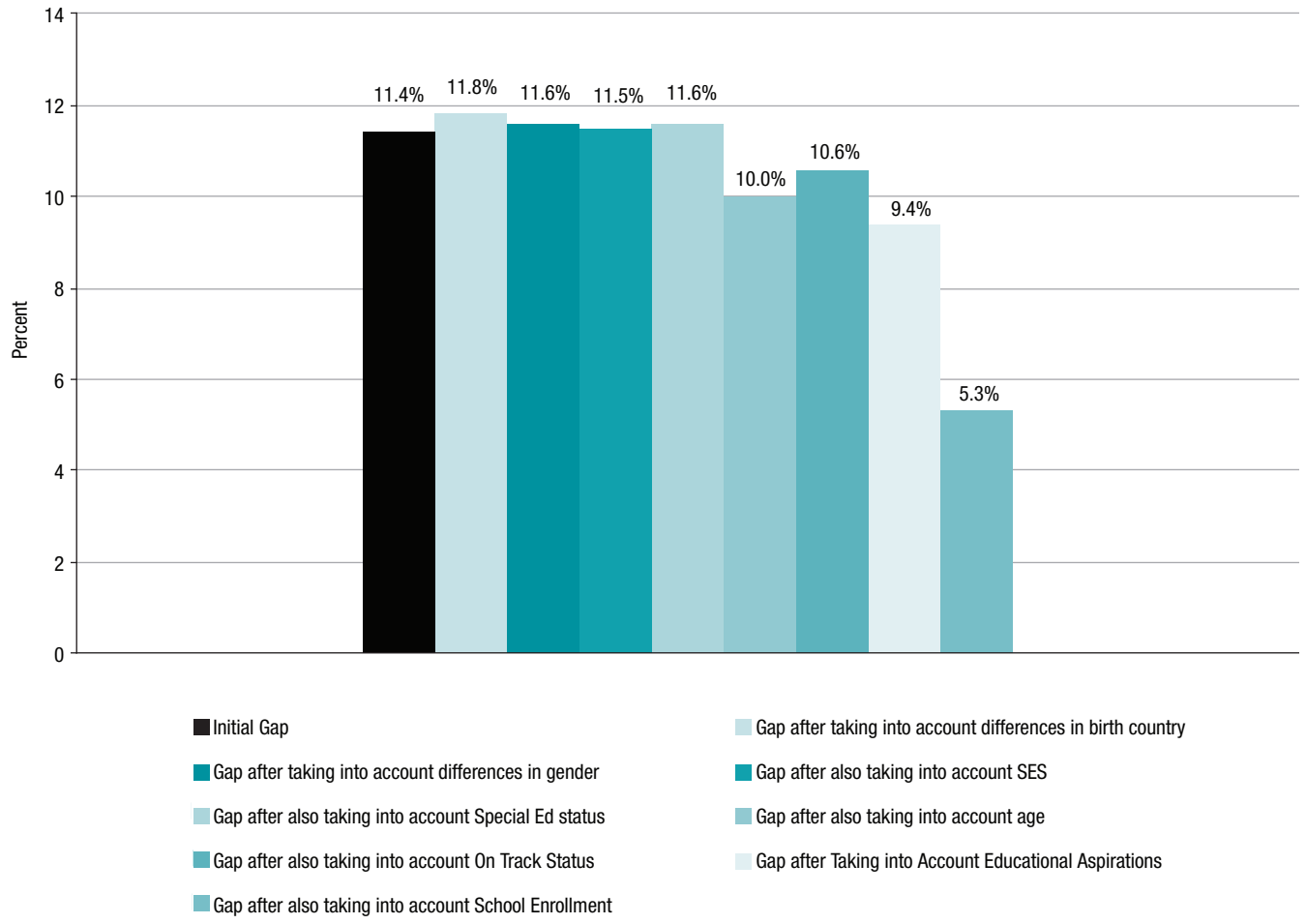
Differences in birth country, gender, socioeconomic status (SES), and special education status did not explain much of the gap in graduation rates between new ELLs and long-term proficient students. Differences in age upon entering high school explained about 1.5 points, or around 14 percent of the overall gap.

Differences in on-track status actually increased the gap by a small amount from 10.0 points to 10.6 points. This is because new ELLs had slightly higher on-track rates than long-term proficient students. Differences in educational aspirations account for about another point, or 11 percent of the graduation gap.

The factor that explained the biggest portion of the gap in graduation rates between new ELLs and long-term proficient students was the schools that students attended. Because new ELLs were more likely to attend academically weaker schools, they graduated at lower rates than long-term proficient students. When we take into account differences in school quality, the gap in graduation is reduced by 36 percent, or 4 percentage points. The unexplained portion of the gap was 5.3 percentage points, or 46 percent of the original gap. By taking into account differences in age, educational aspirations, and schools attended, we were able to explain just over half of the gap in graduation rates between new ELLs and long-term proficient students.

FIGURE 33

Explaining the gap in four-year graduation rates between Hispanic new ELLs and long-term proficient students



