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Marco A. Murillo Ph.D.
Santa Clara University

Magaly Lavadenz Ph.D.
Loyola Marymount University, mlavaden@lmu.edu

EXAMINING ENGLISH LEARNERS' COLLEGE READINESS AND POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT IN CALIFORNIA

Marco A. Murillo, Ph.D., Director of Strategic Initiatives
Latinx Education Research Center | Santa Clara University
Magaly Lavadenz, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor and Executive Director
Center for Equity for English Learners | Loyola Marymount University

INTRODUCTION

Across California, more than 40 percent of students in Pre-K through 12th grade schools speak a language other than English at home, and over twenty percent are classified as English Learners (ELs). ELs are individuals who speak a language other than English at home and who do not score at the proficiency target level on the state English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC). The majority speak Spanish at home and are of immigrant-origin (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). Some of them may have recently arrived (i.e., Newcomers) to the United States (U.S.) and have interrupted schooling while others are native-born and have difficulties mastering academic English (i.e., long-term English Learners).

Recent policy changes in California indicate a shift toward equity-minded reform and provide an opportunity to redress the shortcomings of the educational system in supporting ELs. These policies include: the California Multilingual Education Act which promotes bilingualism and biliteracy; the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) which created a new funding system to address educational inequities; and the *English Learner Roadmap* which is intended to guide institutions and educators in their efforts to effectively meet the academic, educational, and social needs of English Learners. Altogether, these policies aim to improve the educational quality and experiences of ELs by addressing the structural, financial, and instructional issues that continue to impede the academic advancement of this student population. However, early analysis of policy implementation of the LCFF, for example, indicates that educational equity remains elusive for these students (Lavadenz, Armas, Murillo, & Jáuregui Hodge, 2019). Moreover, despite a renewed commitment to EL students, research by Contreras and Fujimoto (2019) indicates that ELs are not enrolling in college preparation courses even when districts increase the number of these courses.

Given a growing asset-based approach to equipping ELs with the knowledge and skills to enter and succeed in postsecondary education, in this brief we examine ELs' college readiness and postsecondary education outcomes in California. In what follows, we briefly summarize relevant literature on college readiness among EL students. We then present data retrieved from the California Department of Education (CDE) on college readiness and postsecondary education. We conclude with recommendations for improving ELs' college readiness and postsecondary enrollment.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW ON COLLEGE READINESS AND ENGLISH LEARNERS

College readiness is commonly defined as the preparation a student needs to enter and succeed in college. According to Kurlaender, Reed, and Hurt (2019), it is a "dynamic process" that includes choices, actions, and beliefs that take place within a bounded school system that, in combination, create or limit opportunity. Research shows that having aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), access to advanced courses (Adelman 2006), college counseling (Hurwitz & Howell, 2014), supportive relationships with institutional agents such as counselors (Stanton-Salazar, 2001), and navigational support (McAlister & Mevs, 2012) promote college readiness and enrollment. Moreover, scholars have developed college-going and readiness frameworks that incorporate a multitude of factors in promoting students' college preparation, enrollment, and success (see Conley, 2012; Kurlaender et al., 2019; McClafferty et al., 2002). These frameworks offer a lens to understand how school systems promote or hinder student college success.

Research examining ELs and their college preparation and enrollment is limited. Recent studies have shed light on the way tracking, deficit-based thinking, and restricted access to institutional and peer networks that promote college choice hinder ELs' access to postsecondary education (Callahan, 2005; Hakuta, 2011; Kanno, 2018; Kanno & Kangas, 2014). Kanno and Cromley (2013) found that ELs lag behind English Monolingual (EM) and English Proficient (EP) students' postsecondary access and attainment. Additional research has shown that even high-performing EL students have limited access to advanced coursework and vital information networks due to inequitable school tracking systems and the lack of institutional supports (Kanno, 2018). Barriers to college preparatory courses and postsecondary education enrollment are often exacerbated by a lack of attention to EL students' socioemotional needs (e.g., discrimination, immigration status, and trauma) (Pérez & Morrison, 2016) or by educators failing to distinguish students' needs by EL subgroup. As the state and nation move towards asset-based approaches that incorporate the advantages of being bilingual in the 21st century, college and career paths are essential areas to examine through an equity lens (Callahan & Gándara, 2014).

