



Native Language Assessment Programs

Introduction

Establishing Native Language Assessment (NLAs) programs allow English Learners (ELs) who have not yet achieved a high level of English proficiency to take certain standardized tests in their native language instead of English. By providing achievement assessments in a student's native language, state education agencies can gain a more meaningful read of ELs' knowledge of the subject matter.

Accuracy, Placement, Accountability, and Resources Matter

The nation's EL student population has grown by roughly 60% over the past decade. There are now nearly five million ELs enrolled in our K-12 public schools. Every state has had at least one school district where the EL population has increased by more than 50% since 2010.* The top three states with the largest EL student enrollment in public schools are: California, Texas, and Florida, respectively.†

* *Our Nation's English Learners*. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC, 2018, <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/el-characteristics/index.html#two> (accessed August 2019).

† Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, Sarah Hooker, Jeanne Batalova, *States and Districts with the Highest Number and Share of English Language Learners* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2015), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/ELL-FactSheet-No5.pdf> (accessed August 2019).

ELs are a diverse group of students. They know English to varying degrees and may have widely differing educational and sociocultural backgrounds. Most ELs are U.S.-born citizens, Latino, and speak Spanish at home.*

Proficiency in core academic subjects such as reading and mathematics is a key indicator that students are learning what is expected at their grade level. While ELs have experienced some small gains in reading and mathematics proficiency nationally, as well as increases in on-time high school graduation rates, their performance still lags far behind their non-EL peers. In 2017, 91% of fourth grade EL students fell below proficient in reading, and 86% of fourth grade EL students fall below proficient in math.†‡

Without a native language assessments program, Florida's current approach to assessing ELs does not properly measure student learning gains. Assessment data which inaccurately measures the knowledge of ELs may result in lower grade-level placement, remedial courses, and placement in special education services. This achievement gap, in combination with the impact of federal and state testing requirements on schools and students, makes the development of appropriate assessment measures for ELs a national priority.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to assess all ELs “in a valid and reliable manner and provide appropriate accommodations...including, to the extent practicable, assessments in the language and form that are most likely to yield accurate data about what students know and can do in academic content areas.”

In order to fulfill federal requirements for languages that are present in their student population, 29 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have developed policies for providing Spanish-speaking ELs with native language assessments in math; 12 states provide access to science assessments in Spanish; five states offer Spanish-language arts assessments; four states offer social studies in Spanish; three states provide science and math assessments in additional languages such as: Hawaiian, Arabic, Chinese, Haitian, Korean, Russian, Vietnamese, and Somali; one state provides social studies assessments in Arabic.§

* Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, Sarah Hooker, Jeanne Batalova, *Top Languages Spoken by English Language Learners Nationally and by State* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2015), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/top-languages-spoken-english-language-learners-nationally-and-state> (accessed August 2019).

† U.S. Department of Education, “NAEP Data Explorer,” <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE> (accessed August 2019), Reading, Grade 4, 2017, Status as English Language Learner, Achievement levels - cumulative.

‡ U.S. Department of Education, “NAEP Data Explorer,” <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE> (accessed August 2019), Math, Grade 4, 2017, Status as English Language Learner, Achievement levels - cumulative.

§ Lisa Tabaku, Maryan Carbuccia-Abbott, Elena Saavedra, *State Assessments in Languages Other Than English* (Chicago, IL: Midwest Comprehensive Center, 2018), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED590178.pdf> (accessed August 2019).

Native Language Assessments Program in Texas

The number of ELs in Texas public schools has nearly doubled in the past decade—from about 570,000 in 2001 to more than a million students, or 19% of the student population, in 2018.* Most ELs in Texas are U.S.-born and speak Spanish at home.† Both state and federal testing regulations require ELs to be taught the same grade-level academic skills as non-ELs. Texas law provides for the administration of Spanish-version state assessments in grades three to five, the grades in which large numbers of Spanish-speaking ELs receive bilingual education. Note: Texas does not provide native language assessments to students in English as a Second Language programs, on social studies assessments, or for most secondary EL students.‡

Texas Assessments Offered in a Language Other Than English

Subject	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Reading	✓	✓	✓
Writing		✓	
Math	✓	✓	✓
Science			✓

Note: Shaded areas refer to grades and subjects which do not have an annual standardized test.

