What is the profile of an English learner dropout in Massachusetts?

DESE Office of Planning and Research | Priyanka Kaura

The on-time graduation rate for Massachusetts high school students overall has improved for 11 consecutive years, now standing at 88.3 percent. Graduation rates for subgroups have improved as well—except for English learners (ELs), the one subgroup whose year 4 graduation rate has recently dropped. This report summarizes data on high school English learners, focusing on their annual dropout rates as a predictor of later cohort graduation rates. These data come from the [Analysis of Dropout Data (ADD) tool](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/ewi/analysistool.html) for school year 2016-17 (SY 2017), which districts can use in conjunction with local data to identify and support ELs at risk of dropping out.

## Who were EL dropouts?

* **6.5% of high school EL students dropped out in SY 2017.** 1,154 of the 17,891 high school ELs dropped out. In comparison, 1.5% of high school non-ELs (4,018 out of 272,189) dropped out.
* **22% of dropouts in SY 2017 were ELs** (1,154 out of the 5,172 dropouts), but only 7% of the general high school population were ELs.
* **More than half of EL dropouts (55%) were coded as immigrants**—meaning they were born outside of the U.S. and had been enrolled in public school in the U.S. for less than 3 school years. Among immigrant EL dropouts who were enrolled in the U.S. for less than 3 school years, the most common countries of origin for EL dropouts were Guatemala and El Salvador.
* **77% of EL dropouts spoke Spanish as their first language,** compared to 60 % of EL non-dropouts8% were native Portuguese speakers, and the remaining 15% spoke a different first language.
* **74% of EL dropouts were over age**, compared to 15% of EL non-dropouts.Over age is defined as being two or more years above expected age for their grade by October 1 of the school year.

## What were the academic characteristics of EL dropouts?

Dropouts may lack data academic and behavioral data, especially during the year of dropout, so the following analysis uses student data from the year prior to dropout.

* **Failing one or more courses**: 68% of EL dropouts failed one or more courses the year prior to dropping out. 44% of EL non-dropouts failed one or more courses in SY 2017.
* **Competency Determination (CD):** 21% of 11th and 12th grade EL dropouts attained a CD, meaning they scored high enough on the grade 10 MCAS tests to meet the state high school graduation requirement. 29% of 11th and 12th grade EL non-dropouts attained a CD in SY 2017.
* **Course accumulation:** 52% (174)of 11th and 12th grade EL dropouts had sufficient course data to analyze. Of them, 69% were not close to graduation. 48% of similar EL non-dropouts were not close to graduation.
* **English Proficiency:** 60% of EL Dropouts scored a 2 or lower on their most recent ACCESS test, compared to 40.8% of EL non-dropouts.

Students with Level 1-2 ACCESS scores have at most some social English and general academic language with visual and graphic support.
MCAS data are students’ most recent 10th grade or 8th grade score.
EL dropouts: ACCESS n=967, MCAS Math n=429, MCAS ELA n=435. EL non-dropouts: ACCESS n=16,721, MCAS Math n=11,051, MCAS ELA n=11,266.

## What were the behavioral characteristics of EL dropouts?

* **Absent 10% of days or more:** 84% of EL dropouts were absent 10% or more of their days of enrollment during SY 2017 prior to dropping out, compared to 32% of EL non-dropouts.
* **One or more suspensions**: 22% of EL dropouts were suspended at least once the year before dropping out. 10% of EL non-dropouts were suspended at least once in SY 2017.
* **Multiple indicators:**  The year before they dropped out, 15% (157) failed at least one course, were absent at least 10% of their days of enrollment, and were suspended at least once. 47% (268) showed two of these indicators, 26% showed one, and 11% showed none.

## Spotlight on over age EL dropouts (74% of EL dropouts)

 Among EL dropouts who were two or more years older than the expected age for their grade:

* **37% were retained at least once**, compared to 26% of non-over age EL dropouts.
* **66% scored 1-2 on ACCESS,** compared to 44% of non-over age EL dropouts.
* **21% were not enrolled in public school in MA last year,** compared to 16% of non-over age EL dropouts.
* **61% were immigrants** (born outside the U.S. and were enrolled in school for less than 3 years in the U.S.). In comparison, 38% of non-over age EL dropouts were immigrants.
* **34% were enrolled in 9th grade**, compared to 21% of non-over age EL dropouts.