DATA SOURCES

We report college readiness and postsecondary enrollment outcomes for ELs in the class of 2018. Data were retrieved from DataQuest, a web-based reporting system managed by the California Department of Education (CDE) and the California School Dashboard. DataQuest provides a summary of reports to look at a variety of school-, district-, and state-level outcomes. The California School Dashboard is an accountability tool that reports progress data on districts and schools. We used three summary reports: (1) Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate and Outcome Data, (2) California School Dashboard College/Career Indicator, and (3) College-going Rates. It is important to note that while we report EL outcomes for the class of 2018 we are unable to follow the same EL students across each outcome measure because of the way the data is collected and reported. As such, we cannot make comparisons across each summary report.

Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate and Outcome Data:

The four-year adjusted cohort graduate rate (ACGR) is defined as the number of students who graduate from high school with a regular diploma divided by the number of students who comprise the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. The state adjusts the cohort number by adding students who enroll after grade 9 and subtracting students who transfer, emigrate, enter prison or a juvenile facility, or die. Data includes outcomes from students enrolled in non-charter, charter, and alternative schools. ELs are those students who were classified as EL at any time during the four years. As such, the EL four-year cohort may include Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) students. The summary report also includes data on students who met the requirements for the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU), the state's public four-year university systems.

California School Dashboard – College/Career Indicator:

California's accountability plan includes a College/Career Readiness indicator (CCI) that is met by completing one of the following criteria: A-G requirements (a set of courses to qualify to attend four-year college institutions), Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment in English language arts and math, AP and/or IB exam performance, completion of a CTE pathway, College Credit Course, State Seal of Biliteracy, and Military Science/Leadership. Students are then placed into three categories: (1) prepared, (2) approaching prepared, and (3) not prepared, with such categories used to assign schools a performance score.

The CCI is based on the four-year graduation cohort as well as the Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) graduation rate. The number of students in the CCI will not match the number reported in DataQuest because DataQuest reports the four-year graduation rate for DASS schools while the Dashboard only reports a one-year graduation rate for DASS schools.

College-going Rates (12 months within completing high school):

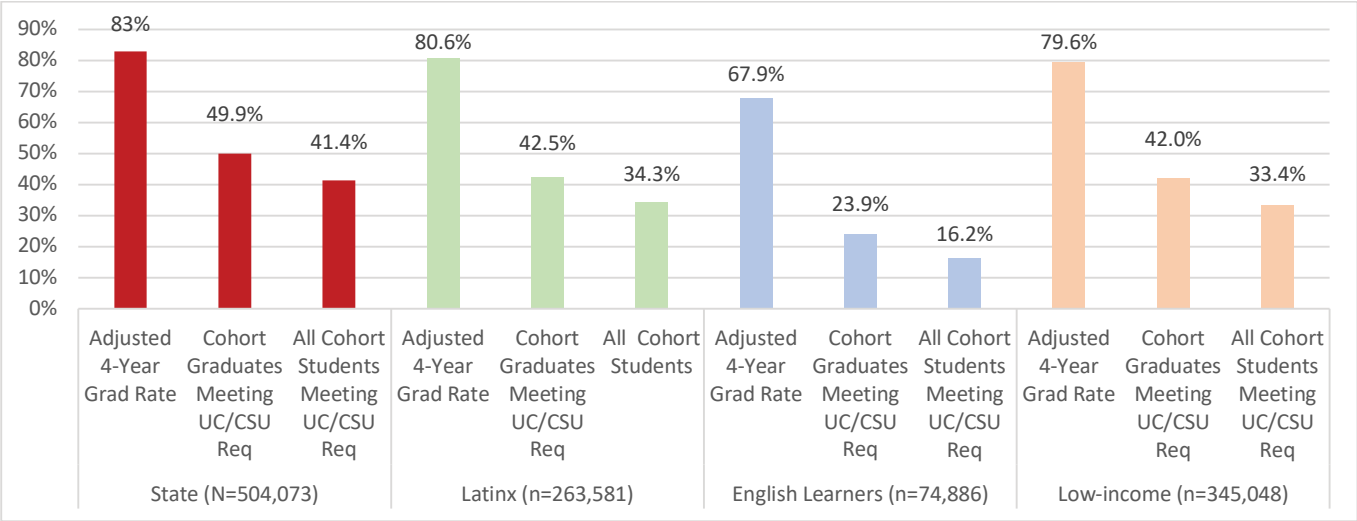
The college-going rate summary report is based on data collected by the National Student Clearinghouse, a national organization that reports data on student postsecondary educational enrollment and completion. It is important to note that because student privacy rights may block access to postsecondary data, it could result in the college-going rate being underreported. The students included in the report are defined as High School Completers, which are individuals who graduated between August 16 and August of 15 of the calendar year. In addition, unlike the ACGR and Dashboard report, only students who were classified as EL during the year are included. For this brief, only students who were labeled EL between August 16, 2017 and August 15, 2018 were counted. Therefore, the summary report does not include RFEP students. In addition, only completers who received a "regular or traditional" diploma were included for this analysis. Data for DASS were not included as it is not intended to be used for comparison purposes with non-charter and charter schools.

