

The Challenges and Pressures of EL Students and the Alabama Literacy Act

Russellville City Schools

Dr. Heath Grimes, Superintendent

Heather Godwin, System EL Instructional Coach

Angela Richardson, CALT, Literacy Specialist

Introduction:

The Challenges and Pressures of EL Students and the Alabama Literacy Act

Alabama Literacy Act (HB388)

Commencing with the 2021-2022 school year, third grade students shall demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to fourth grade. Students shall be provided all of the following options to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to fourth grade, and the State Superintendent of Education shall provide guidelines for the implementation of this subsection.

Alabama Literacy Act (Retention)

If a student does not demonstrate sufficient reading skills on one of the three options listed in subsection (h) and does not qualify for a good cause exemption, the student may not be promoted to fourth grade.

Subsection (h)

1. Scoring above the lowest achievement level, as determined by rule of the the State Board of Education, on a board approved assessment in reading.
2. Earning an acceptable score on an alternative standardized reading assessment as determined and approved by the State Superintendent of Education.
3. Demonstrating mastery of third grade minimum essential state reading standards as evidenced by a student reading portfolio. (As established by the State Superintendent and the task force.)

Alabama Literacy Act & Retention

No student shall be retained more than **twice** in kindergarten through third grade.

Good Cause Exemptions and the EL Student:

Students identified as English Language Learners who have had less than two years of instruction in English as a second language.

Graduation Effects on Retention

Dropout Rates

When it comes to dropout rates for retained students, the numbers are not very promising. A 2004 longitudinal study of students attending Baltimore Public School found that students who were retained at least once faced a 71 percent likelihood that they would not complete high school. Being retained two or more grades was found to increase the drop out to 80 percent. Students who were retained in both elementary and middle schools dropped out at a rate of 94 percent (Walker, 2017).

Research on Retention

- The disparity between enrollment and retention with ELs appears in nearly every grade.
- ELs are overrepresented among students retained in every grade except kindergarten.
- In 2011-12, ELs had lower high school graduation rates, nationally and across almost all states.

Educational Experiences of English Learners: Grade Retention, High School Graduation, and GED Attainment

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development

Research on Retention

This 14 prospective study investigated the effect of retention in grades 1-5 on high school completion. There were 734, ethnically diverse, academically at-risk students from Texas schools, entered the study in first grade. At the end of 14 years, 477 had earned a diploma, 21 obtained a GED, 110 had dropped out, and 126 were missing completion status.

The negative effect was strongest for African American and Hispanic girls.

This is after only **one year** of retention!

Effect of Early Retention on School Completion: A Prospective Study (2017) Jan N. Hughes, Stephen G. West, Hanjoe Kim, and Shelby S. Bauer

Retention

Retention of ELs shall not be based solely upon level of English language proficiency (Section I, Part G, Guidelines to Satisfy Legal Requirements of Lau v. Nichols). Prior to considering retention of an EL, the following points should be addressed in consultation with the EL Committee.

- What is the student's level of English language proficiency?
- Has an Individual English Language Plan (I-ELP) been implemented to document classroom accommodations and student progress?
- To ensure meaningful participation, are classroom accommodations being made in the areas of:
 - Teacher lesson delivery at student's level of English proficiency?
 - Activities and assignments?
 - Homework?
 - Formal and informal assessments (e.g., quizzes and tests)?
- How much individual English language development instruction is the student receiving during the school day?
- Has an alternate grading strategy been implemented (e.g., a portfolio, checklist, teacher observation, or rubric assessment on content and language objectives)?
- Has the student's classroom teacher been adequately trained with EL instructional and assessment strategies specifically designed for students learning English?
- Do the report cards indicate that students were graded according to their I-ELPs?

Second Language Acquisition - BICS/CALP

Cummins makes the distinction between two differing kinds of language proficiency. BICS are Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills; these are the "surface" skills of listening and speaking which are typically acquired quickly by many students; particularly by those from language backgrounds similar to English who spend a lot of their school time interacting with native speakers.

CALP is Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, and, as the name suggests, is the basis for a child's ability to cope with the academic demands placed upon her in the various subjects. Cummins states that while many children develop native speaker fluency (i.e. BICS) within two years of immersion in the target language, it takes between 5-7 years for a child to be working on a level with native speakers as far as academic language is concerned.