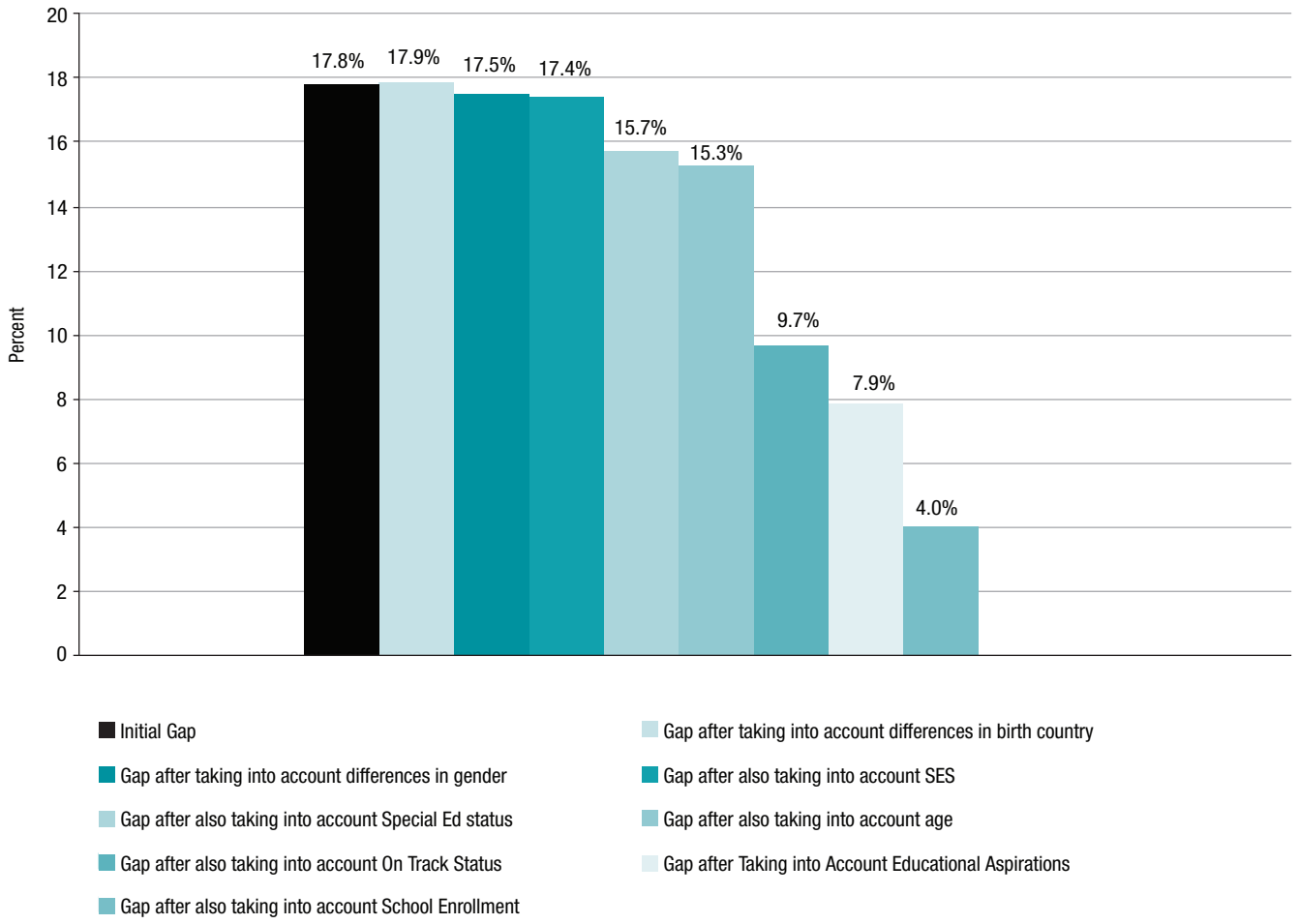
When we look at factors that explain the gap between long-term ELLs and long-term proficient students (see Figure 34), we find that birth country, gender, SES, and age explain very little.[28] Special education status explains about 10 percent, reducing the gap by 1.7 points.

As expected, course performance, measured by on-track status, explains the largest portion of the gap in graduation rates for long-term ELLs, reducing it by 31 percent or 4.6 points. Because long-term ELLs do worse in their courses than long-term proficient students, they are less likely to graduate in four years. Educational aspirations explain about 10 percent or 1.6 points of the gap.

Another important factor explaining lower graduation rates of long-term ELLs is the schools they attend. After we take into account the quality of the schools that long-term proficient students attend, the gap in graduation rates is reduced by another 4 points, or by 22 percent.

FIGURE 34

Explaining the gap in four-year graduation rates between Hispanic long-term ELLs and long-term proficient students



Throughout this report, we have shown that students' performance in their ninth-grade classes provides a very good indication of whether they will graduate in four years. This is the case for ninth-grade ELLs as well as former ELLs. However, at least among Hispanic students, other factors also had a significant impact on whether ninth-grade ELLs were likely to graduate. The most important of these was the quality of schools that students attended. Because ninth-grade ELLs attended academically weaker schools, they were less likely to graduate than long-term proficient students. However, other factors, such as ninth-grade ELLs' lower educational expectations and new ELLs' age when entering high school also played a role. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Interpretive Summary

As policymakers and practitioners focus on the need to improve the learning outcomes and graduation rates of ELL students, many have turned to research demonstrating that ninth-grade course performance is highly predictive of whether students are likely to graduate. Although the usefulness of early warning indicators for identifying students who are at risk of dropping out of school is well established for a general population of high school students, there is little evidence about whether these indicators can be used in the same way for ELL students (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). This reports shows that these indicators are highly predictive of graduation for ELL students, and also for former ELLs, regardless of race or ethnicity. Students who earn high grades, attend class regularly, and are on-track by the end of ninth grade are much more likely to graduate than their peers who fail classes, are often absent, and are off-track in the ninth grade. In fact, course performance is far more predictive of graduation than other ELL-specific indicators such as language proficiency level or interruptions in education.

> ELL and former ELL students are a diverse group: Differences in course performance and graduation rates underscore the distinctive needs and circumstances of each group.

This report also shows that ELL and former ELL students are a diverse group: Differences in course performance and graduation rates underscore the distinctive needs and circumstances of each group. In this chapter, we review the main findings for ninth-grade ELLs and former ELLs, and discuss the implications of these findings for school policies and practices. We focus on Hispanic students because they are the largest group of ELL and former ELL students in CPS, but we also highlight important similarities or differences for white and Asian ELL students when applicable.

Long-Term Proficient Students. Hispanic students who entered CPS as ELLs and obtained proficiency before sixth grade—long-term proficient students—performed better in their classes than most other groups, including students who had never been designated as ELLs. This suggests that there was no long-term disadvantage for students who had at one point been designated as ELLs but achieved proficiency well before entering high school. However, although they outperformed other groups of Hispanic students, their actual performance level was still low: Hispanic long-term proficient students barely had a C+ average in their ninth-grade classes. And one third of them failed to graduate from high school within four years, indicating that college graduation—and indeed matriculation at a four-year college—was out of reach for a substantial portion of these students. By contrast, long-term proficient students who were white or Asian had better course performance and higher graduation rates: The average GPA for white students was nearly a B– and almost a B for Asian students; 86 percent of long-term proficient white and Asian students graduated in four years.

Hispanic students—even those who are most academically prepared for college—also face special challenges around college choice and enrollment. Many Hispanic students, regardless of ELL status, lack access to the kinds of information and advice about college-going available to second- and third-generation college students (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008). As a result, Hispanic students may be particularly reliant on teachers and guidance counselors for help navigating the college enrollment process. Yet, long-term proficient students may be less recognizable for high school counselors as a group that needs special support because they have already exited ELL subgroup status. Our 2005 CPS student survey showed that long-term proficient Hispanic students were much less likely to report meeting with a counselor or teacher to discuss courses needed for college than Hispanic students who were ELLs in high school, despite having higher educational aspirations: Only 21 percent of long-term proficient students reported meeting with a teacher or counselor, compared with 33 percent of new ELLs and 31 percent of long-term ELLs.[29]

Among white and Asian students, long-term proficient students were also less likely to report talking to a teacher or counselor about course selection than new ELLs; however, the differences between the two groups were smaller than for Hispanic students, and the overall rates of support around college were far higher than for Hispanic students: 75 percent of white and Asian long-term proficient students reported talking to a teacher or counselor about course selection compared with 80 percent of new ELLs. These findings point to the need for schools to continue to address the distinctive needs of all Hispanic students, regardless of ELL status.