According to a nationwide report by the U.S. Department of Education, Texan ELs are reaching some of the largest achievement growths in math and reading proficiency rates. The report shows that Texas has seen growth in the math and reading proficiency rates of its fourth grade EL students since 2009; the reading proficiency rate of eighth grade ELs has improved and is five times higher than in 2009. In addition, Texas has seen a 16% increase in the graduation rate of EL students since 2011.§

* *Public School Districts Including Charter Schools, EL Students by Category and Grade* (Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency, 2019), <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/adhocrpt/adlepcg.html> (accessed August 2019).

† Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, Sarah Hooker, Jeanne Batalova, *States and Districts with the Highest Number and Share of English Language Learners* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2015), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/ELL-FactSheet-No5.pdf> (accessed August 2019).

‡ Texas Education Agency, "STAAR Spanish Resources," [https://tea.texas.gov/Student_Testing_and_Accountability/Testing/State_of_Texas_Assessments_of_Academic_Readiness_\(STAAR\)/STAAR_Spanish_Resources/](https://tea.texas.gov/Student_Testing_and_Accountability/Testing/State_of_Texas_Assessments_of_Academic_Readiness_(STAAR)/STAAR_Spanish_Resources/) (accessed August 2019).

§ *Academic Performance and Outcomes for English Learners*. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC, 2018, <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/el-outcomes/index.html> (accessed August 2019).

Gaps in Texas Native Language Assessments Program

Texas native language assessments are accessible only to students in grades three through five who are in their first year of a bilingual education program. When testing out of bilingual education, or upon entering secondary school, ELs are transitioned into English as a Second Language programs. Texas does not provide native language assessments for ELs in English as a Second Language, who are the majority of ELs in the state, at 54%.^{*}

What is the difference between bilingual education and English as a Second Language (ESL)?

In Texas, only bilingual education EL students have access to native language assessments. Bilingual education ELs all share the same language background, and the teacher speaks both the students' native language and English as a means of content instruction. By continuing to teach in the student's native tongue, students are allowed the opportunity to grasp complex ideas in a language they are familiar with rather than being hindered by the double obstacle of learning a subject such as science and dealing with a language barrier at the same time.[†]

In Texas, English as a Second Language EL students do not have access to native language assessments. ESL EL students come from various language backgrounds, and the teacher only speaks English. The theories of ESL teaching practices are rooted in the idea that immersion is the best way to educate someone who needs to learn a new language. ESL teachers often don't know how to speak in their students' native tongues and quite often have a classroom full of diverse languages anyway.[‡]

Bilingual education ELs taking Spanish-language reading and writing were **twice as likely to meet grade level standards** than ELs taking the same assessments in English. Bilingual education ELs taking Spanish-language mathematics and science were **nearly 1.5 times more likely to meet grade level standards** than ELs taking assessments in English. Data from the Texas Academic Performance Report shows that EL students without bilingual education and native language assessments have an increased likelihood of falling below grade level proficiency.[§]