(Jim Cummins, 1979)

Second Language Acquisition

A study, that perhaps represents the “best-case scenario” was conducted in six Arizona schools with well-designed bilingual education programs. Researchers MacSwan and Pray (2005) examined the records of all 89 ELLs who, on enrollment in the district (in grades K-3) had scored a 1 (no English) on the Bilingual Syntax Measure, and who had been tested at every 2 years. The children achieved a 5 or 6 (proficient) after a mean of 3.3 years. English **conversational** proficiency was achieved by about two thirds of the children after 4 years and by more than 90% after 5 years.

Second Language Acquisition

The National Literacy Panel concluded that “considerable future research is needed to develop valid and reliable measures” of academic language proficiency (August & Shanahan, 2006). However, studies conducted to date indicate that it takes 4 to 7 years for ELs to become proficient in academic English.

Collier (1995) found that ELs took **7 to 10** years to develop academic proficiency in English if they had no schooling in their first language and 5 to 7 years to develop such proficiency if they had 2 to 3 years of formal schooling in their native country.



Can Do Descriptors: Grade Level Cluster 1-2

For the given level of English language proficiency and with visual, graphic, or interactive support through Level 4, English language learners can process or produce the **language** needed to:

	Level 1 Entering	Level 2 Beginning	Level 3 Developing	Level 4 Expanding	Level 5 Bridging	Level 6 - Reaching
READING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify symbols, icons, and environmental print Connect print to visuals Match real-life familiar objects to labels Follow directions using diagrams or pictures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Search for pictures associated with word patterns Identify and interpret pre-taught labeled diagrams Match voice to print by pointing to icons, letters, or illustrated words Sort words into word families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make text-to-self connections with prompting Select titles to match a series of pictures Sort illustrated content words into categories Match phrases and sentences to pictures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put words in order to form sentences Identify basic elements of fictional stories (e.g., title, setting, characters) Follow sentence-level directions Distinguish between general and specific language (e.g., flower v. rose) in context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin using features of non-fiction text to aid comprehension Use learning strategies (e.g., context clues) Identify main ideas Match figurative language to illustrations (e.g., “as big as a house”) 	
WRITING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copy written language Use first language (L1, when L1 is a medium of instruction) to help form words in English Communicate through drawings Label familiar objects or pictures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide information using graphic organizers Generate lists of words/phrases from banks or walls Complete modeled sentence starters (e.g., “I like ____.”) Describe people, places, or objects from illustrated examples and models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in prewriting strategies (e.g., use of graphic organizers) Form simple sentences using word/phrase banks Participate in interactive journal writing Give content-based information using visuals or graphics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce original sentences Create messages for social purposes (e.g., get well cards) Compose journal entries about personal experiences Use classroom resources (e.g., picture dictionaries) to compose sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a related series of sentences in response to prompts Produce content-related sentences Compose stories Explain processes or procedures using connected sentences 	

Simple View of Reading



Recognizing words in text & sounding them out phonemically

The ability to understand language

The ability to read and obtain meaning from what was read

Challenges/Implications For English Learners



Language development

- Language develops across different levels of language proficiency.
- Practice using language in the four language domain (reading, writing, listening, speaking)



Phonological awareness

- Some phonemes may not be present in ELs' native language and, therefore, may be difficult for a student to pronounce and distinguish auditorily, as well as to place into a meaningful context
- Teachers can enable phonemic awareness in English for ELs by understanding the linguistic characteristics of students' native language, including the phonemes that exist and do not exist in the native language.