Recently Proficient Students. Among Hispanic students, former ELLs who achieved proficiency at some point during the middle grades did about as well in their ninth-grade classes as Hispanic students who were never ELLs, but they performed somewhat below new ELLs and former ELLs who achieved proficiency before middle school. (Among white and Asian students, recently proficient students did as well as or better than long-term ELL students and students who were never ELLs.) Their weaker course performance relative to long-term proficient students was partially attributable to higher absence rates and worse study habits. Recently proficient students missed an average of nearly 9 days each semester, or a total of 3.5 weeks during their ninth-grade year. However, even after taking into account differences in attendance and study habits, recently proficient students did not do as well in their classes as long-term proficient students with similar absences and study habits. It is possible that these students may have exited from ELL status too early. In fact, in 2010, Illinois raised the score that students need to achieve on ACCESS in order to be considered English proficient, which may have been a response to concerns that it had previously been set too low.[30]

These findings highlight the importance of monitoring the progress of ELL students even after they have been designated as English proficient. Comparing the course performance of recently exited ELL students with never-ELL students or former ELLs who have been proficient for a much longer period provides a good indication of whether these students are well prepared by their ELL training to enter English-only classes without additional support.

Long-Term ELL Students. Hispanic students who were identified as ELLs in the elementary grades and still had not achieved proficiency by ninth grade—long-term ELLs—had the worst course performance of any group. (This was also true among white and Asian students: Long-term ELLs had the worst course performance of any ELL group.) On average, Hispanic long-term ELLs failed nearly three classes; had a C– GPA; and missed an average of 18 days, or 3.5 weeks, of school during their first year of high school. As was the case for recently proficient students who had similarly poor attendance records, low GPAs and high course failures were partially the result of not coming to class. After taking into account differences in attendance, long-term ELLs earned similar grades and failed the same number of classes as new ELLs; their GPAs and course failures were still significantly worse than long-term proficient students and students who were never ELLs, but the differences were small.

Understanding the reasons why students skip class is essential for improving attendance records and ultimately improving course performance. Although high rates of absences is not a problem unique to ELL students—Hispanic students who were never ELLs also missed many days of school, and the average number of days missed across the district was even higher—the reasons why long-term ELLs and recently proficient students missed so much school may be related to their status, or former status, as ELLs. For example, ELL students may have different relationships with their teachers, who play a large role in determining whether students attend class and do their work. Research conducted by CCSR has shown that teacher monitoring and support is essential for ensuring that students remain engaged in their classes and do the work that is expected of them (Allensworth et al., forthcoming). When students do not feel supported by their teachers, they often disengage from the learning process; acting out in class, failing to do assignments and even skipping class can be signs of this disengagement.

Teacher support is especially critical when students feel challenged by their coursework (Allensworth et al., forthcoming). Although many students find the transition to high school challenging, long-term ELLs and recently proficient ELLs face extra challenges. Long-term ELLs have weak academic skills, and in 2004, they also lacked access to classes offering language support despite not being proficient. Recently proficient students had to adjust to being in non-ELL classes without language support at the same time they are adjusting to high school. If these students felt overwhelmed by these challenges, they may have resorted to frequent class cutting. Addressing the absentee problem for long-term ELLs and recently proficient ELLs will require a greater understanding of the particular reasons they miss so much class.

The poor ninth-grade course performance of long-term ELLs led to lower graduation rates for these students; only about half graduated in four years. Other factors also contributed to the low graduation rates of long-term ELLs, including the types of schools they attended and lower educational aspirations. These latter factors were also important for explaining lower graduation rates among new ELLs. These latter factors were also important for explaining lower graduation rates among new ELLs, and we discuss the implications of these findings in the next section.

New ELLs. Hispanic students who were new to CPS in the middle grades or high school and entered ninth grade as ELLs did as well as long-term proficient students in their classes, and their ninth-grade course performance was better than long-term ELLs, recently proficient students, and students who were never ELLs. However, these students present a special case in terms of graduation rates. Although ninth-grade course performance was a strong predictor of graduation for them, new ELLs, as well as long-term ELLs, graduated at lower rates than other groups at each level of course performance. (A similar pattern can be seen among white and Asian students, where new ELLs generally did about as well in their classes as the top-performing students within their race/ethnic group, but they had lower graduation rates than other students with the same course performance and same race/ethnicity.)

One important factor explaining lower graduation rates of Hispanic new ELLs is their older age when starting high school. There is a great deal of research showing that students who begin ninth grade at older ages are less likely to graduate (Alexander at al., 2001; Allensworth, 2005; Roderick, 1994). This makes devel-

opmental sense—if students enter ninth grade at age 15 or 16 and take four years to graduate, they will need to remain in school until age 19 or 20, when most of their peers have moved on. Many students who are not ELLs also enter high school at older ages, often because they were retained in earlier grades for low performance. This suggests a need for school leaders to think about students' trajectories when they enter high school, and what will happen when they reach age 18, when many of their peers will be leaving school. They might develop strategies for accelerating students' progress—for example, encouraging them to participate in summer school or to enroll in slightly heavier credit loads, to try to catch up to their peers, or to develop joint-enrollment programs with local colleges so that students can start getting college credits when they are 18 and their peers are beginning postsecondary education.

Differences in educational expectations among new ELLs and long-term ELLs, compared with students entering high school proficient in English, also contributed to their lower graduation rates: New and long-term ELLs expected to complete fewer years of schooling than other students, and this was a factor in their higher rates of dropping out. Although reasons for lower educational expectations are likely to vary by group, identifying and addressing the belief systems that contribute to these expectations may prove important for improving graduation rates. Counselors and teachers in the middle grades and high schools can play an important role in helping ninth-grade ELL students understand the benefits of both a high school degree and a postsecondary degree for future life opportunities and can help them address obstacles that may prevent them from having higher aspirations.

The type of schools attended by new ELLs—and also long-term ELLs—was the most important factor explaining lower graduation rates. Enrollment in selective high schools was not an option for most of these students because of weak academic skills (long-term ELLs) and limited English proficiency. Ninth-grade ELLs were also less likely to attend higher performing neighborhood schools, as well as charter schools where enrollment is typically determined through a lottery process.