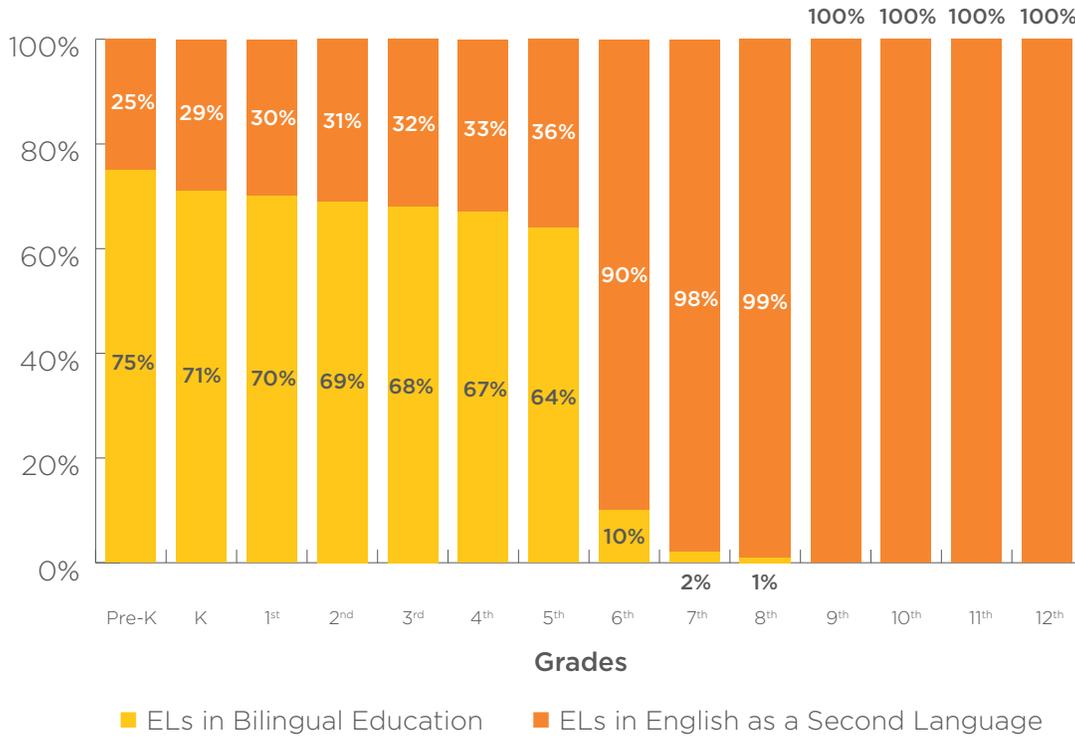
* *Public School Districts Including Charter Schools, EL Students by Category and Grade* (Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency, 2019), <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/adhocrpt/adlepccg.html> (accessed August 2019).

† The University of Texas, "What is the Difference Between ESL and Bilingual Education?" <https://degree.utpb.edu/articles/education/esl-and-bilingual-education.aspx> (accessed August 2019).

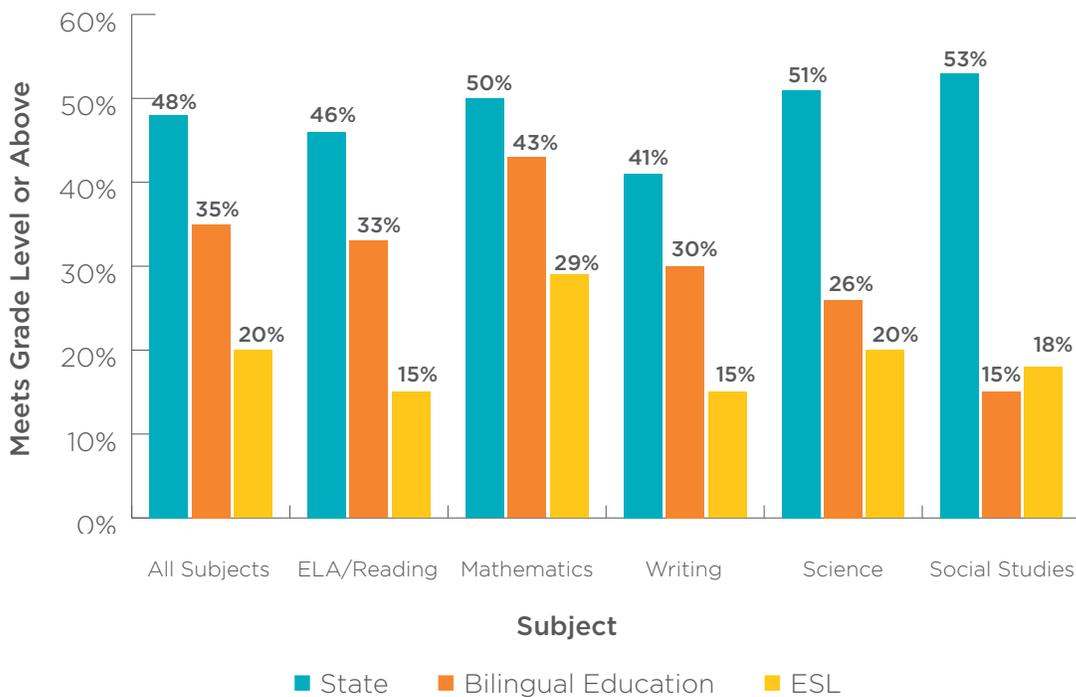
‡ *Id.*

§ *Texas Academic Performance Report, 2017-2018 State STAAR Performance*. (Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency, 2018), https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/cgi/sas/broker?_service=marykay&year4=2018&year2=18&_debug=0&single=N&batch=N&app=PUBLIC&title=2018+Texas+Academic+Performance+Reports&_program=perfrep.perfmast.sas&ptype=H&level=state&search=campname&namenum=&prgopt=2018%2Ftapr%2Fpaper_tapr.sas (accessed August 2019).