RESULTS

Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduate meeting UC/CSU Entrance Requirements

The results show that English Learner (EL) students lack access to college preparatory courses, have a low rate of meeting the state's College/Career Indicator, and enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates than other groups. Only 23.9% (n=12,165) of the four-year EL cohort high school graduates in 2017-18 (n=50,847) met CSU and UC entrance requirements (Figure 1). The percentage is lower (16.2%) when the complete four-year EL 9th grade cohort (N=74,886) is included (i.e., students who did not receive a regular high school diploma or graduated). Additionally, the rate of EL students who met CSU and UC entrance requirements is much lower when compared to all student groups across the state, including Latinx students and low-income students.

Figure 1. Percentage of Students Meeting UC/CSU Requirements by Student Group



A comparison between EL students in non-charter (n=53,229) and charter schools (n=4,161) shows that while EL students enrolled in non-charter schools had a higher four-year graduation rate (79%) compared to EL students enrolled in charter schools (72%), EL students in charter schools (60%) were more likely to meet UC/CSU entrance requirements than those at non-charter schools (24%) (see Figure 2). Of the 17,496 EL students in alternative schools, only 33.2% graduated within four years. Of these students, less than 3% (n=490) met UC and CSU entrance requirements.

Figure 2. Percent of English Learner Students Meeting UC/CSU Requirements by School Type

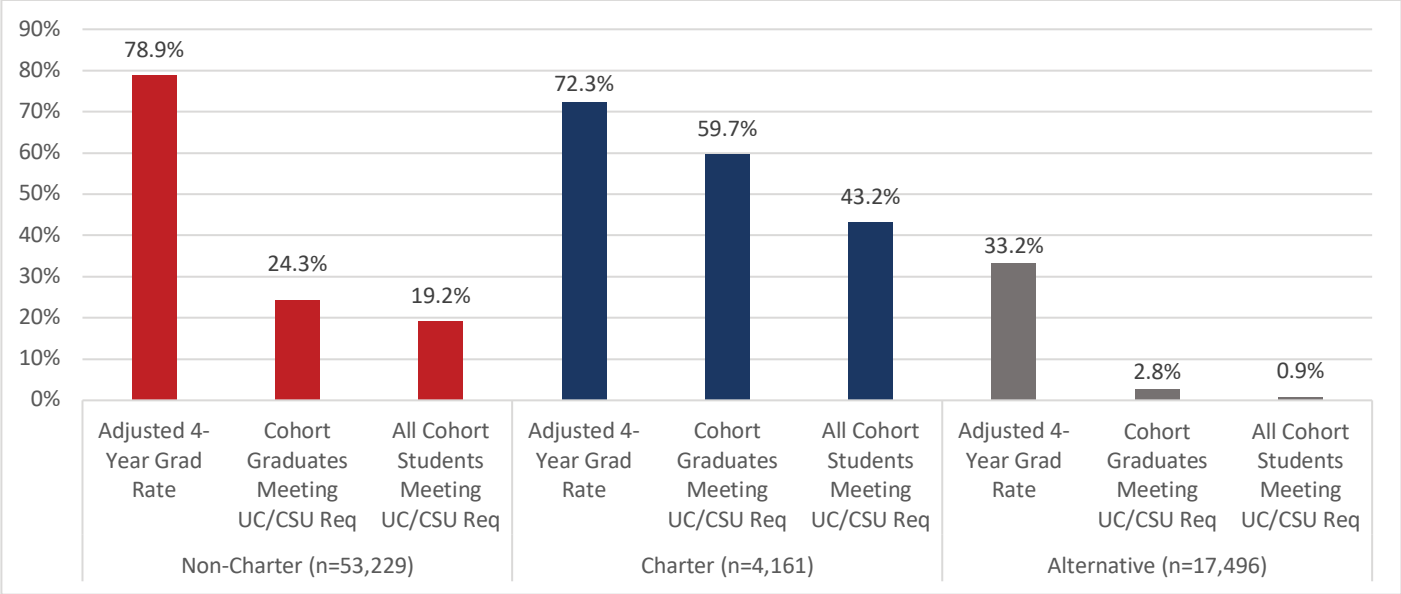
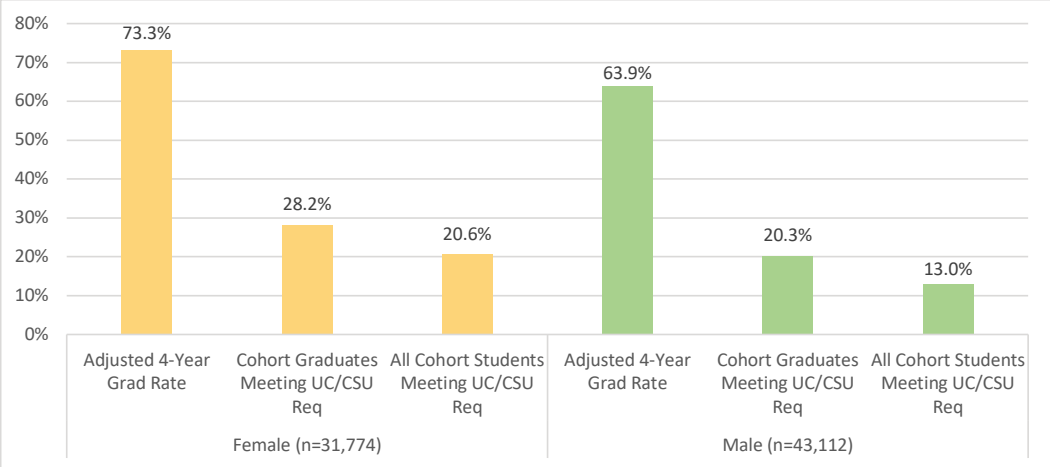


