



A REPORT  
TO THE  
ARIZONA LEGISLATURE

Division of School Audits

Special Study

# Baseline Study of Arizona's English Language Learner Programs and Data Fiscal Year 2007

APRIL • 2008



**Debra K. Davenport**  
Auditor General

The **Auditor General** is appointed by the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, a bipartisan committee composed of five senators and five representatives. Her mission is to provide independent and impartial information and specific recommendations to improve the operations of state and local government entities. To this end, she provides financial audits and accounting services to the State and political subdivisions, investigates possible misuse of public monies, and conducts performance audits of school districts, state agencies, and the programs they administer.

## The Joint Legislative Audit Committee

---

Representative **John Nelson**, Chair

Senator **Robert Blendu**, Vice Chair

Representative **Tom Boone**

Senator **Carolyn Allen**

Representative **Jack Brown**

Senator **Pamela Gorman**

Representative **Pete Rios**

Senator **Richard Miranda**

Representative **Steve Yarbrough**

Senator **Rebecca Rios**

Representative **Jim Weiers** (*ex-officio*)

Senator **Tim Bee** (*ex-officio*)

## Audit Staff

---

**Ross Ehrick**, Director

**Tara Lennon**, Manager and Contact Person

**Briton Baxter**

**Patricia Beckman**

**Christopher DeSanto**

**Bryant Duffek**

**Thomas Huber**

**Melissa Redding**

**John Ward**

**Jennifer Wild**

Copies of the Auditor General's reports are free.

You may request them by contacting us at:

### **Office of the Auditor General**

**2910 N. 44th Street, Suite 410 • Phoenix, AZ 85018 • (602) 553-0333**

Additionally, many of our reports can be found in electronic format at:

**[www.azauditor.gov](http://www.azauditor.gov)**



DEBRA K. DAVENPORT, CPA  
AUDITOR GENERAL

STATE OF ARIZONA  
OFFICE OF THE  
AUDITOR GENERAL

WILLIAM THOMSON  
DEPUTY AUDITOR GENERAL

April 22, 2008

Members of the Arizona Legislature

The Honorable Janet Napolitano, Governor

The Honorable Tom Horne, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Transmitted herewith is a report of the Auditor General, *Baseline Study of Arizona's English Language Learner Programs and Data, Fiscal Year 2007*. This special study addresses certain audit requirements mandated by A.R.S. §15-756.12, and was conducted pursuant to Arizona Revised Statutes §41-1279.03. I am also transmitting with this report a copy of the Report Highlights to provide a quick summary for your convenience.

This report describes a sample of ELL programs in the State, providing a point of comparison for future biennial audits, which will report on the effectiveness of the State's programs in achieving English proficiency. In addition, this report discusses the reliability of data necessary to manage and audit the programs and recommends steps to improve future data before the biennial audits begin.

As outlined in its response, the Arizona Department of Education agrees with all of the findings and recommendations.

My staff and I will be pleased to discuss or clarify items in the report.

This report will be released to the public on April 23, 2008.

Sincerely,

Debbie Davenport  
Auditor General

# SUMMARY

---

The Office of the Auditor General has conducted a baseline study of the current state of English Language Learner (ELL) programs and available data. The report describes the ELL programs and participants in a sample of 18 school districts and charter schools, chosen to provide a cross-section of districts and charter schools across the State. This report also provides a point of comparison for future biennial audits, which are mandated by A.R.S. §15-756.12 to report on the effectiveness of the State's ELL programs in achieving English proficiency. In addition, this report discusses the reliability of data necessary to manage and audit the programs and recommends steps to improve future data before the biennial audits begin. To place Arizona's ELL programs in a national context, recent ELL data and trends from across the nation are presented.

## ELL students and programs in Arizona and in the U.S. (see pages 1 through 9)

Nation-wide, ELL students have composed 10 percent of the total student enrollment for kindergarten through 12th grade. In Arizona—one of five states with the highest concentration of ELL students—the 138,449 ELL students composed approximately 14 percent of the State's total enrollment in fiscal year 2007. Although ELL students speak more than 400 different languages, Spanish is spoken by 80 percent of all ELL students nationally and 81.2 percent in Arizona. In Arizona, as in the nation as a whole, most of the ELL students are in elementary grades. The percentage of Arizona's ELL students diminishes consistently from kindergarten through 12th grade. ELL students constitute over 15 percent of Arizona kindergartners and less than 2 percent of its 12th graders.

Arizona's approach to ELL standards and assessment differs from many other states. Since 2004, Arizona's districts and charter schools have relied on state-defined proficiency standards. In contrast, many districts in other states also use standards at the district, school, and even classroom level. For program entry, exit, and monitoring, Arizona's districts are required to use the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA), a composite of speaking, listening, reading, and writing scores. The assessments used in other states are not as comprehensive.

Ninety percent of districts surveyed in other states based entry decisions solely on oral proficiency, and nearly 82 percent used oral proficiency as the sole basis for exiting the program. Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the federal government requires that all public school districts annually assess all students with limited English proficiency, but neither defines proficiency nor specifies which tests that states must use to measure it.

Arizona's most recent ELL legislation, HB2064, was an outgrowth of more than a decade of litigation and legislation, and further specifies the State's ELL program structure. The bill requires the ELL Task Force to develop state-wide program models, ADE to monitor and report on the program's success, and the Auditor General to audit the models' effectiveness on performance-based outcomes and English proficiency. This study focused on current ELL programs operating at a sample of Arizona school districts and charter schools and the data these schools reported to ADE. The sample of 13 districts and 5 charter schools was designed to reflect different types of programs based on district or charter school size, location, number, and proportion of ELL population and percentage of ELL students reclassified as English proficient.

## Characteristics of sample ELL programs and participants (see pages 11 through 19)

ELL programs in the 18 sample districts and charter schools differ greatly from each other and from the structure they will have to employ in the future under the ELL Task Force's new Structured English Immersion (SEI) models. Adopted in September 2007, the new models specify state-wide ELL policy regarding instructional approach and classroom practices. Implementation of these SEI models is expected beginning in fiscal year 2009. In fiscal years 2007 and 2008, the sample districts and charter schools operated ELL programs that varied by grade and proficiency levels and across individual schools. Although programs at the sample districts and charter schools were aligned with the new models' requirements regarding assessment and English-only classroom materials, their instructional approaches were significantly different from the models' future SEI requirement regarding English language development (ELD).

The Task Force's models require all new ELL students to receive daily 4-hour ELD classes. In fiscal year 2008, only 3 of the 18 sample districts and charter schools were operating classes that met this upcoming requirement, but only for a portion of their ELL students. In 2007, the most recent year for which comprehensive data was available, more than half of all ELL students in the sample districts and charter schools attended programs that mainstreamed all ELL students, providing no hours of ELD instruction in an SEI setting. Forty-two percent were in programs that provided

up to 2 hours of daily ELD instruction. The remaining 6 percent provided more than 2 and up to 4 hours of daily ELD. Across sample districts and charters, program officials identified the schedule and resource challenges to meeting the 4-hour daily ELD requirement. For example, program officials at three rural districts stated that they currently have difficulty filling regular teaching slots, and they do not know where they would find four to six more teachers with the qualifications to teach SEI classes.

The new models are designed to bring ELL students to full proficiency in 1 year. For the sampled districts and charter schools, about 7 percent of the approximately 8,700 ELL students became fully proficient in fiscal year 2007, and most of them had been in the program for at least 2 years. Between fiscal years 2006 and 2007, nearly two-thirds of the students remained at the same proficiency level or regressed, while about one-third moved to a higher proficiency level. ELL students who were at the lowest proficiency levels tended to make the most progress.

## ELL data and data systems need attention (see pages 21 through 28)

A.R.S. §15-756.10 requires ADE to collect and maintain ELL data related to program funding and monitoring. A.R.S. §15-756.12 requires the Auditor General to review compliance with program requirements in district performance audits and biennially report on the overall effectiveness of the State's ELL program. Based on reviews of the data submitted by sample districts and charter schools to ADE and of source records, auditors found several errors affecting both the accuracy of funding ADE provides to districts and charter schools and the measurement of ELL students' progress.

