

Pathways for English Learners

Giving Parents the Right Information

Summary

In Santa Cruz County, some children arrive at school with little exposure to the English language. Since English is the main vehicle for learning, these students are designated as “English Learners” and placed in one of several instructional programs to become proficient. The achievement gap faced by English Learners can start early and continue for years. It is an area of great concern, with over 11,500 Santa Cruz County English Learner students, and is the subject of an ongoing complicated debate over the effectiveness of various instructional programs.

While districts have benchmarks, no data is published on the length of time it takes county English Learners to become fluent, which of the many instructional programs are most effective, and whether the overall trend is improving. With little data, parents of English Learners face the difficult task of deciding which English Language instruction program is best suited to their child’s needs.

So that parents can make better decisions for their children, the Grand Jury recommends that school districts publish additional, updated information on the various instructional programs, provide results of program effectiveness using easily understood measures, and list the availability of each instructional program by school site. In addition, the Grand Jury recommends a higher degree of collaboration between kindergarten and preschool programs like Head Start.

Background

The Grand Jury initiated its investigation in response to several articles in local newspapers last fall regarding English Learners in California schools. These articles raised a number of concerns: flaws in the assessment methodology,^[1] an achievement gap,^[2] ineffective English Learner programs, higher dropout rates, and even allusions to financial incentives that might keep students from moving on.^[3] The Grand Jury decided to examine these issues within selected districts of Santa Cruz County.

The Impact of Proposition 227 on English Learners

Back in the 1990s, the methods for teaching English came under intense scrutiny. In 1998 California voters passed Proposition 227. The summary prepared by the Attorney General^[4] is as follows:

- Requires all public school instruction be conducted in English.

- Requirement may be waived if parents or guardian show that child already knows English, or has special needs, or would learn English faster through alternate instructional technique.
- Provides initial short-term placement, not normally exceeding one year, in intensive sheltered English immersion programs for children not fluent in English.
- Appropriates \$50 million per year for ten years funding English instruction for individuals pledging to provide personal English tutoring to children in their community.
- Permits enforcement suits by parents and guardians.

The intent of Proposition 227 was to end decades of bilingual education, and instead place English Learners into one year of sheltered English immersion (a special curriculum and level of English designed to accommodate students who are learning the language), after which they would be placed into regular mainstream classrooms. The law also allows waivers for parents who prefer a bilingual program. The result was large numbers of students moving from bilingual to English-only immersion instructional programs. A bitter and protracted debate between immersion and bilingual program proponents continues to this day. This debate only makes it harder to address the underlying developmental issues.^[5] Each side clings to data^[6] or studies^[7] that show its method is right, while other studies show neither approach is better.^{[8] [9]}

Head Start

The Grand Jury wanted to better understand the benefits of early childhood education programs like Head Start, to English Learners, because children acquire language skills early in life. Head Start programs were established in the 1960s as part of President Johnson's "War on Poverty" to meet the needs of disadvantaged preschool children.^[10] This national program had an annual budget over \$7 billion by 2010, with an enrollment of more than 900,000 children.^[11] That same year in California, Head Start sent 59,663 children to kindergarten, at over 1,120 different local school districts. Two-thirds of those districts have formal agreements with Head Start to coordinate transition services for children and families.^[12] Through its website, The California Department of Education promotes partnerships between Head Start and local districts.^[13] As part of the investigation on English Learners, the Grand Jury decided to explore the relationship between local Head Start agencies and county public schools.

Scope

We selected the three school districts with the most English Learners (Pajaro Valley Unified School District, Santa Cruz City Schools, and Live Oak School District) for study, as part of this investigation. In the 2010-11 academic year, these three districts enrolled 94% of the county's English Learners.^[14] Santa Cruz City Schools is technically two districts—one for the elementary schools, and one for the middle and high schools. We also chose to examine the Head Start, Early Head Start and Migrant Head Start agencies.

The Grand Jury chose to examine these programs from the perspective of a parent:

- How long will it take for my child to become proficient?
- Will my child be at grade level after completing the program?
- Will the program be better when my next child starts school?

The title of this report was inspired by a statement made by a parent who was making a presentation to other parents of English Learners: “As parents, we don’t always have the right information.”

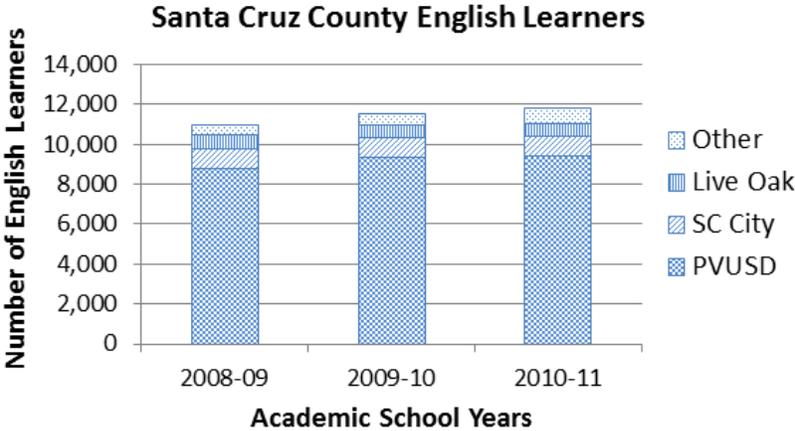
Investigation

The Grand Jury began by reviewing state and national press articles, educational reports, and studies on English Learners. We researched information on the California Department of Education online databases and school district websites. To obtain an overall feel for the structure of English Learner education in Santa Cruz County, we initially interviewed district administrators and the staff administering English Language Development services and assessment programs. Individual schools offer different instructional programs across the county, and each district has its own criteria for when an English Learner is deemed fluent. We focused on Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) in particular, because it is the largest district in the county and has the majority of English Learners.

County English Learner Population

Determining the historical size of the English Learner population in the county is straightforward using the online databases (Dataquest^[15] and Ed-Data^[16]) provided by the California Department of Education. Santa Cruz County had 38,975 students enrolled for the 2010-11 school year, of which 11,764 (30%) were classified as English Learners.

Chart 1



Source: Dataquest^[14]

Chart 1 shows the number of English Learners in the county growing slightly over the last three years. PVUSD is the largest district by far in the county, and has the largest share of English Learners, more than all the other districts combined. In the 2010-11 academic year, PVUSD had 9,388 (80%) English Learners enrolled, Santa Cruz City Schools (Elementary and Secondary districts combined) had 967 (8%), and Live Oak School District had 670 (6%).

Table 1 - Comparison of selected districts for 2010-11 academic year

District	2010-11 Enrollment	Number of English Learners	Number of English Learners Speaking Spanish
Pajaro Valley Unified	19,545	9,388	9135
Santa Cruz City Schools (Elementary)	2,257	599	574
Santa Cruz City Schools (Secondary)	4,718	368	332
Live Oak	2,108	670	644

Source: Ed-Data [\[17\]](#) [\[18\]](#) [\[19\]](#) [\[20\]](#)

Table 1 shows the breakdown for the 2010-11 academic year comparing total enrollment to the number of English Learners, and the number of English Learners speaking Spanish at home. For example, the Live Oak School District had 2,108 students enrolled, of which 670 were English Learners. The language spoken at home for 644 of those English Learners was Spanish.