Phonics

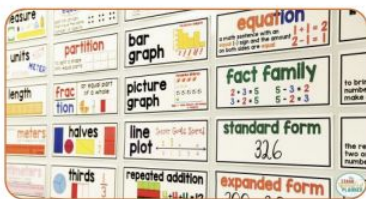
- English consonant and vowel sounds, and their numerous spellings may present a challenge to literate ELs learning to read English because the one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds
- Students may have learned to read and write in a native language in which the letters correspond to different sounds than they do in English

Challenges/Implications For English Learners



Fluency

- students need to see and hear literally hundreds of books over a school year in order for fluency to be modeled to them
- oral proficiency provides a foundation to support subsequent learning about the alphabetic principle



Vocabulary

- in order to read fluently and comprehend what is written, students need to use not just phonics, but context
- BISC/CALP



Comprehension

- Not to be taught in isolation

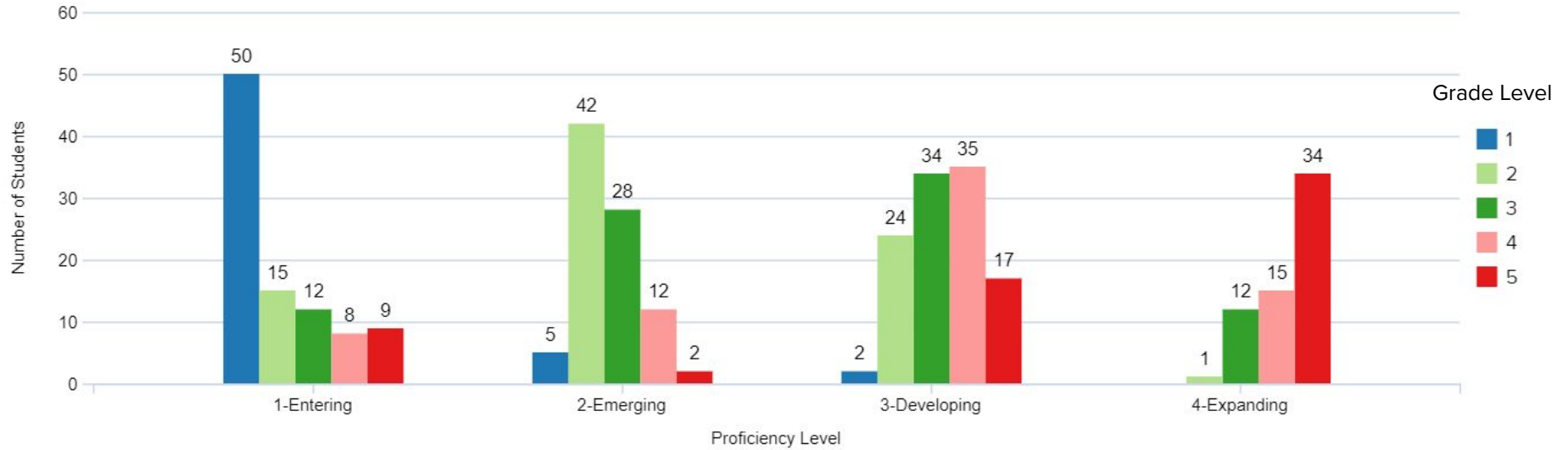
Our ELs

- In the past five years, a third of our newcomers have limited or interrupted formal education, or no previous formal education at all.
- Most of the parents of these students are illiterate. The inability of the parents to read and write in their own language results in the inability to help their children at home.
- Many of our students from Guatemala speak a dialect at home. They learn Spanish at school when speaking to their peers, then begin to learn English as well.
- So truly, the only exposure to the English language these students get is at school.

ACCESS Scores Data

- ACCESS is the test used to assess English language proficiency.
- The lowest you can score is a level 1.0 and the highest is a 6.0.
- In Alabama, students are considered proficient in English once they score a level 4.8.
- In recent years, 83% of our students who have exited the program have done so at the end of 4th or 5th grade, after 5 or 6 years of school.

ACCESS Scores Data



ACADEMICS

- INTENSIVE INTERVENTIONS
- Individual Students
 - Diagnostic Assessments
 - High Intensity

TIER III

5%

TIER III

BEHAVIOR

- INTENSIVE INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTIONS
- Individual Students
 - Assessment-Based
 - Intense Durable Procedures

- TARGETED INTERVENTIONS
- Some Students (at risk)
 - Rapid Response
 - Frequent Progress Monitoring

TIER II

15%

TIER II

- TARGETED GROUP INTERVENTIONS
- Some Students (at risk)
 - Rapid Response
 - Frequent Progress Monitoring

- RESEARCH-BASED
CORE INSTRUCTION
- All Students
 - Prevention
 - Early Intervention