To adequately fund, manage, and audit the effectiveness of Arizona's ELL programs, three main types of information are needed: the number of ELL students, achievement outcomes, and time in the program. First, since state funding is awarded on a per-student basis, ADE needs an accurate determination of the number of ELL students in each district or charter school. However, auditors' review of sample files found that basic student identification information was not necessarily present, or if present, was not necessarily correct. Further, 2 percent of the sample ELL students who were funded had no assessment scores or had an assessment score indicating that, prior to entering the program, the ELL student was already proficient. Second, although accurate proficiency information is needed to monitor and evaluate districts' and charter schools' success, for 6.5 percent of the students, the classification of overall proficiency levels did not match their corresponding AZELLA scores. Additionally, 4 percent who were reclassified as proficient actually had scores that were below proficient or lacked valid assessments. Third, since funding is limited to 2 years, ADE needs to know how long each ELL student has

been participating in the program. However, 6 of the 18 sample districts had ELL students with questionable entry and exit dates. To prevent such errors, ADE needs to work with district and charter schools to develop better ELL data submission and review processes.

ADE does not have adequate procedures in place to identify these errors and either correct them or minimize their impact. When data submitted by districts and charter schools is inaccurate or incomplete, ADE's own internal processes should be able to identify the problems. Auditors found that ADE's integrity checks and controls for doing so are insufficient. Consequently, the errors and limitations in the data are carried into the system. For example, based on schools' erroneous data submissions, ADE included English-proficient students in program-funding counts. Further, an agency's data system should include process controls to ensure that no data is added, lost, or altered during processing. In August 2006, the Auditor General's performance audit of ADE's information management recommended that ADE add such controls. The presence of such controls could help users and ADE prevent potential problems with student achievement and funding data, such as the detection and correction of a massive state-wide recalculation and override of ELL counts that occurred in July 2007. In this case, because of a processing error, over 20,000 ELL students were excluded from end-of-year funding counts. ADE eventually corrected the \$8 million error, but analysts struggled to identify its cause. Further, ADE did not investigate prior years' funded counts for similar processing exclusions.

Also, in order to better monitor implementation of the new SEI models and assess program success, ADE could collect additional data that is currently available from districts. Information about the number and qualifications of ELL teachers is not currently collected and maintained by ADE, although ADE requires districts to maintain ELL teacher certification and endorsement documentation for review during monitoring visits. Information about the number of hours of ELD instruction could also assist with monitoring efforts. Sample districts and charter schools provided auditors with information on students' hours of ELD instruction based on their proficiency and grade levels.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



Introduction & Background	1
Chapter 1: Characteristics of Sample ELL Programs and Participants	11
Current programs vary significantly	11
Few ELL students attained proficiency within 1 year	16
Chapter 2: ELL Data and Data Systems Need Attention	21
ELL data essential for funding, monitoring, and auditing	21
School data submitted to ADE contained errors	22
ADE's controls and checks for data reliability are insufficient	25
ADE could expand types of data collected	27
Recommendations	28
Agency Response	

♦ continued



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Tables:

1	Comparison of Arizona's ELL Program Requirements to Other States' ELL Programs' Requirements	3
2	Sample District and Charter School Characteristics Fiscal Year 2006	8
3	Annual Progress of ELL Students by Proficiency Levels Between Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007	17
4	Elementary and High School ELL Students by Proficiency Level Fiscal Year 2007	18
5	Fiscal Year 2006 Proficiency Level of ELL Students Reclassified as Proficient in Fiscal Year 2007	19
6	Availability and Reliability of ELL Data at Sample Districts and Charter Schools Fiscal Year 2007	23

## Figures:

1	Comparison of Percentages of Arizona to U.S. ELL students by Grade-Level Group	2 4
2	Overview of ELL Process from Entry to Monitoring Period	6
3	Arizona's Statutory Provisions Related to ELL Program Structure, Data and Reporting	6
4	Percentages of ELL Students Grouped by English Language Development Hours Fiscal Year 2007	14

concluded ♦

# INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

---

A.R.S. §15-756.12 requires the Auditor General to conduct a biennial audit of the effectiveness of school districts' and charter schools' English Language Learner (ELL) programs. The statute calls for the audit to be based on outcome measures, such as the percentage of ELL students who become proficient in English each year. The biennial audits will begin in fiscal year 2010. As a point of comparison for these future audits, this baseline study establishes the current state of ELL programs and available data across Arizona. It focuses on ELL programs in a sample of 18 school districts and charter schools chosen to provide a cross-section of districts and charter schools across the State. To place Arizona's ELL programs in a national context, this study also presents recent ELL data and trends from across the nation.

The future structure of ELL programs in Arizona is based primarily on Laws 2006, Ch. 4 (House Bill 2064), passed by the Legislature in 2006. The bill specified that an ELL Task Force develop a state-wide model for ELL instruction, and that ADE report ELL information collected from districts as well as support and monitor their compliance with the models. The models were adopted in September 2007. This baseline study focuses on programs in place in 2006 and 2007, before the models were adopted.

In order for ADE to manage the program and for the Auditor General to determine the effectiveness of the models, the agencies need reliable information on performance measures, such as ELL students' proficiency levels and time in the program. Chapter 1 describes the sample districts' and charters' ELL programs and what current performance measures say about ELL students' proficiency and progress. Future biennial audits will use this information for comparative purposes, as appropriate. To help ensure that the information being collected and reported to ADE is as reliable as possible, Chapter 2 of this report discusses the data necessary to manage and audit the program; the data collection processes at ADE, districts, and charter schools; the reliability of current data; and steps that need to be taken to improve future data before the biennial audits begin.

## English Language Learner

An individual who:

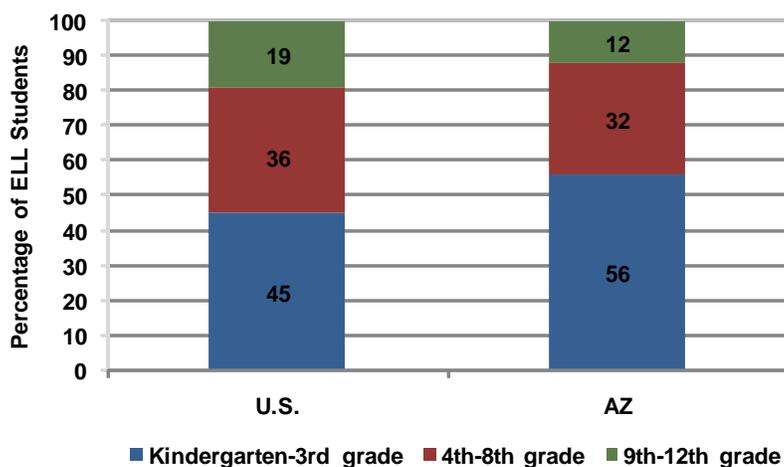
- is 3 to 21 years old
- is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary or secondary public school
- is not born in the U.S. and has a native language other than English or whose English proficiency is significantly impacted by a language other than English
- has speaking, reading, writing, or comprehension of English problems sufficient to limit success in English language classrooms, on state assessments, and participating in society

Source: No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Title IX, Part A, section 9101.

# English Language Learners in Arizona and in the United States

Between 1991 and 2001, the number of ELL students in the United States more than doubled. Nation-wide, there were more than 5 million ELL students in 2006, composing 10 percent of the total student enrollment for kindergarten through 12th grade. Arizona's percentage is higher: in 2007, the 138,449 ELL students in Arizona's public schools composed approximately 14 percent of the State's total enrollment. According to a study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education in 2000, Arizona was one of five states with the highest concentration of ELL students, along with California, New Mexico, Texas, and Alaska.

Figure 1: Comparison of Percentages of Arizona to U.S. ELL Students By Grade-Level Group



Source: Auditor General staff analysis of fiscal year 2007 ELL grade-level and program participation data provided by the Arizona Department of Education for Arizona data and fiscal year 2001 information from the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Education Programs' *Survey of States' Limited English Proficient Students and Available Educational Programs and Services 2000-2001 Report*, October 2002 for U.S. data.

Although ELL students collectively speak more than 400 different languages, Spanish predominates. It is the language spoken by 80 percent of all ELL students nationally and 81.2 percent in Arizona. In Arizona, the second most prevalent language is Navajo (2.6 percent), while nation-wide, the second most prevalent language is Vietnamese (2.4 percent).