English Learner Classification

Every California student is screened for English proficiency when first enrolling in a public school. This screening begins with a very short questionnaire, the Home Language Survey, which is filled out by the parents. If a questionnaire mentions a home language other than English, the child will be further assessed using the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). The CELDT evaluates English proficiency across four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and five performance levels: Beginning, Early Intermediate, Intermediate, Early Advanced, and Advanced. For students entering kindergarten, listening and speaking are the only domain assessments used. [\[21\]](#)

There are three initial outcomes with this assessment:

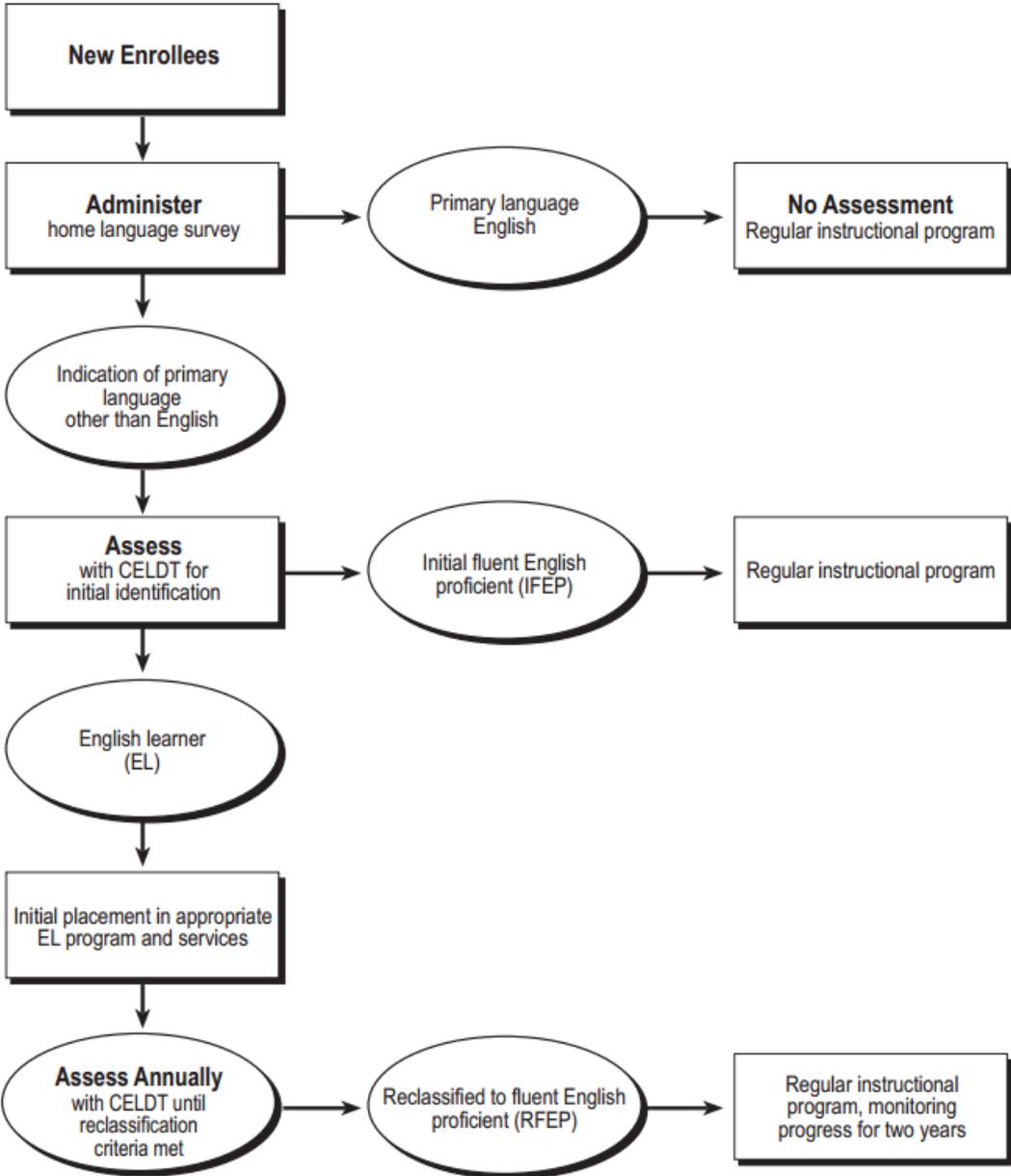
- If the Home Language Survey determines English is the home language, then these students are assigned to a regular classroom.
- Students who pass the CELDT are designated as Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP) and assigned to a regular classroom.
- Children who do not pass the CELDT are designated as English Learners and enter the appropriate English Learner instructional program. From this point on they will take the CELDT annually, until reclassified as fluent.

Figure 1 below shows the process by which a California student can become classified as an English Learner.

Figure 1

Decision Guide for Placement of English Learners

(Education Code sections 313 and 60810[d])



Source: California Department of Education [21]

The publication of a University of California at Berkeley study about the use of the CELDT^[22] tool attracted widespread attention with its finding that children may be misclassified as English Learners, not due to language skills, but to a lack of maturity. Further, one of the primary authors of the study was quoted in a Santa Cruz Sentinel report:^[1]

...if students were misjudged, they can be short-changed academically. In some schools, for example, students are pulled from classrooms for targeted English language development. During that time, they're missing out on other instruction.

The Grand Jury looked into this issue and found that although some students may be incorrectly classified, there are sufficient processes in place to make corrections as needed. While the Home Language Survey and CELDT system may not be perfect, the Grand Jury did not find any evidence that it was being administered improperly. One change PVUSD did make after the Berkeley study came out was to add supplemental questions to their Home Language Survey to better identify which students get assessed using the CELDT.

To get some perspective from outside the county on the CELDT test itself, we interviewed a California researcher and author who specializes in English Learners. This researcher disputed the findings in the Berkeley study on the CELDT assessment, and felt there were more pressing issues that needed to be addressed for English Learners.

As interviews continued, it became apparent that the more pressing problem for English Learners was not the initial CELDT assessment process, but rather the ability to get "Reclassified to Fluent English Proficient" (RFEP) in a timely manner. Those who could not pass the CELDT and gain access to mainstream classroom instruction by middle school get labeled as Long Term English Learners. It becomes increasingly difficult for these students to achieve success in education.^[23]

Instructional Programs for Teaching English Learners

Multiple instructional programs for achieving English proficiency are offered at schools across the county. These programs are the same or similar to those used across the state and nation.^[24] In California, once children are classified as English Learners they are placed, by default, in a Structured (Sheltered) English Immersion program. Parents may request their child be placed, instead, into an English Language Mainstream class, or request a waiver for an alternative program. The alternative programs, which provide instruction in the student's home language, may not be available at their school or district.