Figure 3 shows EL results based on gender. Although EL female students had a higher rate of graduating in four years (n=23,279; 73.3%) and meeting UC/CSU requirements (n=6,555; 28.2%) than EL male students (n=27,568; 63.9% for ACGR and n=5,610; 20% for UC/CSU requirements) the rate is low across both groups. A look at all four-year cohort EL female (n=31,774) and (n=43,112) students indicates that just one-fifth of EL female students in the class of 2018 met UC/CSU requirements, while only 13% of EL male students did the same.

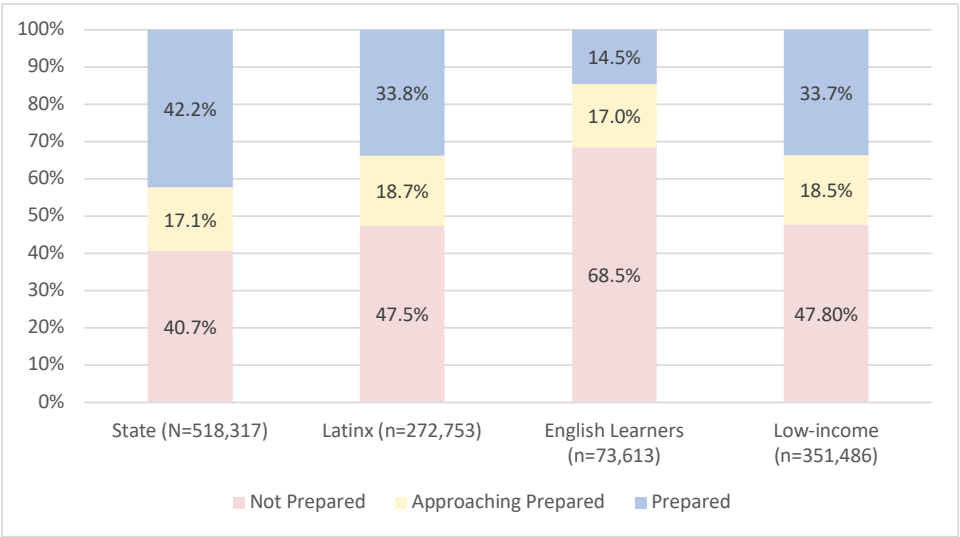
Figure 3. Percent of English Learner Students Meeting UC and CSU Requirements by Gender