In Arizona, and nation-wide, the majority of ELL students are in elementary grades. Fifty-six percent of Arizona's ELL students are in kindergarten through third grade, higher than the 45 percent of students nation-wide in these lower grades (see Figure 1). The percentage of Arizona's ELL students diminishes consistently from kindergarten through 12th grade. ELL students constitute over 15 percent of Arizona kindergartners and less than 2 percent of its 12th graders.

## Arizona's approach to standards and assessment differs from many other states

Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the federal government requires that all public school districts provide an annual assessment test that measures the reading, writing, and oral language skills of all students with limited English proficiency. The act, however, neither defines proficiency nor specifies which tests that states must use to measure it; these decisions are left to the states. Since 2004, Arizona districts

and charter schools have relied on state-defined proficiency standards. In contrast, many districts in other states also use standards at the district, school, and even classroom level (see Table 1 below, which compares Arizona to other states across a number of ELL program components).

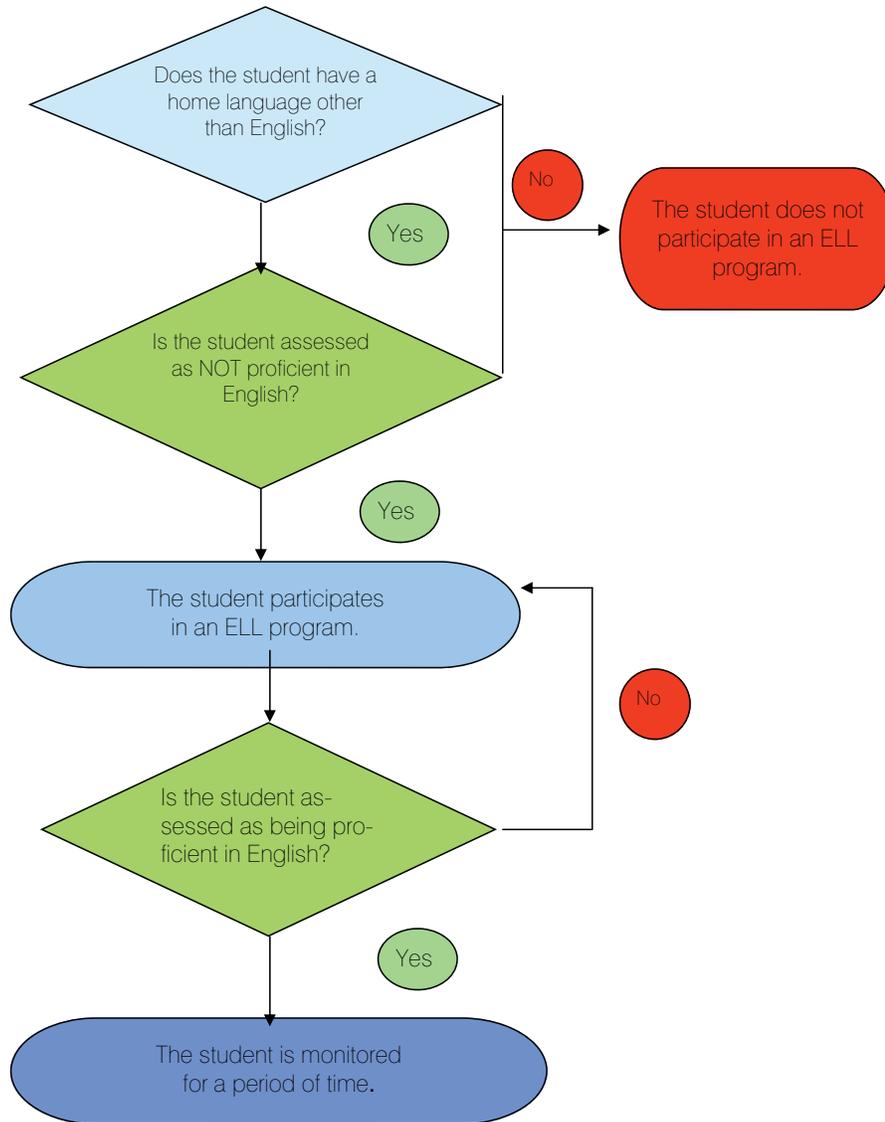
**Table 1:** Comparison of Arizona's ELL Program Requirements To Other States' ELL Programs' Requirements

<b>ELL Program Components</b>	<b>Arizona's Requirements</b>	<b>Other States' Requirements</b>
Level of government that defines proficiency standards (for districts in other states, more than one category may apply)	State	State (61.6%) District (54.3%) School (23.8%) Classroom (14.4%) Other (0.7%)
Type of data used to identify ELL students	Home language survey	Home language survey (90.7%)
Type of data used to make placement decisions	Oral, reading, and writing proficiency tests in English—Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA)	Oral proficiency tests in English (90.0%)
Frequency of ELL instruction review	At least once per year	Once each year (57.5%) Twice or more per year (38.0%) Other (4.5%)
Type of data used to make reclassification decisions	AZELLA	Oral proficiency tests in English (81.8%)
Monitoring of reclassified students	Yes	Yes (66.3%) No (33.7%)
Frequency of ELL reclassification review	At least once per year	Once each year (58.2%) Twice per year (22.9%) Other (18.9%)
Monitoring period of reclassified students	2 years	2 years (44.3%) 1 year (31.2%) Other (24.5%)
Type of data used to monitor reclassified students	AZELLA	Student grades (93.3%)

Source: Arizona Revised Statutes Title 15, Chapter 7, Article 3.1, for Arizona's requirements and Hopstock, Paul J., Howard L. Fleischman, Michelle L. Pendzick, et al. *Descriptive Study of Services to LEP Students and LEP Students with Disabilities: Volume I Research Report*. September 2003, Appendix B for other states' ELL programs' requirements.

Figure 2 below shows a typical process for ELL program entry and exit in Arizona and in many districts across the U.S. After students are identified as having a primary home language other than English, they are assessed for English proficiency and, if they test below proficiency, they are placed in an ELL program. When the annual proficiency assessment shows that they meet proficiency standards, they exit the program, are reclassified as fluent English proficient, and are monitored for a period of time.

Figure 2: Overview of ELL Process from Entry to Monitoring Period



Source: Arizona Revised Statutes Title 15, Chapter 7, Article 3.1 and Auditor General Staff analysis of Hopstock, et. al. *Descriptive Study of Services to LEP students and LEP Students with Disabilities: Volume 1*. September 2003.

Arizona, like most states, uses a home language survey to identify students who may be ELL students. Once students are identified, Arizona public school districts and charter schools currently are required to use the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA) for program entry, exit, and monitoring. The AZELLA recognizes five levels of proficiency, ranging from understanding no English at all to fully proficient (see textbox). Assessment under the AZELLA is a composite of speaking, listening, reading, and writing scores. The instruments used in other states are not as comprehensive. Ninety percent of districts surveyed in other states based entry decisions solely on oral proficiency, and nearly 82 percent used oral proficiency as the sole basis for exiting the program.

After exiting the ELL program as proficient, all Arizona students are monitored for 2 years, again using the AZELLA. By contrast, one-third of the districts surveyed in other states did not monitor students who had been reclassified as proficient. Of the districts that monitor, only 44 percent reported that they did so for 2 years. Further, 93 percent of the districts relied on student grades rather than a testing instrument to monitor 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.

## ELL programs, data, and reporting shaped by HB2064

During fiscal years 2006 and 2007, Arizona districts and charter schools were operating three main types of ELL programs:

- **Structured English Immersion (SEI)**— In SEI programs, most or all instruction is in English, and teachers use an instructional curriculum designed for children who are learning the language. The goal is to help students learn the language and become English proficient in the shortest amount of time.
- **Bilingual**—Bilingual programs use native language instruction to teach subject matter with the goal of gradually shifting instruction to English over time. Since 2001 and as mandated by Proposition 203, bilingual education in Arizona requires a waiver.
- **Mainstream**—These programs place students in regular classrooms with English-fluent students.

Arizona's most recent ELL legislation, Laws 2006, Ch. 4 (HB2064), further specifies the type of SEI instruction that districts and charter schools will need to adopt in the future. This bill was an outgrowth of more than a decade of litigation and legislation,

discussed in more detail in an April 2007 Auditor General Report, *Financing Arizona's English Language Learner Programs, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2006*. As seen in Figure 3 below, the bill specifies that the ELL Task Force will develop state-wide program models, ADE will monitor and report on program success, and the Auditor General will audit the models' effectiveness on performance-based outcomes and English proficiency.