Lack of access to higher performing schools is an issue for many CPS students, not just ELL students. There are simply not enough good high schools to accommodate the needs of all students. Although this points to the importance of improving academically lower performing high schools, it also suggests that students and families need to know how to negotiate the system of high school choice in order to gain access to the better performing schools. New ELLs may be at a particular disadvantage in this process. Having only been in CPS, or even in the country, for a few years prior to ninth grade, they may have less access to information about the application and lottery processes that govern school choice in Chicago. Middle school counselors may play an important role for these students, educating them about different high school opportunities outside of their neighborhood, assisting them with the application process, and educating them about the lotteries. Strategies to provide more assistance to students around high school choice, or to assist students who are over-age to accelerate their education, would be useful for more than just ELL students; ELL students particularly would benefit from such efforts.

Although age, educational expectations, and schools played important roles in explaining the lower graduation rates of new ELLs, nearly half of the gap in graduation rates between these students and long-term proficient students remained unexplained. In Chapter 3, we showed that although new ELL students took similar kinds of math, science, and social science classes to other students, they were more likely to be in predominantly ELL classrooms. Although this was not discernible from the data we had, research suggests that high school ELL students often end up stuck in an ELL track where classes are less challenging, ultimately leaving them less prepared for mastering more complex material later on in high school. However, when we looked at course performance during the second year of high school, we found that new ELLs continued to have GPAs that were comparable to long-term proficient students and better than all other groups, suggesting that their ninth-grade courses were preparing them as well for 10th grade as the courses other students were taking. More research is needed to

fully understand what other factors may result in fewer new ELLs graduating from high school.

Throughout this report, we have focused primarily on the outcomes of Hispanic ELL students because they represent the largest group of ELL students in CPS. The strong relationships that exist between ninth-grade performance and eventual graduation were observed among ELL students from all ethnic groups, as well as among students who were not ELLs. However, that does not mean that the relationships will be exactly the same among ELL students in other cities or with other backgrounds. The similarities among ELL students in Chicago suggest that these patterns may be universal, but similar research is needed in other places. The backgrounds of ELL students vary considerably from city to city, and even Hispanic ELL students in Chicago are likely to be different from Hispanic students in places such as California and Texas—in cities that are geographically closer to Mexico and Central America and have a different employment base for recent immigrants.

Our focus on Hispanic students may have obscured the gap that exists between them and white and Asian students in course performance and high school graduation. Among white and Asian students, ninth-grade ELLs and former ELLs did better in their classes and graduated at much higher rates than any group of Hispanic students. Given that high school grades have been linked to college persistence and graduation, with students earning As and Bs in high school most likely to graduate from college (Bowen et al., 2009; Geiser & Santelices, 2007; Roderick et al., 2006), our findings suggest that white and Asian students are likely to be much better prepared for college than Hispanic students. Future work must move beyond an emphasis on high school graduation and focus more directly on the transition to college. In particular, more research is needed to identify the challenges faced by high school ELLs and former ELLs, particularly those who are Hispanic, as they navigate the path toward college readiness.

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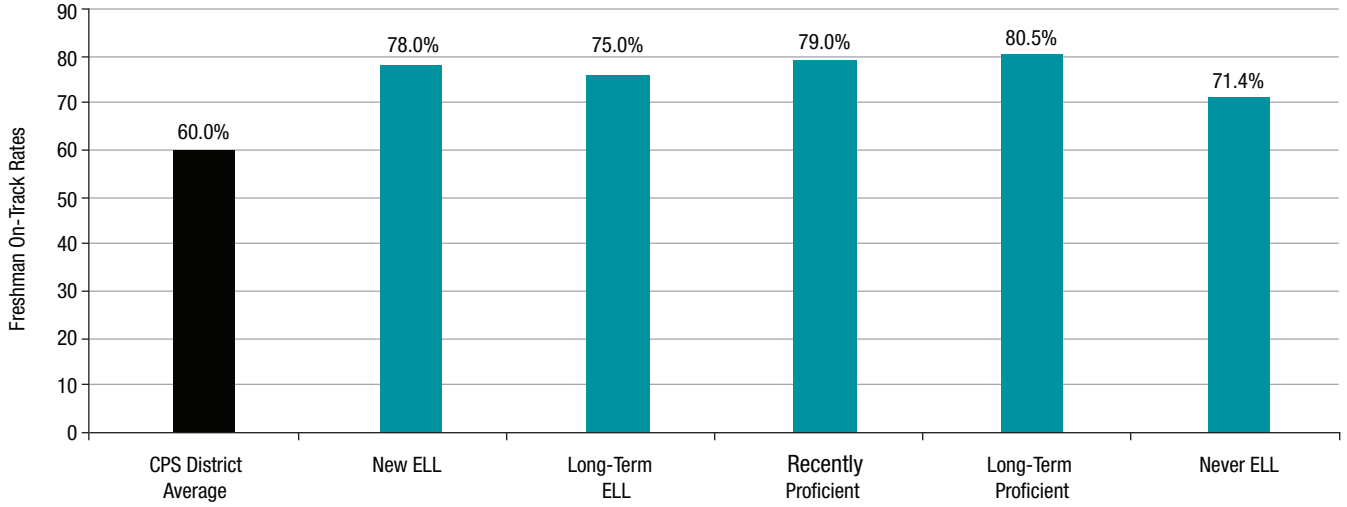
Appendix A:
On-Track Rates and Course Failures for White and Asian Students

Figures A1 and A2 display on-track rates and course failures for white students by ELL category. Approximately 80 percent of proficient students and new ELLs were on-track by the end of their ninth-grade year, compared with 75 percent of new ELLs and 71 percent of students who were never ELLs. In terms of course failures, recently proficient students and new ELLs failed roughly one class on average during their ninth-grade year, followed by long-term proficient students who failed 1.4 classes. Long-term ELLs and students who were never ELL failed around two classes during their ninth-grade year, but all five groups failed fewer classes than the typical CPS student.