CALIFORNIA SCHOOL DASHBOARD - COLLEGE/CAREER INDICATOR

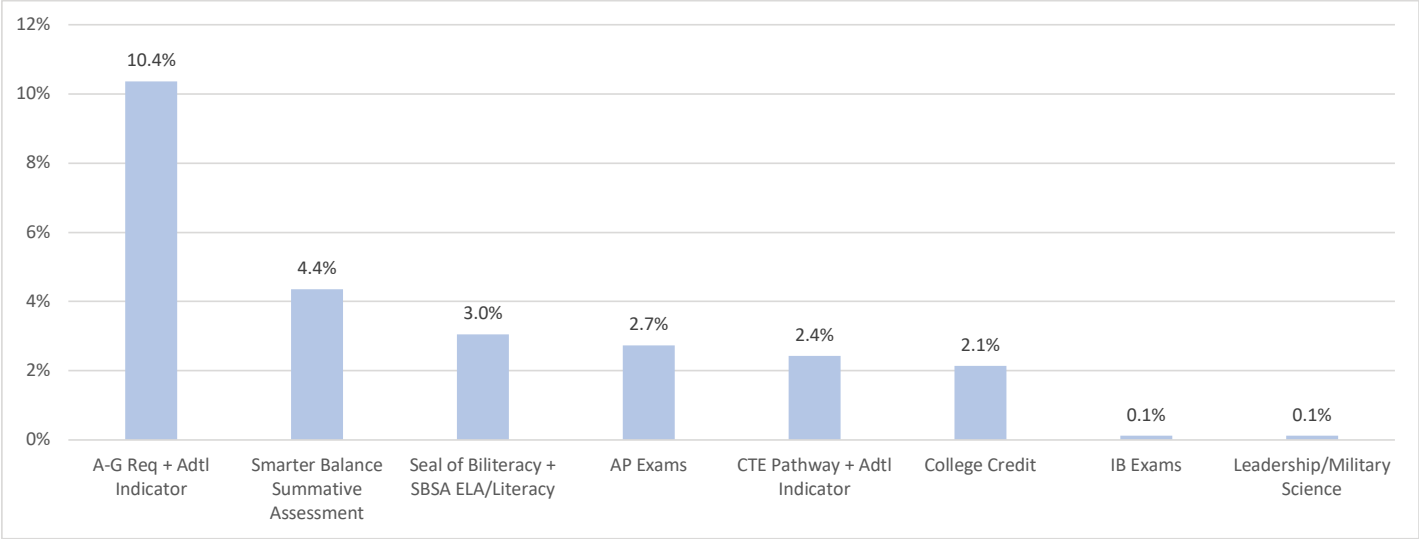
Figure 4 illustrates our analysis of English Learner data for the College/Career Indicator (CCI) on the California Dashboard. The CCI is intended to encourage high schools to design and offer a broad course of study that will prepare all students to succeed after high school by acknowledging students' diverse academic interests to become college and career ready (e.g., completing a-g requirements or a CTE pathway). California Dashboard data indicates that of the 73,613 English Learners in the 2018 sample ELs were less likely to earn "Prepared" in the College/Career Indicator (CCI) in comparison to all students across the state and across Latinx students as a group—14.5% (n=10,690), 42.2% (N=218,729), and 33.8% (n=92,240), respectively.

Figure 4. Percentage of Students Earning "Prepared" in the College/Career Indicator (CCI)



In addition, Figure 5 describes the measures where English Learners earned "Prepared" in the 2017-18 academic year. Of the entire English Learner sample (N=73,613), 10.4% (n=7,624) met the A-G requirements plus an additional criteria (e.g., scored a 3 or higher on one AP exam) while only 2.4% (n=1,789) met the CTE pathway plus an additional criteria. Additionally, three percent (n=2,242) of students completed the Seal of Biliteracy plus the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment in ELA/Literacy. Altogether, these findings demonstrate that while ELs who met a CCI measure were more likely to do so by completing A-G requirements plus an additional indicator, the number of students who earn "Prepared" is dismal when considering all ELs in the state who graduated in 2018.