Method of Instruction for English Learners in Texas by Grade Level Enrollment (2018)



Texas Academic Performance Report 2018 STAAR State Assessment Performance



Note: TEA does not provide performance reports for bilingual ed ELs and ESL ELs disaggregated by grade level. This data reflects the performance of students in grades three through 12.

STAAR Social Studies assessments are available only in English and administered at the secondary level, in grades where most Texan ELs no longer have access to bilingual education and native language assessments. Social Studies is also the only subject in which bilingual education EL students performed lower (15%) than English as a Second Language EL students (18%). According to data analyzed by the U.S. Department of Education, Texan ELs continue to show lower proficiency rates in grades and subjects where native language assessments and bilingual education programs are not made available.* Increasing access to bilingual education programs and native language assessments at all grade levels would improve the measure of learning growth, especially for secondary EL students in Texas.

Clark County School District (CCSD) Master Plan for English Learner Success

Clark County School District (CCSD) in Las Vegas, Nevada, is the nation's third-largest EL-enrolling school district. Well over 30% of its 318,000 students come from homes where a language other than English is spoken. Nearly 20% of CCSD students are considered ELs.

In 2016, CCSD developed its EL Master Plan, which lays out a comprehensive vision for EL success with the goal of not only creating appropriate assessments for ELs but also establishing stronger dual language programs.† CCSD's EL Master Plan lays out a multiyear course of action describing strategic objectives, high-leverage strategies, and action steps in a detailed implementation plan spanning five years, from 2017 to 2022. It articulates evidence-based principles of effective EL instruction and clearly lays out instructional models to be implemented districtwide for elementary and secondary ELs.

CCSD's evidence-based high leverage strategies include, but are not limited to:

- Create a districtwide culture that establishes all teachers as teachers of ELs and all schools as schools for ELs.
- Investigate/research/incorporate/create appropriate assessments to show student growth in content and biliteracy.
- Expand and enrich dual language programs. Research shows that native language assessments are most effective when students are taught in their native language through bilingual education instructional method. Dual language programs provide opportunities for ELs to develop academic literacy and content knowledge in two languages simultaneously. This allows students not only to become balanced bilingual individuals and thereby enhance academic and economic prospects; it also helps them to develop advanced metalinguistic and metacognitive skills, and to maintain home languages and cultures.
- Ensure all ELs have supportive and safe learning environments that demonstrate respect for their cultures, prior experiences, and language assets. Provide differentiated services and targeted academic literacy and language support for all EL subgroups, including long-term ELs, reclassified fluent-English-proficient ELs, ELs with disabilities, Gifted and Talented ELs, and newcomer ELs. Secondary ELs and newcomers are designated a specific counselor, teacher specialist, or faculty member to monitor their language

* *Academic Performance and Outcomes for English Learners*. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC, 2018, <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/el-outcomes/index.html> (accessed August 2019).

† Master Plan for English Language Learner Success (Las Vegas, NV: Clark County School District, 2016).

development, assessed progress, and achievement of goals for meeting grade-level literacy standards, becoming college- and career-ready, and exiting EL status.