The following is a brief description of programs offered:

- **English Language Mainstream (ELM):** This is the regular classroom with instruction in English. This option is intended for students who are reasonably fluent in English. Students in ELM include English Only students and English Learners who have become fluent. They can also include English Learners who are not reasonably fluent in English, but whose parents have requested they be mainstreamed.^{[26] [27]}
- **Structured (or Sheltered) English Immersion (SEI):** This is the primary instructional model used in California after the passage of Proposition 227. It uses a special curriculum and level of English designed to accommodate students who are learning the language. Instruction is done mostly in English to facilitate rapidly learning the language.^[27]
- **Early Exit “Transitional” Bilingual:** The home language is used for the purpose of early reading and clarification. The goal is to transition children into mainstream English-only speaking classrooms within two to three years.^{[28] [31]}
- **Late Exit “Developmental” Bilingual:** Instruction on academic subjects is done in the home language. The home language is maintained and developed as these students learn English and are mainstreamed into English-only classrooms, usually by the end of the fifth grade. The goal is for English Learners to be proficient in two languages.^{[29] [31]}
- **Two-Way Bilingual Immersion:** A program of instruction where a mix of English speakers and English Learners are taught literacy and content in two languages. It combines features of developmental bilingual programs for English Learners and foreign language immersion for English speakers. The goal is for both groups of students to become proficient in two languages.^{[30] [31]} Often referred to as Dual-Language Immersion, but actually it is one of several programs under the Dual-Language Immersion umbrella.^[94]

The Two-Way Bilingual Immersion program has been growing in popularity in the state. At the time of this report, there were over 300 schools in California offering it.^[32] This program appeals to both English Learners and native English speakers, with the goal of all students becoming fully bilingual and biliterate. Much of the growth has been in San Diego County, which now has 48 dual-language programs.^{[33] [34]} The San Diego County Office of Education is providing Two-Way Immersion training and staff development workshops^[35] attended by participants from around the state. Advocates cite recent studies that show learning a second language can stimulate the brain to develop higher-level reasoning skills,^{[36] [37]} and that the program can help turn around low-performing schools.^[38] Santa Cruz County has two schools offering Two-Way Bilingual Immersion programs: Alianza Charter School in Watsonville, and selected classrooms at DeLaveaga Elementary School in Santa Cruz.

The English Learner instructional program options available in each district are shown in Table 2. The percentages indicate the proportion of English Learners in each program. “NA” indicates the program is not available. For example, all Live Oak School District

English Learners and 46% of PVUSD English Learners are placed in Structured English Immersion.

Table 2 - Program Options and Utilization by English Learners (2011-12)

District	Number of English Learners 2011-12*	English Language Mainstream	Structured (Sheltered) English Immersion	Early Exit "Transitional" Bilingual	Late Exit "Developmental" Bilingual	Two-Way Bilingual Immersion	Other
Live Oak	659	0%	100%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Pajaro Valley Unified	9038	22%	46%	13%	10%	5%	4%
Santa Cruz City Schools (Elementary)	619	2%	60%	22%	NA	16%	NA
Santa Cruz City Schools (Secondary)	277	37%	57%	0%	NA	6%	NA

*Current 2011-12 counts which may change by the end of the academic year

Sources: Provided by PVUSD, Live Oak School District, and Santa Cruz City Schools

After reviewing publicly available district literature, master plans, videos, websites, presentations, pamphlets, board meeting minutes, and school websites, we observed:

- School districts do not provide centralized information showing which English Learner programs are offered by which schools.
- It was not clear how parents of native English speakers could find out about the Two-Way Immersion programs being offered.
- Terminology is not always consistent. For example, the PVUSD English Learner Master Plan, the English Learner Program pamphlet, a slide set, and a video use only the term "Dual-Language" or "Dual-Language Immersion." However, on the website for Alianza Charter School, the only school offering this program in PVUSD, it is referred to as "Two-Way Bilingual Immersion."
- The PVUSD English Learner Master Plan and English Learner Programs pamphlet indicate the Dual-Language Immersion program must be requested by at least 20 parents, and all parents must request a waiver each year to be in the program. However, Alianza is a charter school, so no waiver is needed, and the 20-request requirement is not applicable.
- In the PVUSD Master Plan and English Learner Programs pamphlet, the distinction between Late Exit "Developmental" Bilingual, and Two-Way Bilingual

Immersion programs is not clear. There is some confusion even among some PVUSD employees, who stated that the programs are equivalent.

The Time It Takes to Learn English

The Grand Jury attempted to determine how long it takes county English Learners to achieve fluency in English, which instructional models (English mainstream, structured English immersion, early/late bilingual, or two-way bilingual immersion) were most effective, and whether the time to reclassification was continually improving.

There are two important milestones for English Learners. The first is to become “English Proficient,” as measured by the CELDT. This requires an overall score of “Early Advanced” or “Advanced” on the CELDT, and scores of at least “Intermediate” for each required section.^[39] The second milestone is to become Reclassified as Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) and exit the English Learner program entirely.

The first real data on this topic was found in a lawsuit that was filed in 2005 and later dropped.^[40] This lawsuit, which included PVUSD as one of the plaintiffs, states:

Relevant, nationally recognized professional and technical standards and research have determined that English Learners on average need between five to seven years to become proficient enough that academic tests in English will yield accurate results of what that student knows and can do...

Some districts publish benchmark matrices of how long it should take English Learners to become reclassified based on their initial CELDT score. For example, PVUSD and Santa Cruz City Schools benchmarks set the expectation of being reclassified in the sixth year if the initial score on the CELDT is Level 1, or by the second year if the initial score is Level 4 or 5.^[25]^[53] The PVUSD matrix is based on the Hayward Unified School District matrices which aim for being reclassified in the fourth year, given an initial CELDT score of Level 1.^[54]

The Grand Jury learned during interviews that the districts do not regularly produce reports showing which instructional models were proving most effective, or the actual length of time to reclassification; however, five to seven years is probably typical.

The Grand Jury discovered that some English Learners never achieve reclassification.

The Grand Jury asked each district for data or reports regarding the length of time it takes their English Learners to master English. For lack of a better term, we called this “time to reclassification.” We did not receive any reports that showed actual time to reclassification or any historical trends. Instead, the districts provided us with the state-mandated data collected to show progress, and pointed us to the English Learner data on the California Department of Education online databases. We reviewed this data to discover the length of time to reclassification.

All districts track Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs).^[41] Every California school district must track these measures in order to receive Title III federal funding for English Learners.^[42] These measures include:

- AMAO 1: Making annual progress toward proficiency (measured by CELDT)
- AMAO 2: Attaining English proficiency (measured by CELDT)
- AMAO 3: Meeting academic goals for English Language Arts and Mathematics (measured by California STAR testing)
- The numbers of consecutive years not meeting the AMAOs

AMAO 1 is the percentage of English Learners moving up one CELDT performance level each year towards proficiency; or, if proficient, maintaining that proficiency. To do this, a “Beginner” must score as “Early Intermediate”; an “Early Intermediate” must score as “Intermediate”; and “Intermediate” must score as “Early Advanced”; and all others must maintain their “English Proficient” score. For 2010-11, the statewide goal was to have 54.6% of English Learners advance one level, or maintain their proficiency on the CELDT. As shown in Table 3 Santa Cruz City Schools (High), which includes middle and high schools, was the only district of the three to have met this goal.

Table 3 - AMAO 1 - English Learners Making Annual CELDT Progress (2010-11)

CELDT level progress	Statewide Target	Pajaro Valley Unified	Santa Cruz City Schools (Elementary)	Santa Cruz City Schools (High)	Live Oak
Percent making annual progress	54.6%	48.8%	50.0%	56.7%	49.2%

Source: Dataquest^{[43] [44] [45] [46]}

Overall, for the AMAO 1 measure on the three districts, 4,713 of 9,277 English Learners, who took the test and had taken the test previously, advanced one CELDT level or maintained proficiency, according to our calculations derived from Dataquest.^[80]

AMAO 2 shows the percentage of English Learners who have attained English proficiency as shown in Table 4 below. This means scoring “Early Advanced” or “Advanced,” and at least “Intermediate” on all required sections of the CELDT. English Learners are split into two groups: those in the program for fewer than five years, and those in the program for five years or more. The 2010-11 goal was for 18.7% of the first group, and 43.2% of the second group, to score as proficient. The Santa Cruz School District (High) and Live Oak met the goal, and that was just for the long-term English Learner group.

