

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS SPECIAL STUDY

Subject

Statute requires the Auditor General to conduct biennial audits of the effectiveness of the English Language Learner (ELL) programs. This baseline study will serve as a point of reference for these audits, beginning in FY 2010, by establishing the current state of ELL programs. This study focuses on a sample of 18 school districts and charter schools chosen to provide a cross-section of programs.

Our Conclusion

All 18 programs reviewed will need to make significant changes to comply with the new State Structured English Immersion models, especially the required 4 daily hours of English language development. Further, much of the data needed to fund, manage and evaluate the programs is currently unreliable or is not collected.



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ELL students and programs in Arizona and in the U.S.

Arizona's ELL population—In Arizona, 14 percent of the students are ELL, placing Arizona in the top five states for the highest concentration of ELL students. In 2007 there were 138,449 ELL students in Arizona's public schools.

As is true nationally, the vast majority of Arizona's ELL students speak Spanish:

- 81.2 percent speak Spanish
- 2.6 percent speak Navajo

Most ELL students are in elementary school—56 percent are in K-3rd grade.

Assessing English proficiency

Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, public school districts are required to assess the reading, writing, and oral language skills of students with limited English proficiency. Arizona identifies ELL students by first using a home language survey. Once identified, schools use the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA) to place the students in one of five proficiency levels. (See text box)

All Arizona ELL students are tested annually using the AZELLA and upon proficiency, exit the program. After exiting, students are monitored for 2 years while in school to ensure continued proficiency.



Arizona English Language Learner Assessment

Levels of English language proficiency:

Pre-Emergent—Student does not understand enough language to perform in English.

Emergent—Student understands and can speak a few isolated English words.

Basic—Student may understand slower speech, and speak, read, and write simple words and phrases, but often makes mistakes.

Intermediate—Student can understand familiar topics and is somewhat fluent in English, but has difficulty with academic conversations.

Proficient—Student can read and understand texts and conversations at a normal speed, and can speak and write fluently with minor errors.

Source: Arizona Department of Education.

Characteristics of sample ELL programs and participants

The 18 ELL programs we reviewed will need to make significant changes to comply with the State's recently adopted SEI model.

Three types of ELL programs—During FYs 2006 and 2007, Arizona school districts operated 3 main types of ELL programs:

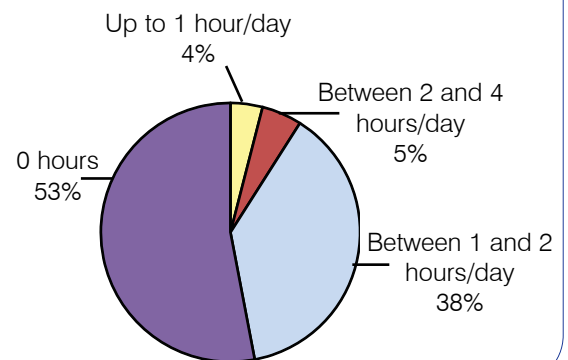
- **Structured English Immersion (SEI)**— ELL-only classes where students receive most or all of their instruction in English.
- **Bilingual**—where the native language is used to instruct. Since 2001, this type of instruction requires a waiver.
- **Mainstream**—where ELL students are placed in a regular classroom with English-fluent students.

Task force created new model— In 2006, the Legislature passed a law to structure English Language Learner (ELL) programs. An ELL task force was authorized to develop models for state-wide use for ELL instruction. The Task Force's models for Structured English Immersion (SEI) classes require that new ELL students receive 4 hours of English language development (ELD) classes each day. The law also provides for the collection of data to assess effectiveness and monitor compliance.

Current programs vary significantly from SEI models—In fiscal year 2008, only 3 of the 18 districts we sampled were operating classes that met the 4-hour ELD requirement and these classes were only offered to a portion of their ELL students. Only 5 percent of the ELL students attending the districts we reviewed received 2 or more hours per day of ELD.

Some of these programs' staff identified their ELL programs as SEI but we found they did not provide separate ELD

ELL students grouped by ELD hours



instruction. Other programs instructed ELL students in mainstream classes in an interactive manner, but in some cases could not identify the ELL students in the class.

Scheduling and resource challenges—Program officials identified several challenges to meeting the 4-hour ELD requirement. One program official indicated that it would be difficult finding separate classes for ELL and non-ELL kindergartners, claiming that the instructional approach for both ELL and non-ELL kindergartners is similar and should not require separate classes.

Three rural districts indicated that they have a difficult time finding regular teachers so finding 3-4 SEI teachers would be an even greater challenge.