Figure 3: Arizona's Statutory Provisions Related to ELL Program Structure, Data and Reporting  
Laws 2006, Ch. 4 (House Bill 2064) effective September 2006

### Arizona Department of Education

#### Arizona ELL Task Force—

- Develop and adopt research-based, cost-effective Structured English Immersion (SEI) models.
- Annually re-evaluate the models, and revise if necessary.

#### Office of English Language Acquisition Services

- Require each district and charter school to report annually the number and types of ELL participants.
- Provide technical assistance and monitor programs for implementation of SEI models.
- Report the mobility of ELL students within and between districts and charter schools.
- Annually present a detailed summary of ELL programs and funding to the State Board of Education.
- Report information relating to the demonstrated success of schools and school districts at achieving English proficiency for ELL students.

### Office of the Auditor General

- Conduct a biennial audit of the overall effectiveness of ELL programs based on outcome measures and English proficiency with consideration for student mobility.
- Review compliance with ELL program requirements in performance audits of randomly selected districts.

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of Laws 2006, Ch. 4 (HB 2064).

In September 2007, the ELL Task Force adopted its research-based models for SEI classes, which are required to be used in all Arizona schools unless, on a case-by-case basis, the Task Force approves an alternative approach proposed by a district or charter school. The models, discussed more fully in Chapter 1, specify state-wide ELL policy and provide guidance for program structure and classroom practices.

In order to comply with HB2064 mandates, ADE and the Office of the Auditor General must analyze ELL information that is collected from districts and charter schools and maintained by ADE. Auditors identified several research questions that need to be addressed in reviewing compliance with ELL program models and determining the program's effectiveness in achieving English proficiency. These questions, which relate both to how the programs are structured and what results they achieve, include the following:

### Compliance—

- How many ELL students are served and are they concentrated in particular schools within a district? How are they grouped and placed in the program?
- How is the program being implemented? How many hours of English language instruction do ELL students receive?

### Effectiveness—

- Does the program have a high percentage of ELL students who become reclassified as English proficient?
- How long does it take a student to become English proficient, on average? Is the average time in the program significantly different for students entering with different proficiency levels—Pre-Emergent, Emergent, Basic, Intermediate?
- Is student mobility—the extent to which students transfer between schools—associated with progress in English proficiency?
- Which students typically re-enter the program after being reclassified as English proficient?

Performance audits of randomly selected districts will report on how the models are being implemented, and biennially, the Office of the Auditor General will audit the program's overall effectiveness.

## Scope and Methodology

This study focused on current ELL programs operating at a sample of Arizona school districts and charter schools. The sample of 13 districts and 5 charter schools was designed to reflect different types of programs, but is not statistically representative of all Arizona ELL programs. As seen in Table 2, the sample selection was based on district or charter school size, location, number, and proportion of ELL population and percentage of ELL students reclassified to “proficient.” Based on the distribution of fiscal year 2006 reclassification data, auditors selected 9 districts with relatively high reclassification rates—above 33 percent—and 9 with relatively low rates—below 10 percent. The sample included 4 large districts, 7 medium districts, and 7 small districts and charters. Of the 18 districts and charters, 9 were in rural and 9 were in urban areas. Five sample programs had more than 25 percent of their total student population consisting of ELL students.

**Table 2: Sample District and Charter School Characteristics**  
Fiscal Year 2006

Reclassification Rate	School Size	Location	ELL Students		Reclassified Students		District or Charter School Name
			Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
High	Large	Rural	2,474	41%	1,039	42%	Nogales Unified School District
		Urban	3,615	27	1,235	34	Glendale Elementary School District
	Medium	Rural	148	5	119	80	Liberty Elementary School District
		Rural	50	4	23	46	Indian Oasis-Baboquivari Unified School District
		Urban	100	16	65	65	Southgate Academy, Inc.
	Small	Urban	246	16	82	33	Sedona-Oak Creek Joint Unified School District
		Rural	36	10	12	33	Antelope Union High School District
		Urban	104	47	54	52	Pan-American Elementary Charter School
		Urban	34	9	10	29	Clarkdale-Jerome Elementary School District <sup>1</sup>
Low	Large	Rural	75	1	0	0	Vail Unified School District
		Urban	281	4	1	0	Tolleson Union High School District
	Medium	Rural	277	35	0	0	Riverside Elementary School District
		Urban	139	19	8	6	West Phoenix Public Charter High School
		Urban	382	8	7	2	Florence Unified School District
	Small	Rural	10	13	1	10	Chester-Newton Charter and Montessori School
		Rural	7	4	0	0	Sedona Charter School, Inc.
		Rural	105	28	2	2	Wellton Elementary School District
		Urban	57	11	1	2	Ajo Unified School District

<sup>1</sup> The district's reclassification rate did not meet the threshold for the high reclassification rate group, but had the highest rate of small, urban public school districts and was included as an example of that group.

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of fiscal year 2007 School District Annual Financial Reports, average daily membership information provided by the Arizona Department of Education, and summary accounting data provided by individual school districts.

In conducting this study, auditors used a variety of methods, including conducting site visits to observe all sample programs, and analyzing various records and data collected and compiled by ADE and information obtained directly from various school districts and charters. Specifically:

- To provide a background of ELL legislation, Arizona Fluency Standards, AZELLA components, and ELL Task Force SEI models, auditors reviewed HB 2064, current Task Force SEI models, and documents provided by ADE.
- To provide a national context for Arizona's ELL program structure, population, and data collection processes, auditors reviewed national ELL studies and interviewed program staff in other states about their ELL legislation and related data systems.
- To provide an understanding of how each of the programs in the sample operated, auditors interviewed program staff, visited program sites, performed file reviews, and observed classrooms with ELL students. Program staff provided detailed schedules for fiscal year 2007 ELL classes and more general information on fiscal year 2008 schedules.
- To analyze sample ELL demographic, program participation, and outcome data, auditors used student-level data collected and reports prepared by ADE. School districts and charter schools put specific student data into ADE's Student Accountability Information System (SAIS), and ADE extracts and reports ELL-related information from SAIS. As a special study, the information was not subjected to all the tests and confirmations that would be performed in an audit. However, auditors validated some of this district- and charter-reported data, including assessment scores and primary home language, by comparing it to the schools' original supporting records. Auditors also performed reasonableness tests to SAIS data for sample districts and charter schools.
- To assess the reliability of SAIS processing of ELL data, auditors reviewed SAIS documentation related to the implementation of statutory program requirements and process controls, interviewed ADE officials, and analyzed the data for logical errors.

The Auditor General and staff express their appreciation to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the staff of the Arizona Department of Education, and the staffs of the Arizona public school districts and charter schools for their cooperation and assistance during this study.



# CHAPTER 1

---

## Characteristics of sample ELL programs and participants

ELL programs in the 18 sample districts and charter schools differ greatly from each other and from the SEI structure they will have to employ in the future under the models adopted by the ELL Task Force. The Task Force's models require all new ELL students to receive daily 4-hour English language development (ELD) classes. In fiscal year 2008, only 3 of the 18 sample districts and charter schools were operating classes that met this upcoming requirement, but only for a portion of their ELL students. In 2007, the most recent year for which comprehensive data was available, more than half of all ELL students in the sample districts and charter schools attended programs that mainstreamed all ELL students during regular classroom hours. The new models are designed to bring ELL students to full proficiency in 1 year. For the sampled districts and charter schools, about 7 percent of the approximately 8,700 ELL students became fully proficient in fiscal year 2007, and most of them had been in the program for at least 2 years. Between fiscal years 2006 and 2007, nearly two-thirds of the students remained at the same proficiency level or regressed, while about one-third moved to a higher proficiency level. ELL students who were at the lowest proficiency levels tended to make the most progress.

### Current programs vary significantly

The Task Force's new models for Structured English Immersion (SEI) classes, adopted in September 2007, specify a state-wide ELL policy regarding providing instruction to ELL students. These models are expected to be implemented beginning in fiscal year 2009. In fiscal years 2007 and 2008, the sample districts and charter schools operated ELL programs that varied by grade and proficiency levels and across individual schools. Although the new models call for ELL students to receive 4 hours of ELD classes a day in SEI settings, the majority of ELL students in the sample programs were being taught in programs that mainstreamed ELL

students with other students during regular classroom hours. Most districts cited scheduling and resource challenges in moving to the new models.