FIGURE A1

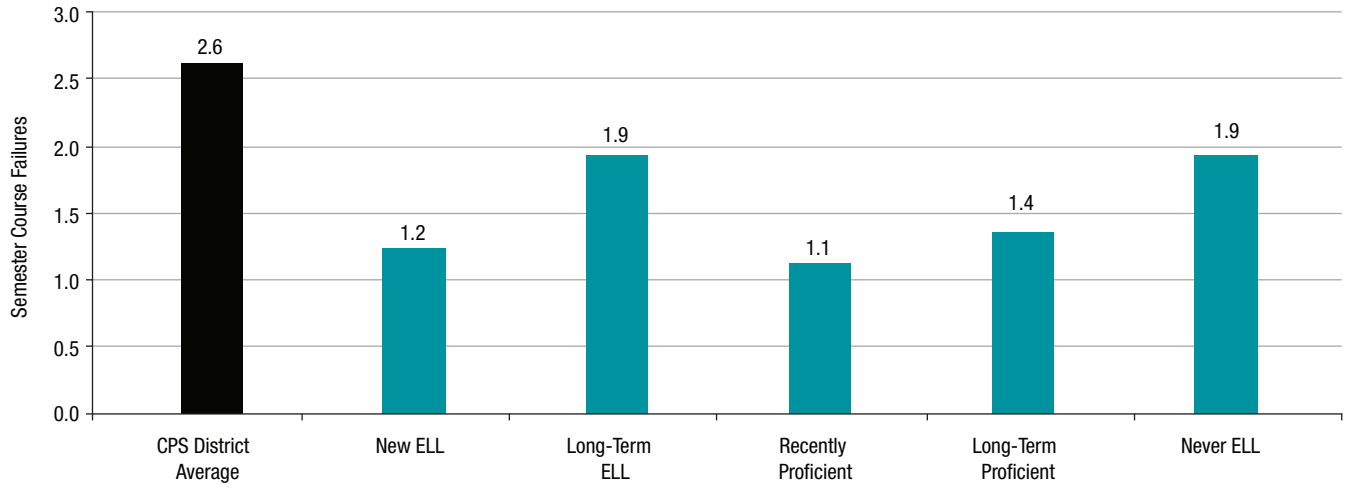
On-track rates for white students, by ELL category



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

FIGURE A2

Semester course failures for white students, by ELL category

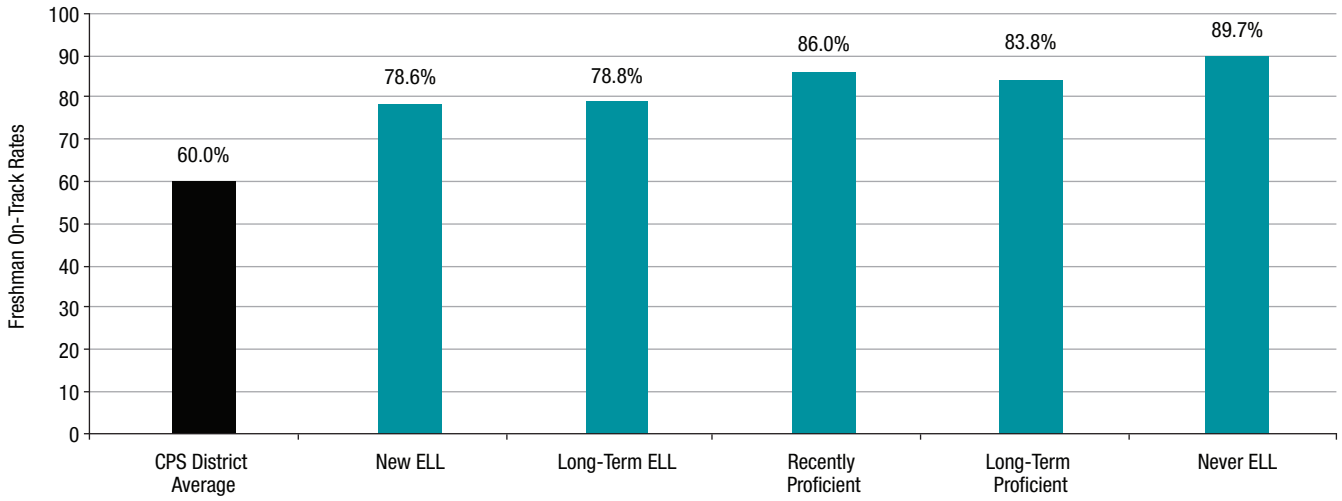


Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Figures A3 and A4 describe on-track rates and semester course failures for Asian students. Following the pattern described in Chapter 3, students who were never ELLs had the highest on-track rate (89.7 percent) and failed the fewest classes (0.6). Ninth-grade ELLs had the lowest on-track rate, around 79 percent, and failed an average of one class during their ninth-grade year.

FIGURE A3

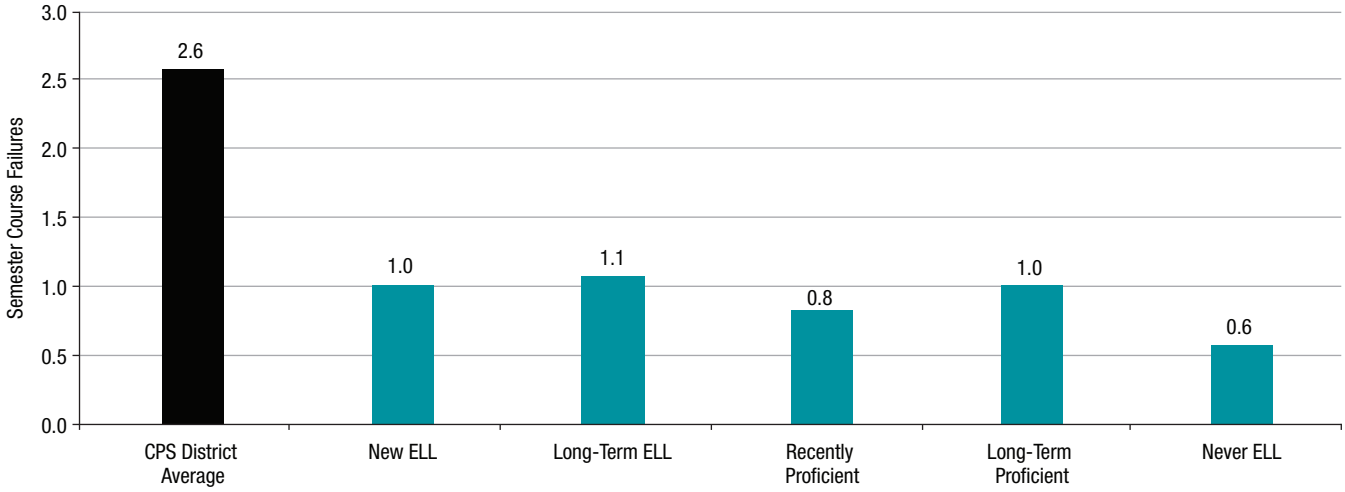
On-track rates for Asian students, by ELL category



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

FIGURE A4

Semester course failures for Asian students, by ELL category



Notes: New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.

Appendix B:
Methods for Describing Course-Taking Patterns of Ninth-Grade Students in 2004–05

To understand course-taking patterns, we used course titles to code every English, math, social science, and science class taken by first-time ninth graders in 2004 into one of three categories: required, support, and remedial.[31] English, math, social studies, and science classes were coded as required classes if they were one of the prescribed classes required for graduation. For ELL students, the required English class was ESL I, II, or III; for non-ELL students, it was Survey of Literature. To distinguish between these two kinds of classes, we coded ESL I, II, or III as **ESL Required** and Survey of Literature classes as **Required** classes. In math, the required class was Algebra. In social studies, it was World Studies, and in science, either Earth Science or Biology. In a few instances, ninth-grade students were enrolled in the core 10th-grade class instead of the core ninth-grade class (e.g., some students took American Literature instead of Survey of Literature). In these cases, we still coded the class as a required class.