Table 4 - AMAO 2 - English Learners Achieving English Proficiency Scores (2010-11)

English Learner Groups	Statewide Target	Pajaro Valley Unified	Santa Cruz City Schools (Elementary)	Santa Cruz City Schools (High)	Live Oak
Fewer than 5 years group	18.7%	12.1%	16.3%	16.4%	17.6%
5 Years or more group	43.2%	40.0%	35.1%	46.8%	43.9%

Source: Dataquest [\[43\]](#) [\[44\]](#) [\[45\]](#) [\[46\]](#)

Overall for the AMAO 2 measure, 8,428 of the 10,915 English Learners taking the test in the three districts did not score as proficient last year, according to our calculations derived from Dataquest. [\[80\]](#)

AMAO 3 indicates whether English Learners are meeting “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) [\[81\]](#) goals in English Language Arts and Mathematics. This is measured using the same STAR standardized tests administered to all California students. Each year there is a new goal for the percentage of English Learners to score proficient or above on these tests. For 2010-11, the goal was 66.1% to 68.5% (depending on the test subject matter and type of school) of the English Learners to score proficient or above. None of the school districts met these goals as shown in Table 5. Note that this AMAO only indicates whether the goal was met or not. It does not indicate the extent of any achievement gap for English Learners. [\[39\]](#)

Table 5 - AMAO 3 - English Learners Meeting Standardized Testing Goals (2010-11)

California Standardized Tests	Pajaro Valley Unified	Santa Cruz City Schools (Elementary)	Santa Cruz City Schools (High)	Live Oak
Met goal for English-Language Arts	No	No	No	No
Met goal for Mathematics	No	No	No	No

Source: Dataquest [\[43\]](#) [\[44\]](#) [\[45\]](#) [\[46\]](#)

Number of consecutive years indicates how long a district has gone without meeting all the AMAOs (see Table 6). The Santa Cruz County districts are not alone in not meeting the AMAO goals. Each year the bar is raised, making it increasingly difficult to hit the statewide targets. Looking statewide for 2010-11, only 51% of school districts and education agencies met AMAO 1, only 45% met AMAO 2, and only 14% met AMAO 3. [\[48\]](#)

Table 6 - Number of Consecutive Years Not Meeting AMAOs (2010-11)

	Pajaro Valley Unified	Santa Cruz City Schools (Elementary)	Santa Cruz City Schools (High)	Live Oak
Years not meeting AMAO goals	8	8	4	5

Source: Dataquest [\[43\]](#) [\[44\]](#) [\[45\]](#) [\[46\]](#)

The 2012 AMAO 1 & 2 results were not available by the time this report was finalized. Some districts let us know that their preliminary results were quite positive compared to last year. The reader will be able to view the final 2012 results using DataQuest (see the website links at the end of this report).

Next, the Grand Jury reviewed online California Department of Education data to see how fast the number of English Learners decreased each year, as they became reclassified and placed into mainstream English-only classrooms. The number of English Learners does decline in each successive grade as shown in Charts 2 through 5. However, it never goes to zero, indicating there are a significant number of Long Term English Learners or incoming transfers that never attain proficiency while in public school.

Chart 2

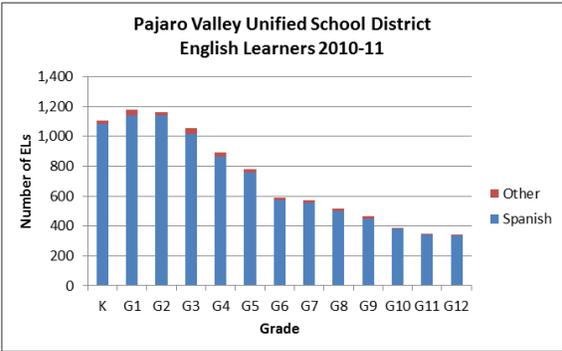
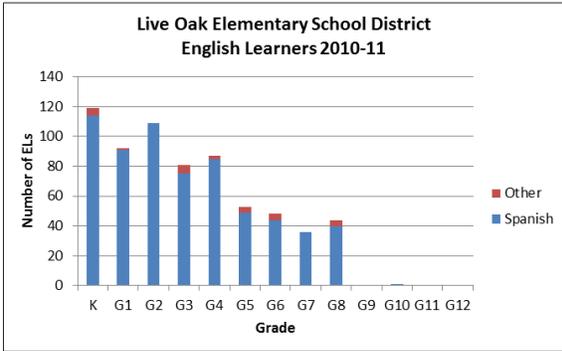


Chart 3



Source: DataQuest [\[49\]](#) [\[50\]](#)

Note the difference in the scale on the vertical axis, which measures the number of English Learners. PVUSD has the largest number of English Learners, with over 1000 entering kindergarten last year, compared with about 120 each, for both Santa Cruz City and Live Oak schools.

Chart 4

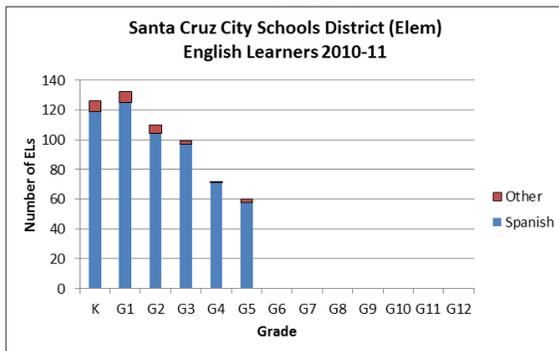
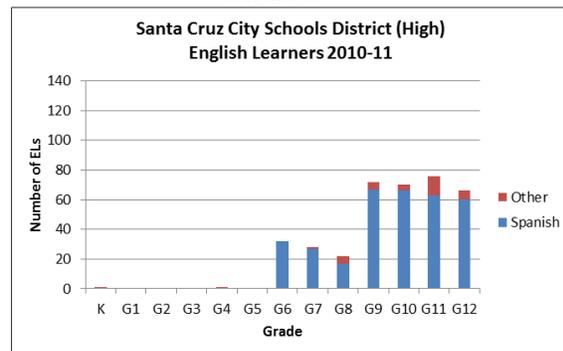


Chart 5



Source: DataQuest [\[51\]](#) [\[52\]](#)

The jump in the number of English Learners in the 9th grade for Santa Cruz City schools is due to the arrival of students from surrounding K-8 districts. For example, the Soquel Union School District does not have any high schools, so its students will flow into the Santa Cruz City Schools for high school.

We got our first glimpse of how long it actually takes to become reclassified when PVUSD and Live Oak School districts provided us with anonymous raw data. This data included student records for every student enrolled that year who had once been an English Learner, and had at some point been reclassified. Each record had the date entering the district, and the date reclassified. This allowed us to calculate the time to reclassification for each student, and to group them accordingly. Each bar on Charts 6 and 7 is a count of the number of students achieving reclassification within a specific length of time. For example, 987 of the past PVUSD English Learners achieved reclassification within 3 to 3.99 years.