**New state SEI models**—The ELL Task Force’s research-based models for SEI classes, which all Arizona schools are required to use unless the Task Force approves an alternative approach, specify state-wide ELL policy and provide guidance for program structure and classroom practices.

- **Policy**—ELD is to be taught for a minimum of 4 hours a day for the first year a student is classified as an ELL. All new ELL students who test below “proficient” must receive the 4 daily ELD hours, regardless of grade. In their second year, middle and high school ELL students testing at the Intermediate level may be excused from 1 to 2 hours of ELD instruction. Programs should teach English using only English materials and instruction in an SEI setting with the goal for ELL students to become proficient in 1 year.

- **Structure**—

- *Content*—SEI class content is a minimum of 4 hours of ELD, a type of instruction designed for students who are in the process of learning English. Unlike math and science classes, ELD emphasizes concepts such as semantics, syntax, word structure, and pronunciation.

#### English Language Development

The teaching of English language skills to ELL students with content emphasizing the English language itself; focusing on pronunciation, structure, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics.

Source: *SEI Models*, AZ ELL Task Force, September 15, 2007.

- *Placement*—ELL students are placed into SEI classes based on their English proficiency on the AZELLA and their grade level.
- *Grouping*—Depending on the number of ELL students in each grade and proficiency level, programs should group students with students of similar proficiency levels. As long as the 4-hour ELD requirement is met, districts and charter schools can adjust their ELD classes based on the school size and grade, number and proportion of ELL students attending each school.

- **Classroom practices**—The teaching materials used in an ELD class may reflect content from a variety of academic disciplines, such as math or science, but must be only in English, be appropriate for the students' level of proficiency, and be chosen based on effectiveness in promoting specific English language objectives.

**Substantial variety in existing programs**—Although the state SEI models may result in a more uniform SEI approach across the State, the current programs in the 18 sample districts and charter schools reflected a variety of mainstream and SEI approaches. None of the programs offered bilingual education. However, according to district officials, one of the charters that used a mainstream approach obtained bilingual waivers for all new ELL students because teachers were allowed to speak Spanish for an initial period until the ELL students were integrated into mainstream classes.

Within individual districts and charter schools, programs also reflected considerable variation across grade levels, levels of proficiency, or individual schools.

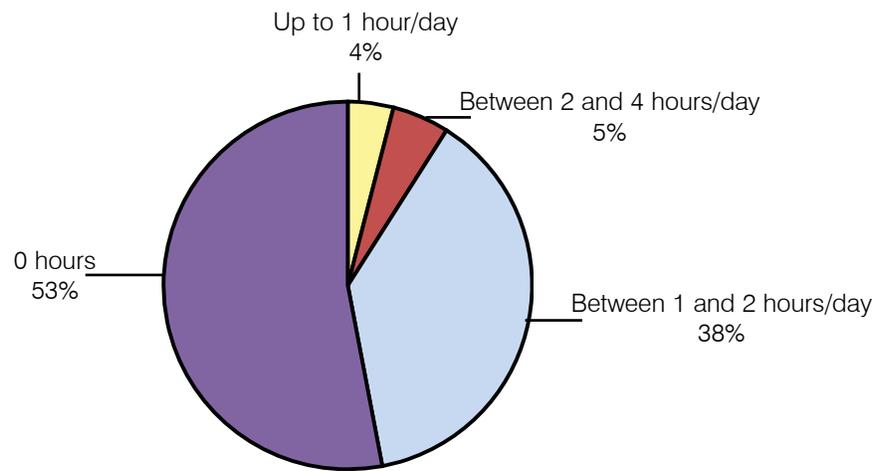
- **Grade level**—In five of the sampled districts and charter schools, the instructional setting varied by grade level. Typically, these programs provided mainstream instruction in the elementary grades, while ELD classes in SEI settings were offered at the high school grade levels.
- **Proficiency level**—Two districts provided SEI classes across grade levels, but not for ELL students who tested at the intermediate level. These students were mainstreamed instead. A program official in one district said the district lacked the space to provide separate classes for all ELL students and that intermediate students were better able to adjust to the mainstream setting than students with lower proficiency levels.
- **School**—Four districts varied the programs among their schools. For example, officials in one district said they allow school principals to establish their own programs to better meet their specific ELL student population's needs as long as they are within the state requirements for ELL instruction. Similarly, at two other districts, some schools provided ELL-only classes, while others mainstreamed ELL students.

In a few programmatic aspects, the sample schools were more aligned with the upcoming SEI models. First, all of the school districts and charter schools reported that they used the AZELLA for program placement and exit. Second, all schools that used an SEI approach used proficiency level as a grouping criteria. Third, in all their classroom observations, auditors found instruction and materials were only in English, in keeping with the SEI models' specifications for classroom practices.

Most existing programs differed substantially from new state requirements—The state SEI models' policy specifies that ELL students should receive 4 daily hours of ELD instruction in SEI settings. Most of the 18 sampled programs used a much different approach in fiscal years 2007 and 2008.

In fiscal year 2007, 7 of the 18 sample districts and charters offered programs entirely in mainstream settings and provided no ELD hours to ELL students. As seen in Figure 4, 53 percent of the approximately 8,700 sample ELL students were in these seven programs. The next largest group, 38 percent, was in four programs that provided between 1 and 2 hours of daily ELD instruction. Two programs provided between 2 and 4 hours of daily ELD in fiscal year 2007, with only one of them meeting the upcoming 4-hour requirement.

Figure 4: Percentages of ELL Students Grouped by English Language Development Hours<sup>1</sup> Fiscal Year 2007



<sup>1</sup> The number of ELL students with 0 ELD hours may be higher because auditors could only determine whether ELD was offered to some students at the district or charter school. Other ELL students at those same districts or charter schools may have received no ELD because their grade- or proficiency-level or school was mainstreamed.

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of fiscal year 2007 ELL schedules and survey responses provided by district and charter school program officials, interviews with program staff, and fiscal year 2007 ELL participation information provided by the Arizona Department of Education.

At four of the seven mainstreaming programs, program staff identified their ELL programs as SEI, but auditors determined that these programs did not provide their ELL students with separate ELD instruction during regular school hours. In some of these districts and charters, the ELL students were instructed in mainstream settings by teachers using approaches, such as Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (S.I.O.P.), which uses demonstrations, visual aids, and dialogue to enhance language acquisition. In visits to mainstream classrooms, auditors observed significant variation in the implementation of this language-acquisition instructional approach. For example, some teachers were very interactive and aware of the ELL students' participation in class. In other cases, the teacher could not identify the ELL students and/or used a traditional lecture instructional approach.

Although some shift to more ELD instruction was discernible in the programs in place for fiscal year 2008, most of the sampled districts and charter schools were still far from having programs that would meet the upcoming requirement. Auditors reviewed the sample districts' and charter schools' programs for the current year—fiscal year 2008—to determine what changes, if any, had occurred from fiscal year 2007, the last year for which comprehensive data was available. Only 3 of the 18 sample districts and charter schools offered 4 hours of daily ELD to any of their ELL students. One was a large high school district with a small percentage of ELL students. This district's program, offered across all district schools, currently teaches 4 hours of ELD to all ELL students, except those who test at the intermediate level. The other two districts' programs are in the process of implementing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) agreements related to their ELL programs. The OCR typically enters into an agreement after substantiating a discrimination claim against the district. The OCR allows schools under OCR agreements to provide instruction in SEI settings as long as the ELL program placement, assessment, and exit policies are nondiscriminatory. At one district, in efforts to redress the national origins claims made to OCR and in anticipation of the State's 4-hour ELD requirement, the district's plan specifies that ELL students receive 1 to 4 hours per day of ELD instruction depending on their proficiency level and time in the program. At the other district under an OCR agreement, the 4-hour ELD is available only at one of the district's eight schools.

## Office of Civil Rights Agreements and Structured English Immersion

“Valid educational reasons may exist to assign a student to a class with a disproportionate number of minority or nonminority students when a class provides specially designated instruction to enable ELL students to acquire English language skills. These assignments are allowed only when appropriate and nondiscriminatory evaluation, placement, and exiting criteria procedures are followed and the classes are designed to move students to regular classes within a reasonable amount of time.”

Source: Office for Civil Rights, Title IV assignment.