Classes that focused on basic skills in a particular subject area were coded as **Support** classes, and these were offered in both English and math. The most common English language arts support classes were Reading in Language Arts, Communication, and Reading Workshop. The most common support class in math was Algebra Problem Solving. These classes were required for students whose eighth-grade test scores were below the national median to double their instructional time in English and/or math.

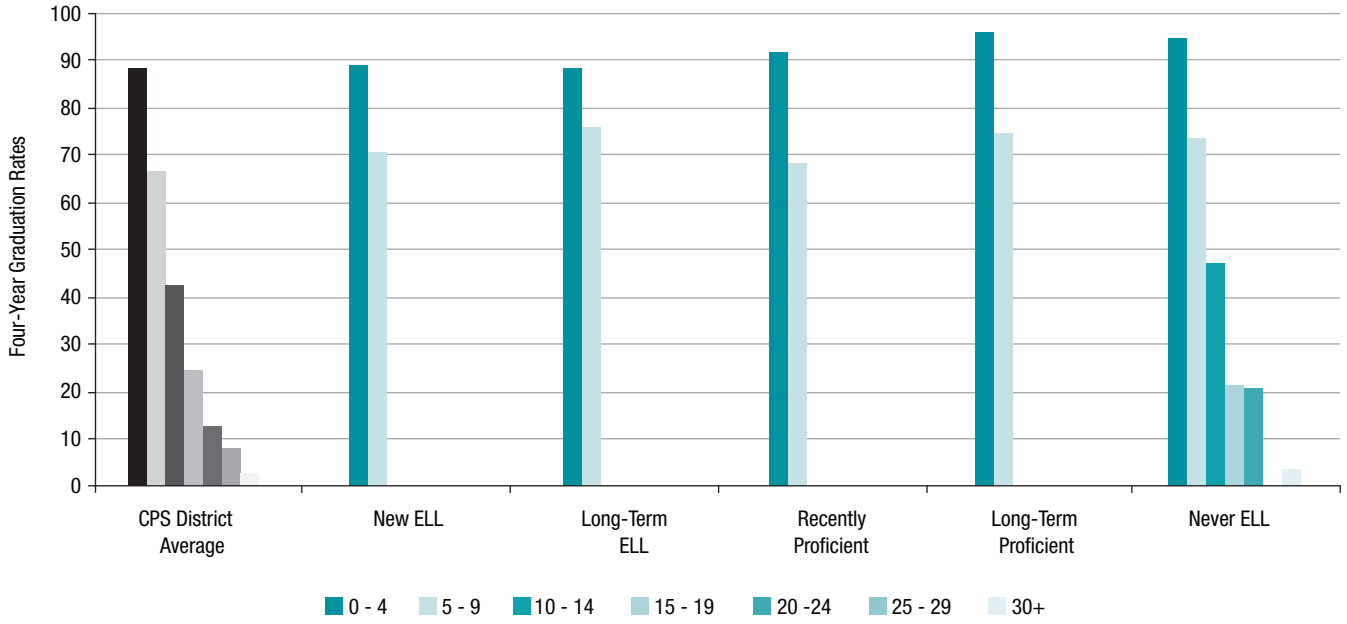
Remedial classes offered only a limited overview of a particular topic and did not meet the graduation requirement in that subject area. In 1997, CPS eliminated nearly all remedial classes and adopted a college preparatory curriculum. Although few students took remedial classes during their ninth-grade year in 2004–05, those who did were most likely to take remedial science classes. The most common remedial science classes were General Science and Topics in Science.

Appendix C:
Four-Year Graduation Rates by Course Failures and Absences for White and Asian Students

Figures C1 and C2 show four-year graduation rates by number of absences and course failures for white and Asian students. Because very few white and Asian students were absent more than two weeks or failed more than two classes, graduation rates are not reported for these categories. In general, both absences and course failures were strong predictors of five-year graduation rates for white and Asian students.

FIGURE C1

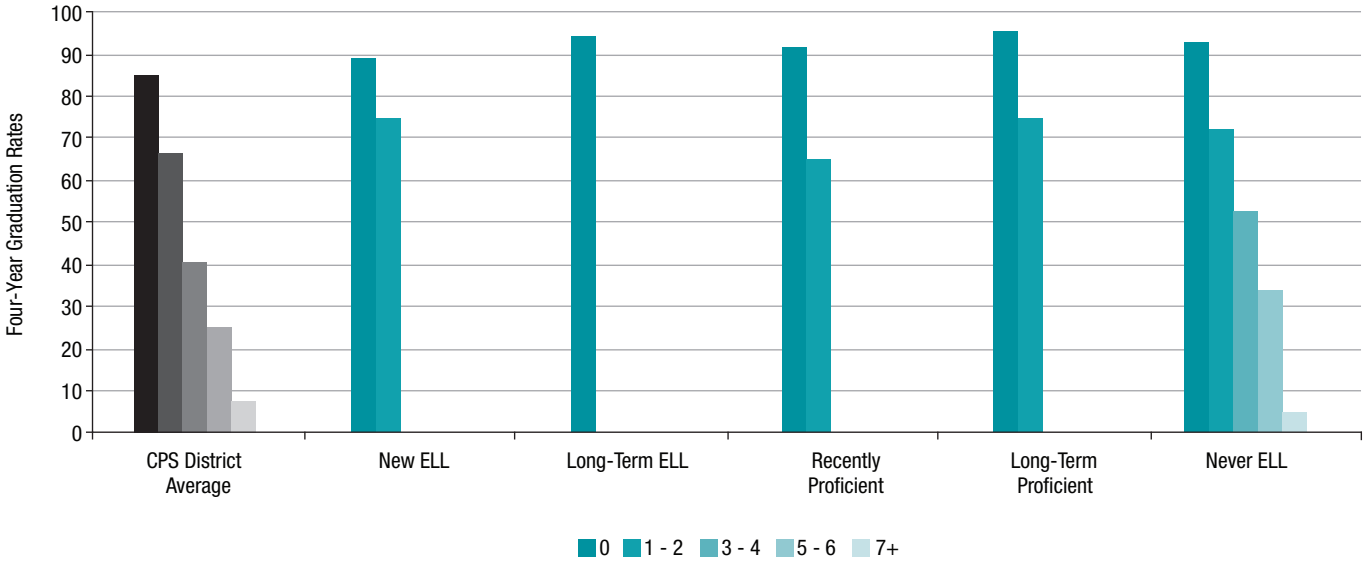
Four-year graduation rates, by number of absences for white and Asian students by ELL category



Notes: (1) New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.
(2) Rates are only reported for cateogries that contain at least 25 students.