Chart 6

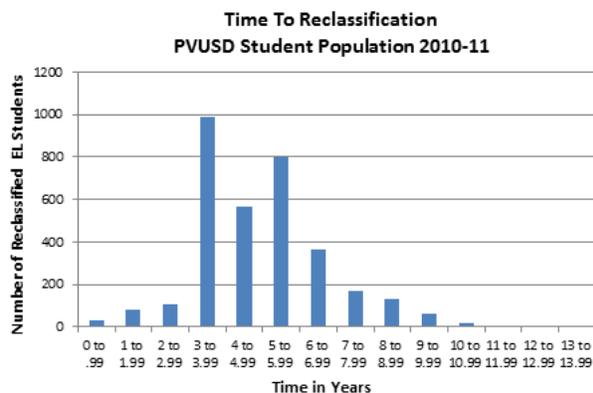
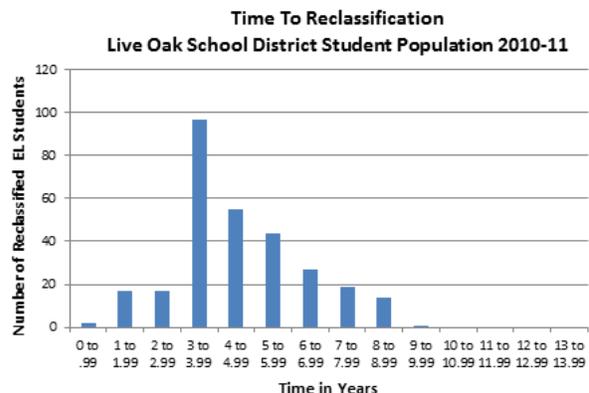


Chart 7



Source: PVUSD and Live Oak School Districts

While the raw data exists, the Grand Jury was not able to obtain English Learner reports from any of the three districts that would show how long it was actually taking district English Learners to become reclassified. The AMAOs do measure progress but give very little hint as to how long it actually takes. The number of English Learners by grade shows students are getting reclassified over time, but it is difficult to draw any conclusions, since unknown numbers of students are periodically entering, leaving or dropping out.

Observations:

- No districts publish data on program effectiveness, as measured by how long it actually takes a student to become reclassified.
- No districts publish trend data on program effectiveness (for time to reclassification) for successive groups of children that start kindergarten together and eventually graduate together.
- No districts publish Title III AMAO results on their websites, or provide links to the online Title III AMAO reports.

Parents need this information to make informed decisions in selecting the right program for their child.

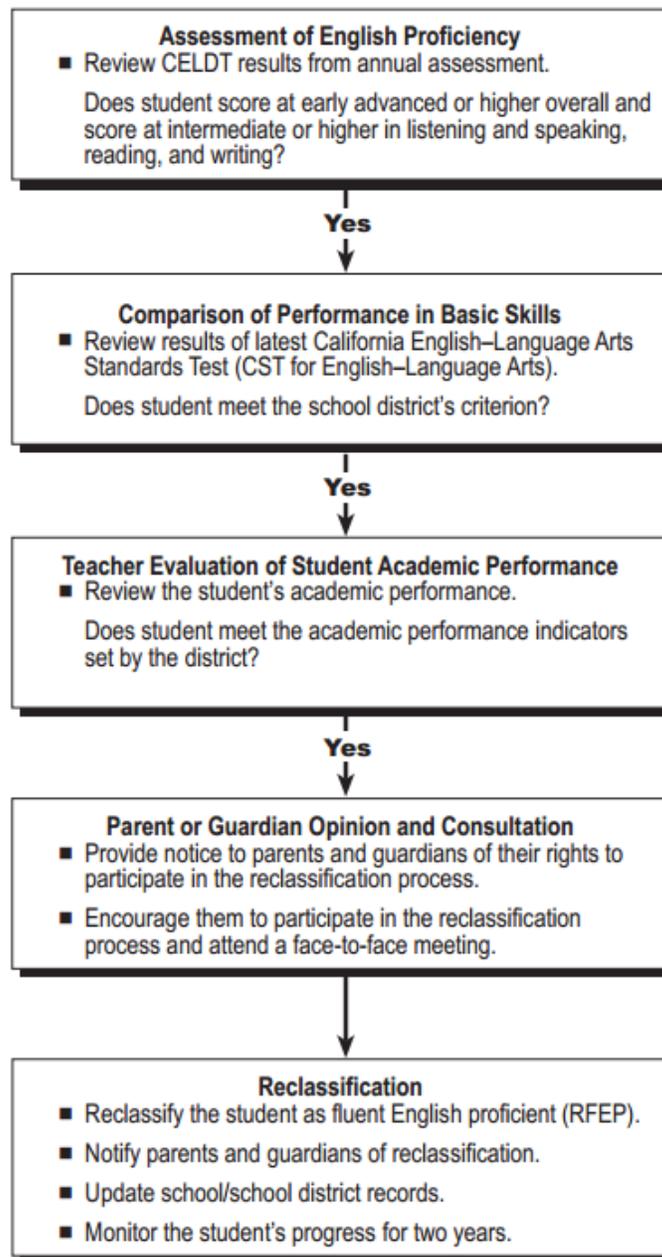
Reclassification

Students exit English Learner programs by being reclassified as fluent, using the steps in Figure 2 below. The procedures used for reclassification must follow overall state guidelines in conjunction with district-developed criteria. Scoring English Proficient on the CELDT is a state-mandated requirement, and these students must take the CELDT test every year, until they have been reclassified or left the school system. The other criteria can vary between districts, but generally include satisfactory results on the regular standardized tests, teacher evaluations, and teacher/parent meetings.

Figure 2

Reclassifying a Student from English Learner to Fluent English Proficient

School districts are to develop student reclassification policy and procedures based on the four criteria set forth in *Education Code Section 313(d)*. The reclassification guidelines, approved by the State Board of Education, may be used by school districts/schools when evaluating a student's readiness for reclassification from English learner (EL) to fluent English proficient (RFEP).



Source: California Department of Education October 2008

The Achievement Gap

Test scores indicate an achievement gap between English Learners and their English-speaking peers. It is a challenge to both learn a second language and master grade-level academic content, with no additional instruction time. It is even harder when practice time for the second language is limited, because it's seldom used on the playground, outside of school, or during school breaks. A recent publication from the Santa Cruz County Office of Education commented on this achievement gap:

Analysis of Santa Cruz County's STAR test scores and API scores reveal similar achievement gaps that are occurring at a national and statewide level. In particular, test scores on English-language arts and math reveal wide gaps in proficiency between 1) Caucasian students and Latino students, 2) English learners and students who are fluent in English, and 3) low-income students and mid-high income students by the second grade.^[55]

Every year California school children take STAR tests designed to assess their knowledge on English Language Arts, Mathematics, and a number of other subjects. To understand the extent of the gap across the three districts, we obtained student test results from the California Department of Education online database, which contains years of test results for all schools in California.