Officials cite schedule and resource challenges in providing 4-hour ELD instruction—Across sample districts and charters, program officials identified the following schedule and resource challenges to meeting the 4-hour daily ELD requirement:

- **Kindergarten students**—The Task Force SEI model requires all ELL students, including kindergarten students, to receive 4 hours of daily ELD in the SEI setting. According to one program official, the challenge of finding additional space for separate kindergarten classrooms for ELL students seemed unnecessary because instructional approaches to ELL and non-ELL kindergartners are similar.
- **Staffing and space**—Program officials from five of the sample districts and charters stated that they would not have the staffing or space to meet the 4-hour requirement. Three rural districts stated that they currently have difficulty filling regular teaching slots, and they do not know where they would find four to six more teachers with the qualifications to teach SEI classes. Another sampled district cited lack of physical space available for the smaller “pull-out” SEI classes. During the classroom visits, auditors observed SEI classroom sizes between 3-20 students.
- **ELL students spread across grades and proficiency levels**—Grouping ELL students’ SEI classes by proficiency level is complicated when a district or charter has ELL students with various proficiency levels spread across grade levels and/or schools. For example, a sample elementary school provided ELD classes to new ELL students in grades 3 through 8 who tested below intermediate. For these 12 students, in addition to finding ELD teaching materials appropriate across their different age groups, the ELL coordinator had to integrate the ELD classes with each ELL student’s grade-level mainstream classes, such as math, science, and physical education. Some of these ELL students switched between the ELD and mainstream classrooms as often as six times in a day.

## Few ELL students attained proficiency within 1 year

Between fiscal years 2006 and 2007, 63 percent of the sample ELL students remained at the same proficiency level or actually regressed. Those who did advance tended to be at the lowest proficiency levels, such as pre-emergent, rather than at the intermediate level. Seven percent of the approximately 8,700 sample ELL students in the sample programs in fiscal year 2007 became fully proficient by the end of that fiscal year. Most of them had tested as intermediate the year before, and most had been in the program for at least 2 years.

Majority of sample ELL students' proficiency remained the same or regressed—Between fiscal years 2006 and 2007, 55 percent of the ELL students in the sample districts and charters remained at the same proficiency level, 8 percent fell back, and 37 percent moved forward one or more proficiency levels. According to ADE program officials, students testing at the pre-emergent and emergent levels typically progress more rapidly than students testing at the basic and Intermediate levels. These different rates of progress in proficiency were evident in the sample districts and charters. For example, as seen in Table 3, 36 percent of ELL students with pre-emergent language skills advanced three proficiency levels in 1 year to achieve the intermediate level, while 51 percent with emergent skills advanced two proficiency levels to achieve the intermediate level in 1 year. In contrast, two-thirds of the ELL students who tested as intermediate in fiscal year 2006 remained at that proficiency level in fiscal year 2007 assessments. Further, almost one-third of the sample ELL students who tested as proficient in 2006 regressed into the program the next year.

**Table 3:** Annual Progress of ELL Students by Proficiency Levels Between Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007

Proficiency Level	Percentage of ELL students changing or maintaining proficiency level					
	Regressed	Maintained	Up1	Up2	Up3	Up4
Pre-Emergent		4%	5%	52%	36%	3%
Emergent	1%	3	43	51	2	
Basic	2	36	53	9		
Intermediate	8	67	25			
Proficient	31	69				

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of ELL students' participation and proficiency data for the sample districts and charter schools for fiscal years 2006 and 2007 provided by the Arizona Department of Education.

Half of sample ELL students at intermediate proficiency—In fiscal year 2007, approximately one-half of the ELL students in sample school districts and charter schools tested at the intermediate proficiency level. According to officials, since students at the intermediate level tend to make slower progress to the next level than their counterparts at lower proficiency levels, the high percentage of students testing at the intermediate level may help explain the overall lack of proficiency growth in the sample. As seen in Table 4 (see page 18), 55 percent of the approximately 8,700 ELL students tested as intermediate prior to participating in fiscal year 2007 programs. Thirty-one percent tested as basic proficiency, with the remaining 14 percent testing as pre-emergent or emergent. In all, more than 7,600 of the ELL students in the sample (87 percent) attended elementary grades kindergarten through 8, while 13 percent attended grades 9 through 12. Sixty-seven percent of high school students tested at the intermediate level, compared to 53 percent of the elementary ELL students.

**Table 4: Elementary and High School ELL Students by Proficiency Level<sup>1</sup>**  
Fiscal Year 2007

Proficiency Level	ELL Students					
	Elementary		High School		Total	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Pre-Emergent	732	4%	39	4%	771	9%
Emergent	435	6	48	4	483	5
Basic	2,402	32	282	25	2684	31
Intermediate	4,021	53	761	67	4782	55
Total	7,590		1,130		8,720	

<sup>1</sup> Proficiency levels for fiscal year 2007 participants were based on most recent, valid assessment scores from fiscal years 2006 or 2007.

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of ELL students' participation and proficiency data for the sample districts and charter schools for fiscal years 2006 and 2007 provided by the Arizona Department of Education.

Seven percent of sample ELL students reclassified as proficient, most after 2 or more years in program—In fiscal year 2007, 596, or 7 percent, of the sampled districts' and charters' ELL students were tested and reclassified as proficient. According to ADE, the State's average reclassification rate in fiscal year 2006 was 14.4 percent.<sup>1</sup> It is not clear whether the different rates are due to uniqueness of sample districts and charters, or to errors in state-wide data processing, as discussed further in Chapter 2. In the sample districts and charters, approximately three out of four (74 percent) of those reclassified in fiscal year 2007 were in an ELL program for at least 2 years.<sup>2</sup> Three percent were in a program for 1 year or less. As Table 5 (see page 19) shows, approximately 89 percent of those reclassified as proficient in fiscal year 2007 had a prior proficiency level of intermediate, and over 8 percent had a proficiency level of basic. About 3 percent, or 17 students, had tested at the pre-emergent or emergent level in fiscal year 2006 before testing as proficient in fiscal year 2007.

<sup>1</sup> "Demographic Characteristics and Assessment Results of ELL students in Arizona," presented by ADE, ELL Task Force Meeting, Phoenix, AZ, January 2007.

<sup>2</sup> For students in an ELL programs for 2 or more years, auditors could not determine how long they were actually in the program because reliable data prior to fiscal year 2005 is unavailable. Fiscal year 2005 was the first year that districts and charter schools were required to use a state-wide ELL assessment to support program participation. It was also the first year that ADE added processing controls related to ADE data.

Table 5: Fiscal Year 2006 Proficiency Level of ELL Students  
Reclassified as Proficient in Fiscal Year 2007

2006 Proficiency Level	Reclassified as Proficient ELL Students	
	Number	Percent
Pre-Emergent	13	2.2%
Emergent	4	0.7
Basic	51	8.6
Intermediate	528	88.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>596</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of ELL students' participation and proficiency data for the sample districts and charter schools for fiscal years 2006 and 2007 provided by the Arizona Department of Education.



# CHAPTER 2

---

## ELL data and data systems need attention

ADE needs to take action to ensure that accurate and meaningful data is available so that it can adequately fund, manage, and audit the effectiveness of Arizona's ELL programs. Although ADE collects a wide variety of data from districts about their ELL programs, auditors' review of this data showed that it contains errors in all but one of the 11 key fields for which data is currently available. Further, ADE does not have adequate procedures in place to identify these errors and either correct them or minimize their impact. These errors affect both the accuracy of funding ADE provides to districts and charter schools and the measurement of ELL students' progress. ADE's procedures would also be enhanced by collecting additional data that is currently available from districts.

### ELL data essential for funding, monitoring, and auditing

A.R.S. §15-756.10 requires ADE to collect and maintain ELL data related to program funding and monitoring. Accurate and complete data is essential for several reasons:

- **Program funding**—Most ELL funding is based on the number of ELL students served.<sup>1</sup> ELL per-pupil funding, commonly called the “ELL B-Weight” in reference to the school funding formula, is a calculated percentage of a student's base-level funding. Accordingly, the correct identification of the number of ELL students is essential for determining the correct percentage for districts and charter schools.
- **Monitoring**—ADE is responsible for monitoring program compliance by districts and charter schools, for funding programs, and for reporting the extent to which ELL students achieve English proficiency. To carry out this responsibility, ADE needs accurate and complete data on how long students remain in the program and the level of proficiency they have achieved. For example, ADE must annually

<sup>1</sup> For further discussion, see the Office of the Auditor General's report, *Financing Arizona's English Language Learner Programs, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2006*, April 2007.

present to the State Board of Education detailed summaries of the program's success in achieving proficiency and of program funding.