FIGURE C2

Four-year graduation rates, by number of course failures for white and Asian students by ELL Category



Notes: (1) New ELL students are those who were first determined to be ELL in Grade 6 or later. Long-term ELLs were first determined to be ELL before Grade 6. Recently proficient students are former ELLs who achieved English proficiency in Grade 6 or later. Long-term proficient students are former ELLs who achieved proficiency prior to Grade 6.
(2) Rates are only reported for cateogries that contain at least 25 students.

Appendix D:
Methods for Explaining Differences in Graduation Rates Between Hispanic Ninth-Grade ELLs and Long-Term Proficient Students

To understand which factors explained differences in graduation rates between Hispanic ninth-grade ELLs and long-term proficient students, we used a two-level hierarchical non-linear model to estimate the probability of graduating from high school as a function of students' background characteristics, on-track status, educational expectations, and ELL status. Students were nested within the high school in which they were enrolled during their ninth-grade year in 2004–05. The model was run twice, the first time with new ELLs as the omitted category and the second time with long-term ELLs as the omitted category.

Level 1 Model

Pr(Graduating from high school within four years = 1) = φ_{ij}

$$\log\left[\frac{\varphi_{ij}}{1-\varphi_{ij}}\right] = \eta_{ij}$$

$$\begin{aligned}\eta_{ij} = \beta_{0j} &+ \beta_{1j}(\text{Male})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{Neighborhood Poverty})_{ij} + \beta_{3j}(\text{Neighborhood SES})_{ij} \\ &+ \beta_{4j}(\text{Special Education})_{ij} + \beta_{5j}(\text{Born in USA})_{ij} + \beta_{6j}(\text{Began School Early})_{ij} \\ &+ \beta_{7j}(\text{Slightly Old for Grade})_{ij} + \beta_{8j}(\text{Months Old for Grade})_{ij} \\ &+ \beta_{9j}(\text{On-Track Status})ij + \beta_{10j}(\text{Expect High School Degree})_{ij} \\ &+ \beta_{11j}(\text{Expect Vocational Technical Certificate})_{ij} \\ &+ \beta_{12j}(\text{Expect Two Year Associates Degree})_{ij} + \beta_{13j}(\text{Expect Graduate Degree})_{ij} \\ &+ \beta_{14j}(\text{Recently Proficient})_{ij} + \beta_{15j}(\text{Long-Term Proficient})_{ij} \\ &+ \beta_{16j}(\text{Never ELL})_{ij} + \beta_{17j}(\text{Long-Term ELL or New ELL})_{ij} + e_{ij}\end{aligned}$$

Level 2 Model

$\beta_0 = \gamma_{00} + u_j$

$\beta_1 = \gamma_{10}$

...

$\beta_{17} = \gamma_{170}$

After running the above model, we used the student-level residual file to draw a random sample of long-term proficient students that was the same size as the population of either new ELLs or long-term ELL students in our analysis (depending on which comparison we were making). We then assigned this sample of long-term proficient students the same characteristics as new or long-term ELLs (defined by the predictors in the above model). Finally, we ran a series of simulations in which we estimated what the graduation rate of long-term proficient students would be if they had the same characteristics as new or long-term ELLs.

Endnotes

Executive Summary

1 These numbers are based on data from the 2005–06 school year, the last year for which CCSR has information about ELL students.

2 ELLs who first enroll in U.S. schools during the middle or high school grades and have been in this country for less than two years are often referred to as newcomers. Because we include students who were designated as ELL as far as three years before entering high school, we chose the term new ELLs.

3 Other research has described long-term ELLs as students who have been designated ELL for at least five or more years. We considered setting the criteria for inclusion in the long-term ELL group to include students identified as ELL in fourth grade or before, meaning they would have been in their fifth year as an ELL when they entered high school (assuming normal grade progression). But when we looked at the course performance of ninth-grade ELLs who were first identified as ELL in fifth grade, they resembled long-term ELLs more than new ELLs.

4 In this report, we define "interruptions in CPS education" as an absence of one or more year from CPS after initial enrollment. Students who experience this type of interruption in their CPS education may be enrolled in other districts during their time away from CPS, but our data do not allow us to determine if this is the case. This definition differs from what is often referenced in research about ELLs. Research has shown that some ELLs travel between the United States and their home country during the school year and, as a result, may miss a month or more of school. Our data do not allow us to detect these kinds of absences from school (DeCapua et al., 2007; Menken et al., 2007).

Chapter 1

5 In New York City, for example, students with interrupted formal education had at least two fewer years of school than their peers of the same age, and they performed at least two years below grade level in reading and math (New York City Department of Education, 2006).

6 This reporting trend is beginning to change. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) first began reporting achievement scores of former ELL students in 2005. Former ELLs were defined as students who passed their state's English proficiency exam within the previous two years (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). And many states now report adequate yearly progress (AYP) separately for current ELLs and former ELLs, including Illinois, which has included adding a "former ELL" AYP reporting subgroup as part of its most recent No Child Left Behind waiver request.

Chapter 2

7 In 2004–05, CPS had the third largest ELL student population, behind Los Angeles and New York (Batalova & McHugh, 2010).

8 In CPS, most elementary schools include Grades K–8; there are very few middle schools. Grades 9–12 are typically housed in separate high schools.

9 This decline is likely due to several different factors. First, immigration to Chicago has slowed somewhat since 2000 as more immigrants have chosen to move to collar counties surrounding the city (Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, n.d). Second, Hispanic representation in Chicago increased substantially between 1990 and 2005 because of substantial out-migration by African Americans from Chicago to suburban communities. Because of higher fertility rates among Hispanics, there are now many more second- and third-generation Hispanic children living in the city, who are more likely to already be proficient in English when they enroll in school (Goerge, Dilts, Yang, Wasserman, & Clary, 2007).

10 At the national level, approximately 80 percent of ELL students are Spanish speakers, and more than 400 languages are represented across all ELL students (NCELA, 2011).

11 Since 2009, the Illinois State Board of Education has allowed for the assessment of preschool children for ELL designation, but individual districts are allowed to choose which assessment to use. CPS chose the Pre-IPT as the screener for preschool children (J. Yanguas, personal communication, February 23, 2012).

12 ACCESS stands for Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State. See the WIDA website for more information (http://wida.us/assessment/ACCESS/).

13 Sheltered instruction is defined as classes in which "instruction is entirely in English. Teachers strive to deliver lessons in clear, direct, simple English and use a wide range of scaffolding strategies so that students develop English language skills and learn academic subjects. Classes may be composed of students who speak many different languages but are not fluent in English" (ISBE, 2011, p. 6).