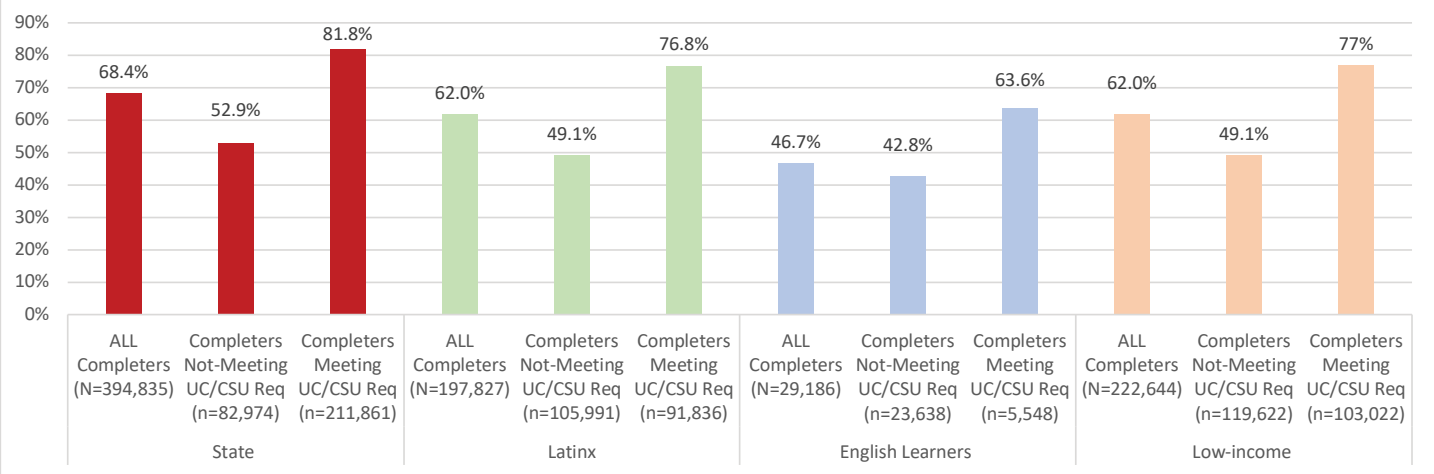
Figure 5. Percentage of "Prepared" English Learners by CCI Measure (N=73,613)



COLLEGE-GOING RATES

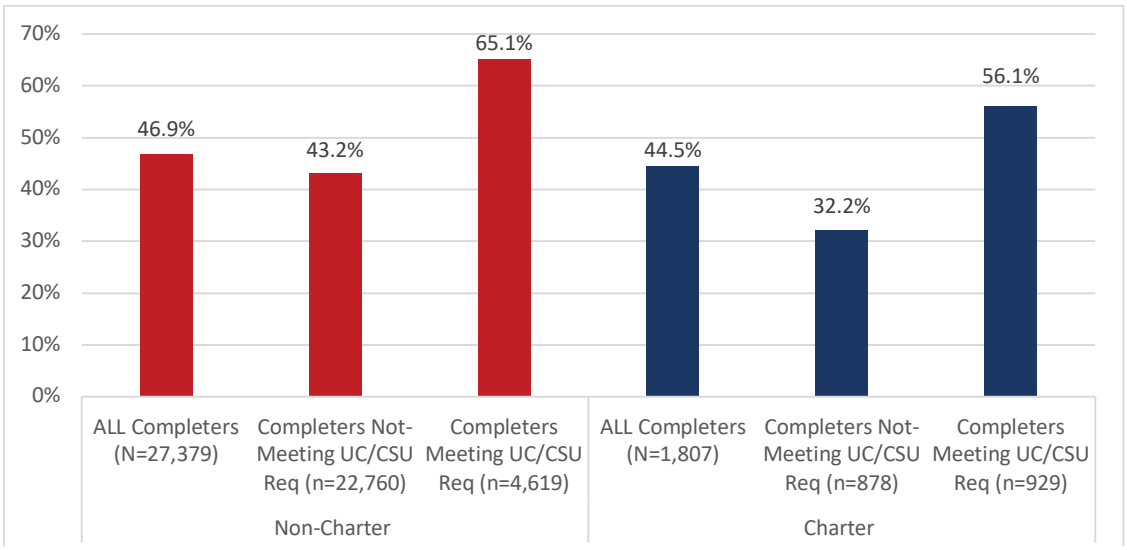
Of the 29,186 EL high school completers in the class of 2018, 46.7% (n=13,604) percent enrolled at a two- or four-year college 12 months after graduating. The college-going rate for ELs is lower when compared to all students in California, Latinx students, and low-income students. Also, Figure 6 shows a gap in enrollment between EL students who met UC/CSU requirements (n=5,548) and those who did not (n=23,638). While 63.6% (n=3,528) of EL high school completers who met UC/CSU enrollment requirements enrolled in college, only 42.8% (n=10,112) of EL high school completers who did not meet UC/CSU requirements did so.

Figure 6. Percentage of the College-going Rate by Student Group



A comparison between EL high school completers in non-charter (N=27,379) versus charter schools (N=1,807) demonstrates that the overall college rate is similar (46.9% versus 44.5%, respectively). However, the college-going rate for completers who met UC/CSU requirements at non-charter schools was nearly ten percent higher than completers at charter schools (65.1% versus 56.1%, respectively) (see Figure 7). A similar trend appears for completers not meeting UC/CSU requirements.