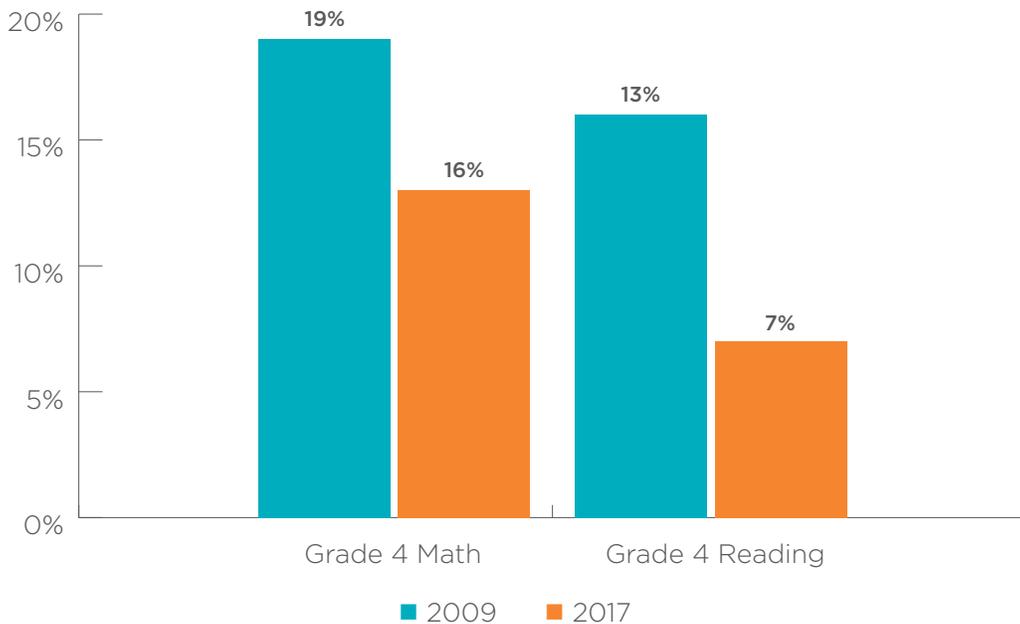
- Effectively engage families and build their capacity to provide academic support so that the aspirations of all ELs and their families can be achieved. Expand communication strategies to families of ELs on attendance, academic and language proficiencies, EL Instructional Models, and graduation requirements.
- Develop a teaching pipeline to recruit, prepare, and support teachers, who are qualified to teach ELs, by partnering with high schools and institutions of higher education.

UnidosUS’s Recommendations for Florida Native Language Assessments

It’s important for all Florida students to have access to an equitable education, a pathway to high school graduation, be college- and career-ready, and have the supports needed to achieve these goals.

ELs should have multiple ways to meaningfully engage with and demonstrate their content knowledge through native language assessments enriched with a bilingual education. In doing so, the state will benefit from a more accurate read on the knowledge base of EL students.

NAEP Proficiency Rates of Florida English Learners (2009 vs. 2017)



The academic performance of all Florida ELs has steadily decreased since 2009. The EL fourth grade reading proficiency rate has decreased by 6% and math proficiency has decreased by 3% since 2009.*

These alarming learning gaps reflect themselves even further into the graduation rate of Florida ELs, at only 62%, while their non-ELs peers are graduating at 82%.†

The Florida Department of Education should commit to providing these supports for EL students who represent 10.2% of the state's K-12 student population, or nearly 300,000 students.‡

UnidosUS recommends the following to strengthen Florida's EL assessment systems.

- **Stage implementation with sufficient time for the new assessment system to be successful.** Form a plan of action and timetable for the development and adoption of these statewide, standardized assessments, beginning with assessments for the two most prevalent languages represented in the limited English proficient student population within the state.
- **Reform initiatives to statewide EL accountability policies,** including research-based assessment accommodations appropriate for ELs.
- **Rigorously and regularly analyze the results** from the native language assessment program to inform ongoing improvement.
- **Help districts and schools secure the funds to develop and sustain dual language programs.** Develop standards for heritage language courses and provide funding for instructional materials for these courses.
- **Build the supply of teachers qualified to teach in dual language programs.** Ensure teacher preparation and credentialing standards offer professional development and in-service education in English to Speakers of Other Languages and bilingual education program models, including dual language and heritage language, and instructional materials and strategies.

* *Academic Performance and Outcomes for English Learners.* U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC, 2018, <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/el-outcomes/index.html> (accessed August 2019).

† *Id.*

‡ Florida Department of Education. "Florida's PK-12 Education Information Portal," <http://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/students.shtml> (accessed August 2019), PK-12 Enrollment (EDStats tool).



UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an [Affiliate Network](#) of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels.

For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our country stronger.

The UnidosUS Policy and Advocacy component is a leading think tank focusing on issues relevant to the Latino community. Through research, policy analysis, advocacy efforts, civic engagement, and campaigns, it defines a rigorous policy agenda that includes stances on immigration, education, health, employment and the economy, and housing. The component aligns federal work with state-level advocacy and provides support and expertise to state and local leaders in implementing Latino-focused policy.

For more information on UnidosUS, visit unidosus.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

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