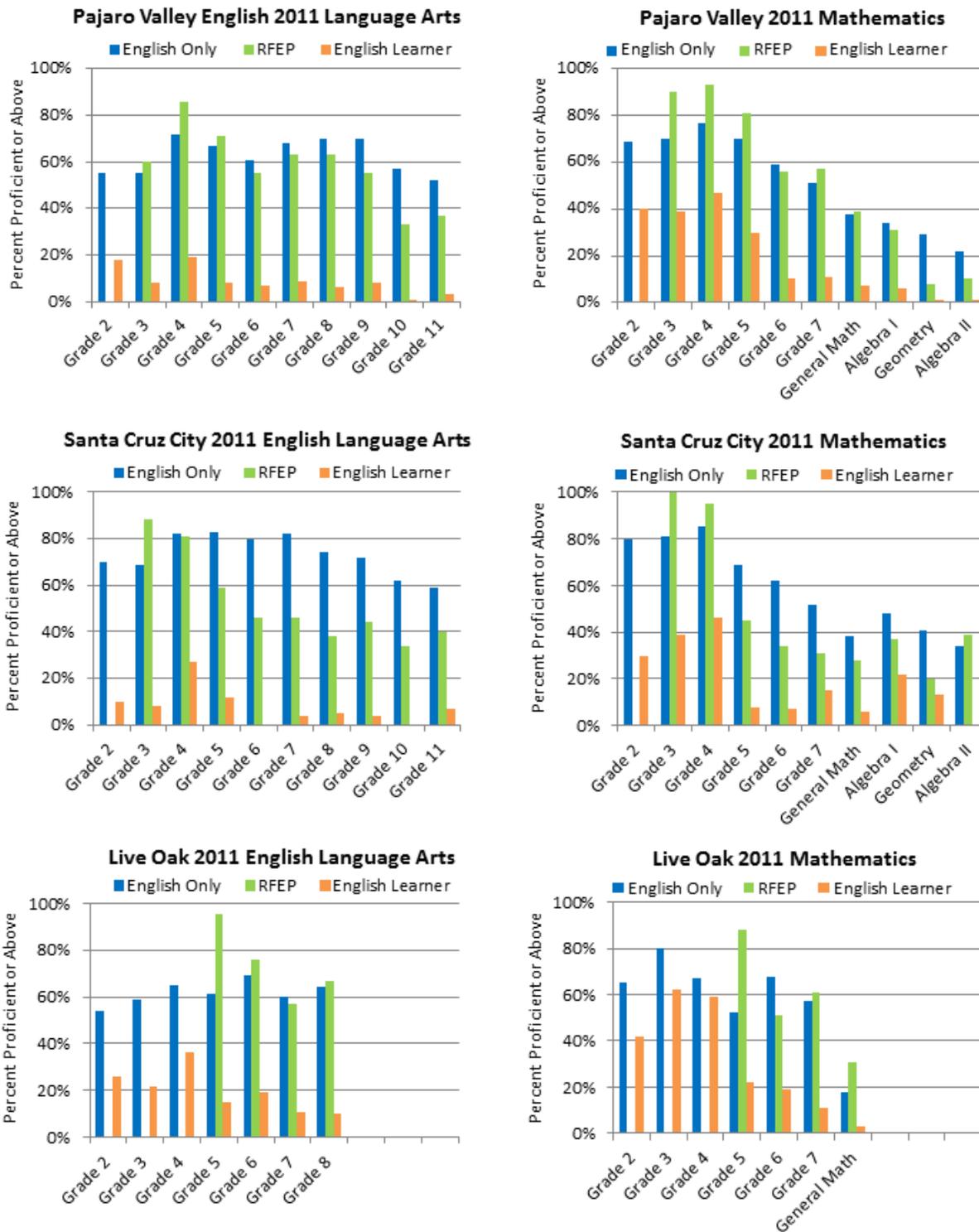
Figure 3 shows district test results for both Mathematics and English Language Arts scores, for three student subgroups, in each of the three districts reviewed. For each subgroup (English Only, Reclassified, and English Learner) the height of the bar represents the percentage of each group that scored Proficient or above on the STAR test. For example, of the PVUSD fourth-graders who took the English Language Arts STAR test, 72% of the English Only group, 86% of the reclassified students, and 19% of the English Learners scored Proficient or above.

Note that these tests are given in English, and, by definition, English Learners are not yet proficient in English.

The scores for General Math, Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II are compiled at the end of the course and are not associated with a specific grade level, since they can be taken in different grades.

The Grand Jury observed the reclassified group's unexpectedly high scores. Their scores are initially higher than English Only scores and then taper off. One reason for this can be found in the state's AYP Information Guide,^[47] which states that reclassified student scores should continue to be included in the English Learner subgroup, until scoring proficient or above three times.

Figure 3 - 2011 STAR test results



Source: DataQuest [\[56\]](#) [\[57\]](#) [\[58\]](#) [\[59\]](#) [\[60\]](#) [\[61\]](#) [\[62\]](#) [\[63\]](#) [\[64\]](#) [\[65\]](#) [\[66\]](#) [\[67\]](#)

One county school has demonstrated significantly higher middle school test scores for English Learners.^[68] Ceiba College Preparatory Academy charter school starts with the sixth grade and has a student population that is 94% Latino and 34% English Learner. Ceiba College Prep uses an English Immersion model, offers significantly more instruction time for all students, and provides additional tutoring and a summer academy for students needing help. The Ceiba website states: “30% of students entering Ceiba as 6th graders score proficient in Math and 25% score proficient in Language Arts. Two years later: 72% of the same students score proficient in Math and 70% score proficient in Language Arts.”^[69] After a follow-up with Ceiba we learned that of the English Learners who entered Ceiba with the cohort quoted above (Ceiba 6th graders in the 2008-09 academic year), 14% scored proficient in Math and 5% scored proficient in English Language Arts in the year prior to Ceiba. After two years at Ceiba, 43% of the same English Learner students scored proficient in Math and 23% scored proficient in English Language Arts.

In reviewing district websites and literature, the Grand Jury observed that, of the districts reviewed, none publish data on program effectiveness as measured by actual academic achievement levels. These districts publish no long-term trend data on program effectiveness for successive groups of children that start kindergarten together and eventually graduate together.

Observations:

- Tests are given in English only, and, by definition, English Learners are not yet proficient in English.
- The achievement scores for English Learners tend to stay low, because as soon as those students become proficient in English, and their scores increase, they are reclassified and removed from the English Learner group.
- Ceiba spends more classroom hours per day, and more school days, than any other middle school in the district.
- No districts publish data on program effectiveness as measured by long term achievement levels and historical trends.

Again, parents need this information to make informed decisions in selecting the right program for their child.

Drop-out and Graduation Rates for English Learners

In 2011, the California Department of Education did its first statewide annual report on dropouts in California for the class of 2010, using “longitudinal” data. Longitudinal studies follow the same group of students over a long period of time. One of the subgroups analyzed was English Learners. Studies have indicated that dropout rates are significantly higher for English Learners. The study began when this group started high school (9th grade) and followed them through their senior year. The data for

English Learners across all of California is alarming, with a 31.1% dropout rate and a 56.3% graduation rate.^[70]

It should be pointed out that this study was done for the high school students, so by definition those English Learners would all be Long Term English Learners. Ideally, future studies done at the state or local level would be comprised of a group of students who started kindergarten together, so data would show their relative performance through high school.