TIER I

80%

TIER I

- UNIVERSAL INTERVENTIONS
- All Settings, All Students
 - Preventive, Proactive
 - Classroom Management

ALL 3 TIERS FOCUS ON ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES
IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SETTING

Russellville City Schools K-3 Tiers Academics

Intensive Interventions

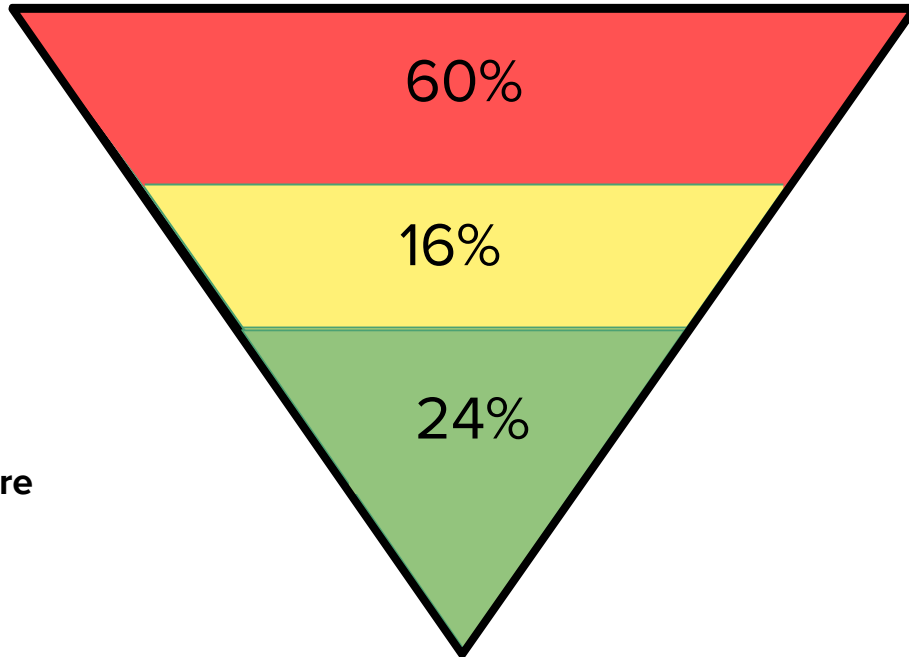
- Individual Students
- Diagnostic Assessments
- High Intensity

Target Interventions

- Some Students (at risk)
- Rapid Response
- Frequent Progress Monitoring

Research Based Core Instruction

- All Students
- Prevention
- Early Interventions



Tier 3

Tier 2

Tier 1

Current Resources & Strategies

- Personnel K-3 (West Elementary & Russellville Elementary)
 - EL: 4
 - Interventionist: 5
 - Literacy Specialist: 2
 - Instructional Coach: 1
- Students in Tier 3
 - There are 475 students in need of 45 minutes a day, small group (1-4 students) explicit, systematic, direct instruction

Current Resources & Strategies

- Technology/Programs we use:
 - Imagine Learning
 - Reading Horizons
 - Heggerty
 - Wonders
 - Brainpop EL
 - Chromebook & iPad Carts
- Reading Intervention
- At-Risk
- EL Program-Push-in & Pull-out
- Newcomer Program

The Math on Intervention with an Inverted Triangle

If interventionists and EL teachers met with 8 groups of 4 per day that would equal: 32 Students (This is the maximum)

Four EL Teachers: 128 Students

Five Intervention Teachers: +160 Students

288 Students

K-3 has 475 students who need Tier 3 Intervention

475

-288

187 Students

187 which would require **5.84** additional units for intervention and EL teachers

Resources Necessary for Implementation of the Alabama Literacy Act

- 66% of our Tier 3 Students are ELs, that is 313 students.
- 313 students require approximately 9.8 EL teachers and in K-3 we have 4.
- We have a 5.8 teacher unit deficit according to what is needed for our EL population.

Questions/Comments

Contact Information:

Dr. Heath Grimes, Superintendent Russellville City Schools

heath.grimes@rcs.k12.al.us

Heather Godwin, System EL Instructional Coach

heather.godwin@rcs.k12.al.us

Angela Richardson, CALT, Literacy Specialist

angela.richardson@rcs.k12.al.us