14 As described in endnote 2, ELLs who first enroll in U.S. schools during the middle or high school grades and have been in this country for less than two years are often referred to as newcomers. Because we include students who were designated as ELLs as far as three years before entering high school, we chose the term new ELLs.

15 As endnote 3 states, other research refers to long-term ELLs as students who have been designated ELL for at least five or more years. We considered setting the criteria for inclusion in the long-term ELL group to include students identified as ELLs in fourth grade or before, meaning they would have been in their fifth year as an ELL when they entered high school (assuming normal grade progression). But when we looked at the course performance of ninth-grade ELLs who were first identified as ELLs in fifth grade, they resembled long-term ELLs more than new ELLs.

16 As described earlier, in 2004 ELL students were assessed using the LPTS each year. If they were in Grade 3 or higher, they also took the Illinois Measure of Annual Growth in English (IMAGE) assessment, a state achievement test that used simplified English to test ELLs in math and reading in place of the state-mandated ISAT to test for content-based knowledge. Using these assessments, CPS categorized students into proficiency levels of 1–4, with 1 being the lowest level and 4 indicating that the student was considered proficient and no longer eligible for ELL services. The LPTS and IMAGE are no longer in use, and we have been unable to determine what specific cutoffs were used to determine each level of proficiency. ACCESS is now used to determine proficiency, and students can transition out of ELL services when they achieve an English proficiency level of 4.8 overall and a 4.2 literacy score, as well as a minimum of three years in the program (CPS, 2011b).

17 As we describe in endnote 4 in the Executive Summary, our definition of interruption in CPS education—missing a year or more of school in CPS after initial enrollment—differs from what is typically described in the research on ELLs. Research has shown that some ELLs travel between the United States and their home country during the school year, resulting in these students missing a month or more of school during the school year (DeCapua et al., 2007; Menken et al., 2007).

Chapter 3

18 This pattern is not quite as strong among Asian and white students.

19 It was not clear why some new ELLs took non-ESL required English instead of ESL. These students had a range of proficiency levels, with about half having the lowest level of proficiency. Most were enrolled in schools with sizeable ELL populations. It is possible that these students' parents requested that they not receive ELL support, but we have no way of verifying this information. Many of the long-term ELLs may have reached the maximum number of service years under the old policy and were considered ineligible by their schools.

20 We made these distinctions based on course titles; however, there is no way to verify what type of instruction was actually taking place in these classes.

21 Our measure of self-reported commitment to studying is created using four items from the 2005 CCSR biennial survey of CPS students. Students were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following questions: (1) I set aside time to do my homework and study; (2) I try to do well on my schoolwork even when it isn't interesting; (3) If I need to study, I don't go out with my friends; and (4) I always study for tests. For this analysis, we have standardized the study-habits measure so that 0 represents the typical study behavior for all Hispanic students. New ELLs scores on this measure were more than a one fourth of a standard deviation above the typical Hispanic student's score, which is quite high.

22 Although recently proficient students had significantly higher grades than new ELLs with similar attendance and study behavior, they had significantly lower grades than similar long-term proficient students. This finding suggests that recently proficient students may have been struggling somewhat in their classes despite having exited ELL status.

Chapter 4

23 Students who had experienced an interruption in their CPS education were not enrolled in CPS for one or more years at some point after their initial enrollment.

24 Although a correct prediction rate of 60 percent may seem reasonably good, it is not better than assuming every student graduates. Given that the overall graduation rate for this group was 60 percent, if we assumed that everyone graduated, we would be correct 60 percent of the time. In other words, students' proficiency level is not able to distinguish between students who graduate and students who drop out.

25 Among students who were never ELLs, the prediction rates for each of the four course-performance indicators were very similar to the rates for current and former ELLs: The on-track indicator correctly predicted outcomes for 80 percent of students who were never ELL; GPA correctly predicted 81 percent of students' outcomes; and course failures and absences correctly predicted 79 percent and 80 percent of outcomes respectively.

Chapter 5

26 Among white and Asian students, the difference in graduation rates between ninth-grade ELLs and other groups of students after taking into account course performance was much less pronounced than for Hispanic students. For example, among white and Asian students who were on-track, 90 percent of new ELLs and 93 percent of long-term ELLs graduated within four years, compared with 94 percent of long-term proficient students.

27 Responses come from the CCSR Survey of CPS Students, which was administered in the spring of 2005, when the students in our sample were in the spring semester of their ninth-grade year. Students were asked, "What is the highest level of education YOU plan to complete?"

28 The initial gap between long-term ELLs and long-term proficient students estimated from the analysis is a little larger than the actual gap of 16 points because the analysis includes only students who were enrolled in CPS for the entire ninth-grade year in 2004–05 to ensure they have an on-track status. Long-term proficient students who were enrolled for the entire ninth-grade year had higher graduation rates than students who were there for only the second half of the year.

Chapter 6

29 Recently proficient Hispanic students and Hispanic students who were never ELL were just as unlikely as long-term proficient students to report talking to a teacher or counselor: Only 24 percent indicated that they had met with a teacher or counselor to talk about courses needed for college.

30 Despite raising the scores on ACCESS that students need to achieve in order to be considered English proficient, Illinois's criteria is still lower than some other members of the WIDA consortium. See http://wida.us/index.aspx for details.

Appendix B

31 Very few ninth-grade students took elective classes, so classes that would have fallen into this category (e.g., journalism, creative writing) were omitted from our analysis.

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Julia Gwynne is a senior research analyst at CCSR. Her current work focuses on middle-grade indicators of high school and college readiness. She is also studying the causes and consequences of chronic absenteeism among preschool students. She received her doctoral degree in sociology from the University of Chicago.

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Elaine Allensworth is the interim executive director of CCSR, where she has conducted research on educational policy for the last 14 years. She is best known for her studies of high school graduation and college readiness, but she has also published in the areas of school leadership and school organization. Dr. Allensworth is one of the authors of Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons From Chicago, which provides a detailed analysis of school practices and community conditions that promote school improvement. Her research on early indicators of high school graduation, particularly the study What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating, has been used to create student tracking systems used in Chicago and school districts across the country. She is now extending that work to examine factors in the middle and elementary grades that affect high school graduation and college readiness, as well as continuing her study of high school processes. Dr. Allensworth earned a doctoral degree in sociology and an master's degree in urban studies from Michigan State University; formerly, was a high school Spanish and science teacher.

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Our Mission

The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) conducts research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. We seek to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners as we support the search for solutions to the problems of school reform. CCSR encourages the use of research in policy action and improvement of practice but does not argue for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for school reform by identifying what matters for student success and school improvement, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluations to identify how programs and policies are working.

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