We were told by some of the districts that better quality dropout data was needed in order to draw valid conclusions.^{[71] [72] [73]}

The Importance of Early Childhood Education

Children start learning language at a very young age. Research points to the benefits of early childhood education. The Santa Cruz County Office of Education recently published “ASAP: All Succeed with Access to Preschool.”^[55] This is a plan developed by early childhood education experts from around the county and begins:

Children are born learners. A young child’s brain is most flexible and impressionable during the first five years of life when brain cells are forming the connections that shape thinking, feeling and behavior. The growth in connections and organization of the brain structure in these early years creates the foundation for future development and how an individual will think, learn and function throughout life. In this sense, the early years of a child’s life are truly a window of opportunity to chart a course for a lifetime of learning.

The ASAP plan mentions the RAND Corporation’s “California Preschool Study” (2009),^[74] which traces the root of the achievement gap back to readiness for kindergarten. Based on findings in the “California Preschool Study,” the ASAP plan also states:

However, it’s not just the availability of preschool programs that leads to positive outcomes in school and life, but it’s the quality of the preschool programs that makes the difference. Unfortunately, not everyone has the opportunity to attend the type of quality preschool associated with positive outcomes. According to the California Preschool Study, children from the most disadvantaged socioeconomic groups are the least likely to attend quality preschool programs.

There are a large number of early childhood education programs in the county. The Grand Jury decided to focus on Head Start, because they are a well known, nationwide program with standardized measurement criteria. The Grand Jury looked at the three Head Start programs in the county:

- Head Start and Early Head Start^{[77] [78]}
 - serves 625 children
 - part of the Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center
- Migrant Head Start
 - serves 752 children
 - housed by PVUSD
- Central California Migrant Head Start^[79]
 - serves 112 children
 - coordinated by Santa Cruz County Office of Education

The Head Start staff realize they have a responsibility to prepare their children for kindergarten. These new kindergarten students would benefit greatly if the public schools interacted more with the Head Start programs. Some collaboration has begun between Head Start and the Freedom and Starlight Elementary schools, but much more is needed. With more collaboration and relationship-sharing strategies, these organizations could better link student data, advise parents, and smoothly promote children into the public schools. In other counties, most early childhood education programs, such as Head Start, have formal agreements in place with school districts.^[12]

English Learner Program Funding

Schools receive additional state and federal funding for each student classified as an English Learner. A recent newspaper article stated these extra funds averaged \$448 annually per English Learner statewide.^[3]

The primary additional funding for English Learners comes from these funds:

- Economic Impact Aid^[82]
 - This state fund is for both English Learners and economically disadvantaged students, some of whom may not be English Learners.
- No Child Left Behind - Title III Limited-English Proficient^[83]
 - Federal funding to help students achieve grade level standards and learn English.
- No Child Left Behind Title I - Part A^[84]
 - This federal fund is for low-income students who are not achieving proficiency levels; many of these children are English Learners.

The annual district apportionment for these and other funds are available online at the California Department of Education website. Each district was asked to provide the average amount of additional annual funding it receives per English Learner, which is shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7 - Additional Funding Per English Learner

PVUSD	Santa Cruz City (Elementary)	Santa Cruz City (High)	Live Oak Elementary
\$1,348	\$707	\$821	\$1,225

Sources: PVUSD, Santa Cruz City Schools, Live Oak school districts.

This funding is used for expenses such as the annual CELDT assessments, professional development for staff on teaching English Learners, English Language Development materials, and expenses related to parental involvement in English Language Advisory Committee and District English Language Advisory Committee activities.

Findings

F1. The Title III Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) for English Learner progress are complex, give little indication of how long it takes English Learners to become reclassified as fluent, and do not measure the effectiveness of individual English Learner programs.

F2. Many parents and community members do not understand the various English Learner programs.

F3. The English Learner program information is not readily accessible on district websites.

F4. Two-Way Immersion programs are not widely available in Santa Cruz County.

F5. Two-Way Immersion programs are beneficial to native English speakers who want to become fluent in multiple languages.

F6. Portions of the descriptive material made available by the Pajaro Valley Unified School District describing the Dual-Language Immersion program are inconsistent or incomplete, which could be misleading to parents trying to decide on the best program for their children.

F7. Collaboration and communication between Head Start and the elementary schools would be beneficial to English Learners making the transition to kindergarten.

Recommendations

R1. Even though it is not mandated by the state, in order to monitor historical trends and validate improvements made to programs, districts should consider tracking long term English Learner results by program and make the information available on district websites for review by parents, the Board of Trustees, and the community. The data should track all English Learners and follow them until they leave the district. This longitudinal data would allow the following information to be published by instructional program:

- Time to Reclassification (RFEP)
- Long term achievement levels (from STAR testing)
- Long term achievement level “gap” between English Learners, RFEPs, and English Only
- High school graduation and dropout rates

R2. Districts should make the following information available on their English Learner web pages:

- An easy-to-understand description of the programs offered by the district, with references to more in-depth information
- A matrix showing availability of programs by school site
- Title III Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs), or links to them on the California Department of Education website
- The district English Learner Master Plan

A bilingual packet containing the above information (except the Master Plan) should be provided to all parents and teachers of English Learners.

R3. Districts should consider starting or expanding Two-Way Bilingual Immersion programs.

R4. Information on Two-Way Bilingual Immersion programs should be made available to parents of English speakers.

R5. The next version of Pajaro Valley Unified School District’s pamphlets, slide sets, video, and websites should revise the Dual-Language Immersion information to:

- Use consistent terminology throughout the district. For example, the district refers to a “Dual-Language Immersion” program, and Alianza (which provides the program) calls it “Two-Way Bilingual Immersion.”
- Update the description of how the waiver process works, as applied to Alianza, to clarify that neither the annual waiver, nor the need for at least 20 approved waivers by parents, is applicable because of Alianza’s status as a charter school.

- The “English Learner Programs” pamphlet should more clearly distinguish the differences between Late-Exit “Developmental” Bilingual, and Two-Way Bilingual Immersion.

R6. The districts should develop agreements for collaboration with the appropriate Head Start agencies to better align and take advantage of the school readiness efforts of Head Start.

Commendations

C1. The Grand Jury congratulates all the Santa Cruz County English Learners who have persevered and successfully completed the uphill climb to English fluency. We also acknowledge all the teachers, staff, administrators, and parents who provided support along the way.

C2. The State of California passed Assembly Bill 815 creating a State Seal of Biliteracy Award. As of January 1, 2012, graduating seniors who achieve the biliterate, bilingual standards will be honored with a gold insignia on their diplomas. County students in several school districts received the award this year, and PVUSD was ahead of its time presenting deserving seniors this award starting last year.