Figure 7. English Learner Students' College-going Rate by School Type



EL female students (N=13,471) enrolled in college at a higher rate than EL male students (N=15,715), 50% versus 44% respectively. However, as Figure 8 shows, the gap in college enrollment diminishes between EL female and EL male students who met UC/CSU requirements. Of EL female students who met UC/CSU requirements (n=3,027), 65% enrolled in college, while 62% of EL male students who met UC/CSU requirements (n=2,521) enrolled in college.

Figure 8. English Learner Students' College-going Rate by Gender

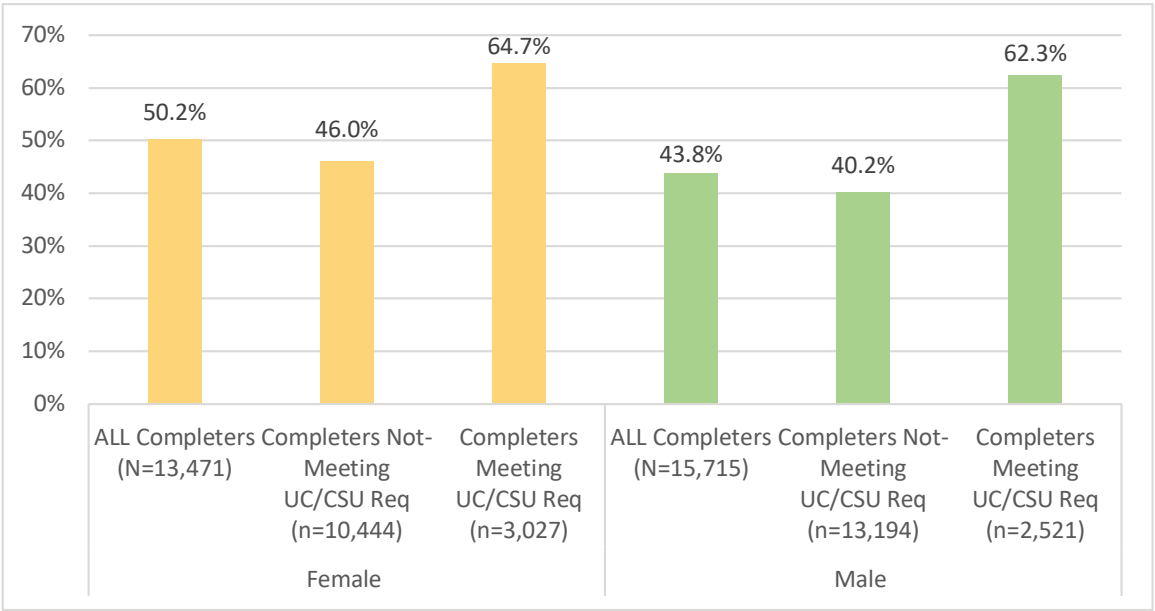
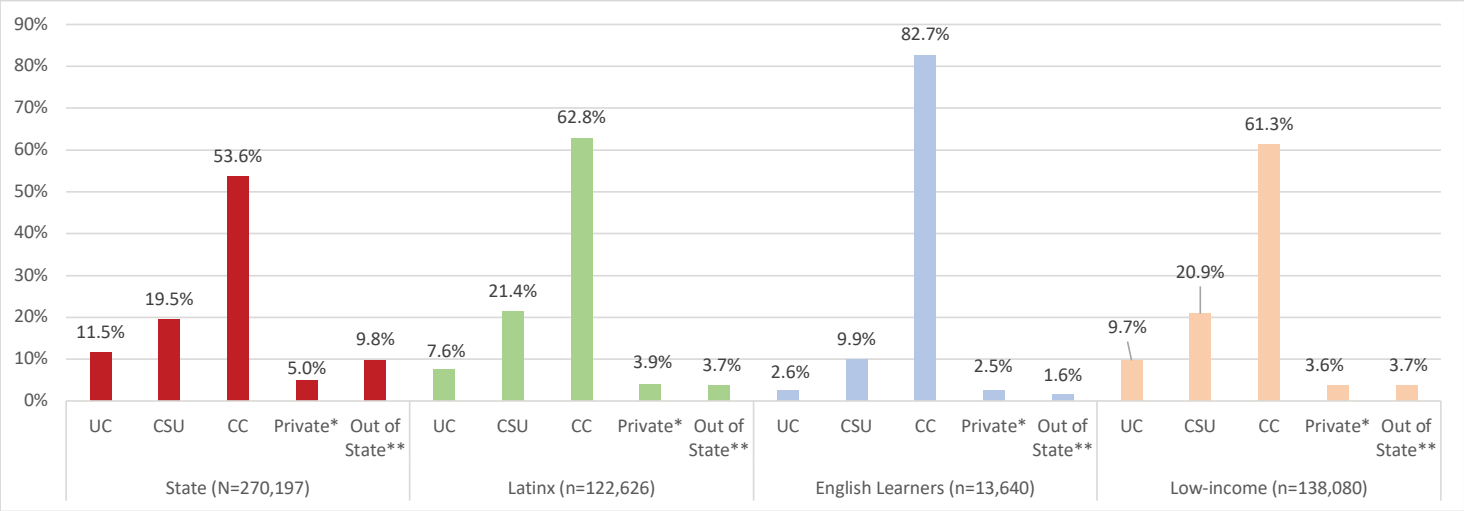