- **Auditability**—A.R.S. §15-756.12 requires the Auditor General to review compliance with program requirements in district performance audits and biennially report on the overall effectiveness of the State's ELL program. In performance audits of randomly selected districts, auditors will review programs for compliance with ELL program requirements. In biennial audits of the State's programs, auditors will report on the ELL programs' overall effectiveness based on outcome measures and English proficiency, considering student mobility. If the data itself is unreliable, neither the Auditor General nor any other entity can attest that the analysis presents an accurate picture of what the program is accomplishing.

To fund, monitor, and audit ELL programs, three main types of information are needed:

- **Number of ELL students**—Since state funding is awarded on a per-student basis, ADE needs an accurate determination of the number of ELL students in each district or charter school.
- **Achievement outcome**—To monitor and evaluate districts' and charter schools' success in bringing ELL students to proficiency in English, ADE needs information about each student's level of proficiency as they enter the program and the changes in this proficiency as they move through their instruction.
- **Time in the program**—Statute provides districts and charter schools with 2 years of ELL funding. Since funding is limited to 2 years, ADE needs to know how long each ELL student has been participating in the program. Because families with ELL students may relocate, ADE needs to be able to track ELL students' time in the program for all districts and charter schools as well.

## School data submitted to ADE contained errors

Auditors found errors in most of the data fields that districts and charter schools submitted to ADE's Student Accountability Information System (SAIS). Auditors conducted two main types of reviews—a detailed analysis of 493 ELL files from the 18 districts and charter schools in the sample, and a more general analysis of records for all 10,054 ELL students who attended the sample districts and charter schools in fiscal year 2007.<sup>1</sup> These reviews showed that although districts and charter schools submit many types of information that can be useful in administering and evaluating the program, most of the available information was found to be unreliable. Auditors identified 15 ELL-related data fields that would be useful in administering the program or auditing its effectiveness (see Table 6 on page 23). The

<sup>1</sup> When the 10,054 sample ELL students' memberships are summarized for funding purposes and adjusted by auditors for errors, they equate to the approximate 8,700 full-time equivalent ELL students cited in Chapter 1.

Table 6: Availability and Reliability of ELL Data at Sample Districts and Charter Schools Fiscal Year 2007

Type of data	Is it available from ADE?	Is it reliable?
<b>Data on individual students</b>		
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)	✓	
<b>Data on program in general</b>		
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	✓	

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of ELL students' demographic, program participation, and proficiency data for the sample districts and charter schools for fiscal year 2007 provided by the Arizona Department of Education and comparison of a sample of this data to supporting records provided by sample districts and charter schools.

majority of these data types—11 of the 15—are currently available in ADE's SAIS system. However, only one of the 11 available data types—grade level—can currently be categorized as reliable. The errors and processing issues of the other ten data types are discussed in subsequent sections.

Unreliable data limit ADE and the Auditor General from providing accurate basic information and answering critical research questions. For example:

- **What is the primary home language spoken by the ELL student?**  
Current SAIS data suggests that for 11 percent of the ELL students English is the primary language spoken at home. This is probably higher than the actual

percentage because students are assessed for program participation when the language spoken at home is not English.

- **How long does an ELL student typically participate in the program before becoming proficient?**

Auditors found errors in the program exit information in 6 of 18 sample programs and errors in the proficiency levels for all of the programs.

- **What is the average percentage of ELL students reclassified as proficient in a given year?**

Four percent of sample ELL students who were reclassified as proficient were actually assessed below proficient or lacked valid assessments.

The specific problems with reliability are discussed in the sections that follow.

**Errors in student identification**—Basic identification information about each ELL student includes such data as a unique identification number and the student’s home language. Such information is essential for tracking students’ eligibility and participation across the years. Auditors’ review of 493 sample files found such information was not necessarily present, or if present, was not necessarily correct.

- **Identification number**—Within SAIS, each student has a unique identification number, called a SAIS ID. To monitor students over time, SAIS IDs should be consistent across years and assigned to only one student. Before requesting a SAIS ID for a new student, school officials should determine whether a SAIS ID has already been assigned to the student by another school. Within the sample of 493 files, auditors identified instances in which an ELL student received a new SAIS ID in a subsequent fiscal year, even though the membership district remained the same, and the same SAIS ID was assigned to one ELL student in fiscal year 2006 and a different ELL student in 2007.
- **Home language**—Twenty percent of the ELL students in the sample lacked appropriate or current documentation of their home language. In SAIS data, 11 percent of the ELL students at the sample districts and charter schools have English as a primary home language, which would tend to call into question whether the student should be classified as an ELL student. According to program officials at one sample charter school, their student management information software has a default value of English for primary home language, and they do not enter other values, even when ELL students indicate Spanish as their home language on the state form.

**Errors in student proficiency and participation data**—Accurate information about an ELL student’s English proficiency is critical for determining appropriate funded-participant counts, achievement outcomes, and time in the

program. In Arizona, students receive a score on the AZELLA and a resulting proficiency level. For students scoring below proficient, officials also enter information about program participation. Auditors identified errors in data related to the assessment of students' English proficiency and their program participation.

- **Total composite AZELLA score**—In 14 of the 493 sample files (3 percent), auditors found that the information in a student's file could not support the information that had been entered into SAIS. In fiscal year 2007, the district and charter schools entered AZELLA scores manually into their data systems and reported them to ADE.
- **Overall proficiency level**—For each total composite AZELLA score, school employees classified the student in one of the five corresponding overall proficiency levels ranging from pre-emergent to proficient. Auditors found that for 6.5 percent of the students, or 658 of the 10,054 sample ELL students, overall proficiency levels did not match their corresponding AZELLA scores. At one of the sample districts, employees entered the overall proficiency levels using a prior year's rules, which had been changed. This resulted in 9 of the 26 sample students from that district being misclassified as ELL students.
- **Program entry and exit**—School officials must also record information about the ELL students' program entry and exit dates and reasons for exiting the program. Accurate data on ELL students' time in the program ensures that they are only funded for 2 years, a requirement of HB 2064, which mandated that the SEI models aim to achieve proficiency in 1 year. However, 6 of the sample districts had questionable entry and exit dates, since 29 students exited on the same day they enrolled or the next day. It is not clear how many of these were students who simply pre-enrolled and then withdrew from the school or program and how many were students whose data was entered incorrectly by school staff.

**School officials do not review data accuracy**—Program officials at many of the sample schools indicated that they did not confirm the accuracy of assessment scores, and some were not familiar with the practice of confirming program participation data within SAIS. ADE reminds district and charter school employees at the end of the school year to check the data accuracy but does not require districts and charter schools to confirm the data's accuracy. According to California state officials, California's student data collection system requires districts to confirm their data's accuracy and perform procedures that identify and resolve errors within their data.

## ADE's controls and checks for data reliability are insufficient

When data submitted by districts and charter schools is inaccurate or incomplete, ADE's own internal processes should be able to identify the problems. Specifically, ADE's processes should not accept schools' participation data for ELL students who lack assessment data or who have assessment data indicating that they are already English proficient. Auditors found that ADE's integrity checks and controls for doing so are insufficient. Consequently, the errors and limitations in the data are carried into the system. These checks and controls are of two main types, and each needs attention.

**Weak integrity checks of ELL data may have resulted in improper program funding**—ADE is responsible for complying with statutory requirements related to different types of student membership and program funding. To help ensure appropriate funding levels, statutory requirements need to be incorporated within SAIS and ensured through a data process called integrity checks. As reported by the Auditor General in August 2006, ADE lacks a comprehensive, documented process for ensuring that validation processes, such as the ELL integrity checks, are functioning properly.<sup>1</sup> Auditors identified several failures in the integrity checks that may have resulted in improper program funding and outcome reporting:

- **Proficient students funded as program participants**—Although A.R.S. §15-756 authorizes program funding only for students who test below the proficient level, ADE's fiscal year 2007 integrity checks do not prevent ineligible students from being included in the calculations for ELL funding. Auditors identified 178 students, about 2 percent of the 10,054 sample ELL students, who had no assessment scores in the current or prior year, or had an assessment score indicating that, prior to entering the program, the ELL student was proficient. Statutory requirements related to program funding should be translated into SAIS integrity rules that function properly for all students. ADE needs to change the system to check that the student received an assessment score below the proficient level in the current or prior year before including the student in funded participation counts.
- **Students reclassified as proficient lack an assessment indicating proficiency**—Integrity checks do not ensure the accuracy of a key outcome measure—the percentage of students becoming proficient. Auditors determined that 27, or 4 percent, of the 662 sample ELL students who were reclassified as proficient in fiscal year 2007 had assessment scores below proficient or no assessment scores at all.