For some schools, grouping ELL students by proficiency level will be difficult when the schools have students with varying degrees of proficiency over grade levels.

Few students attained proficiency within 1 year—The new model is designed to bring students to full proficiency within 1 year. However, the existing programs have fallen far short of this goal. We reviewed 8,700 ELL

students at the 18 districts and found that between fiscal years 2006 and 2007:

- 8 percent regressed
- 55 percent remained at the same proficiency level
- 30 percent progressed at least 1 level, but not to full proficiency
- 7 percent were reclassified as fully

proficient

However, most of the students (74 percent) that were reclassified as fully proficient had been in an ELL program for at least 2 years.

ELL data and data systems need attention

Three types of information are needed to properly fund, manage, and audit the effectiveness of ELL programs:

- **Number of students**—to determine program funding, which is awarded on a per-student basis.
- **Achievement outcomes**—to determine program success.
- **Time in the program**—to ensure compliance with statutory requirements limiting funding to 2 years.

School data contains errors—We identified 15 ELL-related data fields that are needed. Only 11 of these data fields are available on ADE's Student Accountability Information System (SAIS). Further, because of errors in the information submitted to SAIS by the school districts and charter schools, only 1 of these fields can be considered reliable. An example of key information that is unreliable is data on home language. SAIS data indicates that 11 percent of ELL students' primary home language is English, which if true would mean they were probably not ELL.

Availability and Reliability of ELL Data

Type of data	Is it available from ADE?	Is it reliable?
Data on individual students		
Grade level	✓	✓
Home language	✓	
Program entry date	✓	
Program exit date	✓	
AZELLA total composite score	✓	
Overall proficiency level	✓	
Overall assessment result	✓	
Reclassification as fluent English proficient (FEP)	✓	
Data on program in general		
Number of ELL students	✓	
Number of SEI-endorsed teachers		n/a
Number of teachers with ESL or bilingual certifications		n/a
SEI teachers' average years of experience		n/a
Hours of ELD instruction		n/a
Number of ELL students reclassified as FEP	✓	
Average time in program until FEP	✓	

Program officials at many of the schools we sampled indicated that they did not confirm the accuracy of the data they enter onto SAIS, including critical data about ELL students' English proficiency assessments.

ADE can do more to ensure data reliability and availability

—ADE's controls and checks for data reliability are insufficient. ADE should have internal processes called integrity checks to identify when schools are submitting ELL data that is obviously inaccurate or incomplete. ADE should also have process controls to ensure that ADE processes the data accurately.

Integrity checks—Integrity checking verifies that data complies with business rules such as statutory requirements of ADE policies. Because ADE lacks integrity checks, we found errors in the data that should have been caught when the data was first submitted to ADE. For example, we found:

- 178 of the 10,054 ELL students sampled either had no assessment scores or had an assessment indicating they were already fully proficient in English.
- 27 of the 662 ELL students sampled who were classified as proficient had either no assessment or still had assessment scores below proficient.
- Half of the sample districts and charters had reclassification percentages that fluctuated widely between FYs 2006 and 2007, suggesting possible data errors.

Two integrity checks could help minimize these types of errors. First, when "English" is recorded as the home language of an ELL student, it should trigger an integrity warning. Second, when assessment scores are missing or do not correspond to the students' classification, it should also trigger an integrity warning.

Lack of process controls contributes to "lost" data—Process controls are used to ensure that no data is added, lost, or altered during processing. In July 2007, over 20,000 ELL students were excluded from the year-end funding counts—an \$8 million error—due to an internal processing oversight. ADE subsequently corrected the error.

Sample program officials also reported cases of ELL students who pass integrity checks in the beginning of the year who are later "dropped." As a result, these students were excluded from the counts of ELL students who were funded.

ADE could expand the types of data collected—The following data fields are collected by school districts and charter schools but are not currently collected by ADE:

- **Program staffing data**—The number and qualifications of ELL teachers.
- **Program ELD schedule data**—Information about the number of hours of ELD instruction provided to ELL students.

TO OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION

A copy of the full report can be obtained by calling
(602) 553-0333



or by visiting our Web site at:
www.azauditor.gov

Contact person for this report:
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Recommendations

ADE should:

- Work with schools to develop improved data submission and review processes.
- Add ELL integrity checks that require appropriate achievement data before funding the student's participation.
- Implement process controls that enable users, ADE, and the Auditor General to compare data at critical points in the data-flow process.
- Consider collecting additional program data such as teacher qualifications and staffing levels.