Responses Required

Respondent	Findings	Recommendations	Respond Within/ Respond By
Superintendent - Live Oak School District	F1-F5, F7	R1-R3	60 Days September 1, 2012
Superintendent - Pajaro Valley Unified School District	F1-F7	R1-R6	60 Days September 1, 2012
Superintendent - Santa Cruz City Schools	F1-F5, F7	R1-R4, R6	60 Days September 1, 2012

Definitions

- **AMAO:** *Annual Measurable Achievement Objective* - All public schools in California use three measures to track English Learner progress towards proficiency. AMAO 1 is the percentage of English Learners moving up one CELDT performance level, becoming or maintaining proficiency. AMAO 2 is the percentage of English Learners who have attained the English proficient level. AMAO 3 is the percentage of English Learners meeting No Child Left Behind requirements for English language arts and math.^[39]
- **API:** *Academic Performance Index* - The centerpiece of the California Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999. The API is used to measure schools based on a variety of academic measures.^[96]
- **AYP:** *Adequate Yearly Progress* - From the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 for measuring student proficiency in English and math using standardized tests.^[85]
- **CDE:** *California Department of Education* - The top of the administrative hierarchy for education in California. The current State Superintendent of Public Instruction is Tom Torlakson, an elected official.^[95]
- **CELDT:** *California English Language Development Test* - This test is used to assess initial and ongoing English proficiency. The CELDT assesses four domains: listening, speaking, reading and writing at five performance levels: Beginning, Early Intermediate, Intermediate, Early Advanced, and Advanced.^[87]
- **DELAC:** *District English Learner Advisory Committee* - A committee of parents, school staff and community members who advocate for English Learners at the district level.^[88]
- **Early Exit “Transitional” Bilingual:** A program model where the home language is used for the purpose of early reading and clarification. The goal is to transition children into mainstream English-only speaking classrooms within two to three years.^{[28] [31]}
- **EL:** *English Learner* - Formerly known as Limited English-Proficient. A student can be classified as an English Learner after being assessed by the CELDT.
- **ELAC:** *English Learner Advisory Committee* - This is a committee of parents, school staff and community members who advocate for English Learners at the school level. They are responsible for advising the school on programs and services for English Learners and the school site council on the development of the Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA).^[90]
- **ELD:** *English Language Development* - ELD was formerly known as ESL (English as a Second Language). ELD refers to the curriculum and course materials used to instruct students in learning English.^[91]
- **ELM:** *English Language Mainstream* - This is the regular classroom with instruction in English. This option is intended for students who are reasonably fluent in English. Students in ELM include English Only students and English

Learners who have become fluent. They can also include English Learners who are not reasonably fluent in English, whose parents have requested they be mainstreamed. [\[26\]](#) [\[27\]](#)

- **English-Language Arts:** Includes reading, writing, listening and speaking. English-language arts and math are tracked and improvements are required every year on standardized tests for No Child Left Behind. [\[89\]](#)
- **ESL: *English as a Second Language*** - A program model to teach English to non-English speakers with a focus entirely on language development. Taught primarily in English. "Pull-out" ESL refers to students leaving the classroom to work on English skills. [\[92\]](#)
- **IFEP: *Initial Fluent English Proficient*** - Newly enrolled students who "pass" the CELDT are designated as IFEP. IFEP students will be placed in regular instruction rather than an English Learner program. [\[21\]](#)
- **Late Exit "Developmental" Bilingual:** Instruction on academic subjects is done in the home language. The home language is maintained and developed as these students learn English and are mainstreamed into English-only classrooms, usually by the end of the fifth grade. The goal is for students to be proficient in two languages. [\[29\]](#) [\[31\]](#)
- **LEA: *Local Education Agency*** - LEAs include school districts, county offices of education, and independent public charter schools.
- **LEP: *Limited English-Proficient*** - This was the federal designation used in the past for English Learners.
- **Long Term English Learner:** Not a precise term but often used for English Learners who have not become proficient in English by middle school.
- **Longitudinal Study:** In education, these studies track student academic performance over long periods of time.
- **LOSD: *Live Oak School District*** - A district in the Live Oak area of Santa Cruz County, not to be confused with the Live Oak Unified School District in Sutter County.
- **NCLB: *No Child Left Behind*** - An Act of Congress passed in 2001. The federal NCLB program established statewide standardized testing and accountability for results. [\[81\]](#)
- **Proposition 227:** A proposition which requires school instruction to be in English. Parents may get waivers if they feel their child would learn English better with alternate techniques. [\[4\]](#)
- **PVUSD: *Pajaro Valley Unified School District*** - The largest school district in Santa Cruz County with schools in the Watsonville, Aptos and Rio Del Mar area.
- **RFEP: *Reclassified Fluent English Proficient*** - The designation for students who were initially classified as English Learners but have passed both CELDT and

local district criteria as fluent in English. They no longer participate in the English Learner program and join their peers in the regular classes.^[21]

- **SCCOE:** *Santa Cruz County Office of Education* - The Santa Cruz COE supports infrastructure for local schools and districts. They also fulfill state mandates to audit school district budgets, register teacher credentials, complete employee background checks, certify school attendance records, and develop countywide programs to service special student populations. The current superintendent is Michael Watkins who is an elected official.
- **SCCS:** *Santa Cruz City Schools* - Instead of a single unified district, the SCCS are actually comprised of two districts, one for the elementary schools and one for the secondary (middle and high) schools.
- **SEI:** *Structured (or Sheltered) English Immersion* - This is the primary instructional model used in California after the passage of Proposition 227. It uses a special curriculum and level of English designed to accommodate students who are learning the language. Instruction is done mostly in English to facilitate rapidly learning the language.^[27]
- **SPSA:** *Single Plan for Student Achievement* - The SPSA is developed by each school site council with the advice of the English Language Advisory Committee. The purpose is to have a single plan to most efficiently organize the funding to meet student needs.^[93]
- **STAR:** *Standardized Testing and Reporting* - California uses the annual STAR tests to assess English and math as part of the No Child Left Behind program. They also measure proficiency in other areas like science, history and social studies.^[86]
- **Two-Way Immersion (also called Dual-Language Immersion):** A program of instruction where a mix of English speakers and English Learners are taught literacy and content in two languages. It combines features of developmental bilingual programs for English Learners and foreign language immersion for English speakers. The goal is for both groups of students to become be proficient in two languages.^{[30] [31]}

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Resources

- Santa Cruz County Office of Education
 - Website: <http://www.santacruz.k12.ca.us/>
- Pajaro Valley Unified School District
 - Website: <http://www.pvUSD.net/>
 - Archived website: <http://www.pvUSD.k12.ca.us/>
 - English Learners: <http://www.pvUSD.net/els>
 - School Facts: <http://pajarovalley.schoolwisepress.com/home/>
 - School improvement plans: http://www.pvUSD.net/cms/page_view?d=x&piid=&vpid=1311502328844
- Santa Cruz City Schools
 - Website: <http://www.sccs.santacruz.k12.ca.us/>
 - English Learners: <http://www.sccs.santacruz.k12.ca.us/education-services/academic-equity-and-categorical-programs.html>
 - School facts: <http://santacruzcity.schoolwisepress.com/home/>

- Single Plans for School Achievement:
<http://www.sccs.santacruz.k12.ca.us/education-services/curriculum/single-plans-for-student-achievement.html>
- Live Oak School District
 - Website: <http://www.lodo.santacruz.k12.ca.us/>
 - English Learners: http://www.lodo.santacruz.k12.ca.us/cur_txt_bks.html
 - School Facts: <http://liveoak.schoolwisepress.com/home/>
 - School Plans:
http://www.lodo.santacruz.k12.ca.us/board/docs/2010/Board_Packet_12-14-10.pdf
- Ed-Data - provides fiscal, demographic and performance data on California K-12 schools
<http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Pages/Home.aspx>
- DataQuest - provides a wealth of information on California K-12 schools including English Learners, graduation and dropout rates
<http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>
- Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Results
<http://star.cde.ca.gov/>
- Title III Accountability Reports (AMAOs)
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/t3/t3reports.asp>