<sup>1</sup> Office of the Auditor General's performance audit report, *ADE—Information Management*, August 2006.

- **Significant variations in data on reclassification**—Auditors also identified significant variations in the percentages of sample ELL students reclassified as proficient between fiscal years 2006 and 2007. Half of the sample districts and charter schools had reclassification percentages that fluctuated more than 20 percentage points between the 2 fiscal years. Such variation could indicate data errors and should be further reviewed.
- **Other integrity checks needed**—Auditors identified two potential integrity checks that, if implemented, might minimize observed errors. First, when English is recorded as an ELL student's home language, it could trigger a warning that further investigation is required. Second, integrity checks should ensure that proficiency levels correspond with the numeric assessment scores.

Two districts that reclassified over 30 percent of their ELL students as proficient in 2006 reclassified 0 percent as proficient

**Lack of process controls contributes to lost data**—According to industry best practices, an agency's data system should include process controls to ensure that no data is added, lost, or altered during processing. In August 2006, the Auditor General's performance audit of ADE's information management recommended that ADE add such controls. The presence of such controls could help users and ADE prevent potential problems with SAIS data.

These controls could have assisted ADE in preventing and correcting a massive state-wide recalculation and override of ELL counts that occurred in July 2007. Because of to an internal processing oversight, over 20,000 ELL students were excluded from the reported end-of-year funding counts—an \$8 million error eventually corrected by the override. Based on auditor analysis of ADE internal communication, analysts struggled to identify the error's cause. Further, although the error could have affected prior year funding counts, ADE did not investigate prior year discrepancies. ADE should have reviewed all funding data affected by the processing error.

School officials also reported cases of ELL students who pass integrity checks in the beginning of the year and later are excluded from the number of ELL students for which funding was received. In the case of a charter school, after several exchanges with charter school employees, ADE's School Finance unit had to reconcile the data manually. Other school officials also cited difficulties in identifying data errors and their causes.

Determining the number of ELL students eligible for funding is a critical step in processing ELL data and warrants additional process controls. SAIS could use integrated system process controls to automatically check for discrepancies and provide more information about how the ELL funding amounts were derived. Such information would help districts and charter schools to review the accuracy of data and would enable ADE and Auditor General staff to more effectively audit the data.

## ADE could expand types of data collected

Table 6 (on page 23) also identifies some of the data fields that ADE does not currently collect, but for which information is available at the districts and charter schools. Specifically,

- **Program staffing data**—ADE does not currently collect and maintain information about the number and qualifications of ELL teachers. ADE's Office of English Language Acquisition Services requires districts to maintain ELL teacher certification and endorsement documentation for review during monitoring visits. This information could be systematically maintained state-wide for analysis and monitoring purposes.
- **Program ELD schedule data**—ADE does not currently collect information about the number of hours of ELD instruction provided to ELL students. Sample districts and charter schools provided auditors with information on students' hours of ELD instruction based on their proficiency and grade levels. Using the program's ELD schedules for ELL groups, hours of ELD instruction could be calculated for individual ELL students and compared to their outcome measures.

## Recommendations

1. To ensure the accuracy of ELL data, ADE should work with districts and charter schools to develop improved data submission and review processes.
2. To ensure proper ELL program funding, ADE should add ELL integrity checks that require appropriate achievement data. ADE should not provide funding for students without such data.
3. To improve data accuracy and auditability, ADE should implement process controls that enable users, ADE, and the Auditor General to compare data totals at critical points in the process, such as a list of students included in funded participation counts.
4. To assist with analyzing ELL outcomes, ADE should consider collecting additional data that describe how a program is implemented, such as teacher qualifications and staffing levels.

# AGENCY RESPONSE





State of Arizona  
Department of Education

Tom Horne  
Superintendent of  
Public Instruction

April 11, 2008

Ms. Debra K. Davenport, CPA  
Auditor General  
Office of the Auditor General  
2910 North 44<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 410  
Phoenix, Arizona 85010

Dear Ms. Davenport:

The Arizona Department of Education is providing the enclosed response to the Auditor General's revised preliminary draft report entitled "Baseline Report of Arizona's English Language Learner Program."

We appreciate your work on this report and your consideration of our previous comments and suggestions.

Please feel free to call me at (602) 364-2339 if any additional information is needed.

Sincerely,

Margaret Garcia Dugan  
Deputy Superintendent

Enclosure



State of Arizona  
Department of Education

**Tom Horne**  
Superintendent of  
Public Instruction

April 11, 2008

**ADE General Comment**

ADE welcomes recommendations that will lead to improved support for English Language Learners, better accountability in program design and implementation, and increased accuracy in data capture, management, and analysis.

Recognizing the limitations of the audit “Baseline Report of Arizona’s English Language Learner Program” in so far that it is based on a random sample methodology and only for the 2006-2007 Fiscal Year, ADE wishes to acknowledge the value of such an audit, and in particular the general reference information that was provided. Such review of other States’ and National data allows for a greater appreciation for the monumental steps taken by the State of Arizona and the Department of Education in recent years in addressing the needs of English Language Learners.

In additional, ADE wishes to further acknowledge that while the audit was limited to the 2006-2007 Fiscal Year, it was likewise limited in identifying major improvements and achievements during the current fiscal year (2007-2008) for those areas cited. As such, while ADE agrees to the four recommendations made by the Auditor General in this report, ADE will also identify such improvements and achievements, as well as future actions, in the response portions of this communication.

## **ADE Comments and Responses Regarding Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1**

To ensure the accuracy of ELL data, ADE should work with districts and charter schools to develop improved data submission and review processes.

### **ADE Response**

The recommendation of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

ADE has an established training component that employs the STAR Team to provide both general training as well as site specific assistance. ADE recognizes the difficulties faced by school districts and charters regarding turn-over in personnel and will continue to provide such assistance through the STAR Team in an on-going manner.

Since considerable data entry errors occur at the district and charter level, ADE is currently working with the assessment/testing company to arrange all AZELLA scores to be submitted directly to the SAIS System (electronic copies to the districts and charters) thus eliminating a vast number of local entry errors.

ADE has formed a Data Subcommittee that meets every four to six weeks. The Data Subcommittee is comprised of ADE staff (e.g. IT and R&E), and constituents from both the K-12 and Higher Education communities. The Data Subcommittee will incorporate dialog with a focus on accurate and timely data.

### **Recommendation 2**

To ensure proper ELL program funding, ADE should add ELL integrity checks that require appropriate achievement data prior to including the student in funded participation counts.

### **ADE Response**

The recommendation of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

ADE will examine and evaluate the integrity checks to assure that each student eligible for testing is tested and that English Language Learners classified as “proficient” are not counted for funding.

### **Recommendation 3**

To improve data accuracy and auditability, ADE should implement process controls that enable users, ADE, and the Auditor general to compare data totals at critical points in the process, such as a list of students included in funded participation counts.

### **ADE Response**

The recommendation of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

To ensure the accuracy of the ELL management process, ADE will identify key performance metrics resulting in total system auditability.

### **Recommendation 4**

To assist with analyzing ELL outcomes, ADE should consider collecting additional data that describe how a program is implemented, such as teacher qualifications and staffing levels.

### **ADE Response**

The recommendation of the Auditor general is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

For the past several months ADE has been working with software developers to design an interactive software and technology piece for the field monitoring and data collection process. The software and technology will allow field agents to collect such data as matching model selection to actual model implementation, the number of hours provided for by program design and actual program participation of individual students, teacher qualifications, and other data traditionally collected in monitoring by paper and pencil. The ability to transmit the collected data electronically to the Agency from the field is a feature that is incorporated into the technology to better insure more timely and accurate information regarding the ELL programs.

ADE will implement the software and technology in the monitoring and data collection process.