Figure 9 shows EL high school completers in the class of 2018 who enrolled in postsecondary education were more likely than any other group to enroll at a two-year college. Of EL students who enrolled in college 12 months after completing high school, 83% percent enrolled at a community college, 10% enrolled at a CSU, and nearly 3% enrolled at a UC.

Figure 9. College Enrollment by Institution Type



* Includes two- and four-year college; ** Only four-year colleges are included. Enrollment at two-year out-of-state colleges was less than 1% for all groups.

We conclude from the data in Figures 1-9 that California schools are not preparing English Learner (EL) students for college. Moreover, ELs who completed high school in 2018 had the lowest college-going rate in comparison to other student groups and were more likely to enroll at a community college. Differences among ELs in non-charter and charter, as well as by gender were also prominent. ELs in charter schools were more likely to meet UC/CSU requirements while EL female students performed better than male students. Although there are differences in how EL students are counted (e.g., one- versus four-year graduation cohort) and who is included in the EL group (e.g., including or omitting reclassified students in the count), the results provide a snapshot of EL students' college readiness and postsecondary enrollment. In other studies of statewide outcomes for English Learners (Lavadenz et al., 2019), we found that the quest for equity as one of the pillars of the state's school finance and accountability system is still elusive.

POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS: ENGLISH LEARNERS' COLLEGE AND CAREER PREPARATION

Our findings here indicate that attention to programs and practices that provide ELs with opportunities to succeed in college and careers is clearly called for and warrants attention, both locally and statewide. Additional research that follows the same cohort of EL students across college readiness and enrollment outcomes is needed. Analyses are also needed across EL subgroups (e.g., Newcomer, long-term EL, etc.).

The following policy and implementation recommendations highlight the need to provide ELs access to a constellation of college and career preparation supports that are not mutually exclusive and are offered across all levels of the educational system. They are intended to align with the *English Learner Roadmap* and affirm a commitment to improving EL outcomes. They also complement and extend Umansky's (2018) recent work, which highlighted the need for alignment from early childhood education through college. We draw on her work with the aim to deepen efforts to support ELs' across the educational pipeline.

State-Level Recommendations: Systems-wide Improvements and Research

- Reinstate the P–16 Council as a Pre-K through 20 Council to monitor, examine, and understand the conditions that support college and career readiness for ELs and other underrepresented student populations. The P–16 Council was originally commissioned to bring P–16 educational leaders as well as business and community leaders together to improve the quality of education and outcomes.
- Invest and create a state database to track students into postsecondary education and the labor workforce; such a database should include students' EL status.

- Invest in college and career personnel who are culturally and linguistically knowledgeable and responsive to ELs' needs.
- Refine the metrics/measures within the College/Career Indicator to ensure consistency, accuracy, accessibility, and transparency for all stakeholder groups.

District and School- Level Recommendations: Build College Preparatory and Career Course Placement, Success, and Knowledge

- Include a college and career culture framework in the English Learner Master Plans for educators to utilize when making decisions about college and career preparation.
- Integrate the EL Roadmap as part of local and statewide policy alignments that guide educators to increase ELs' college and career readiness across the P-21 systems.
- Integrate college and career practices that foster a college-going identity for students.
- Ensure that professional development and investments in counselors, social workers, and school psychologists are culturally responsive to ELs needs.
- Target PreK-12 college awareness and knowledge for EL and family's needs (e.g., language concerns, financial aid, college rigor).
- Promote additive bilingualism for all students, particularly for English Learners who already possess linguistic resources in more than one language. The term, additive bilingualism, as used here, emphasizes the promotion of a "bilingual advantage" through college and career education.

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Center for Equity for English Learners
ceel@lmu.edu | 310.568.6117
soe.lmu.edu/centers/ceel/
1 LMU Drive Suite 1300
Los Angeles, CA 90045

LMU
Loyola Marymount University