

Diverse Learners on the Road to Success

The Performance of
New York City's English Language Learners

Office of English Language Learners, 2009



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Data Notes

In this report, performance data, originating at the New York State Education Department, is disaggregated by New York City subpopulation by analysts in the New York City Department of Education's Office of Accountability. This office shares the data with staff in the Office of English Language Learners, who verify, analyze, and present the data.

This report compares the proficiency rates of student groups, year to year, since Children First reforms and does not track the progress of individual students over time. Changes to tests and testing policies based on evolving federal and State laws (e.g., No Child Left Behind) and local reforms make drawing statistically valid conclusions challenging. For instance, in 2005-06, the New York State Education Department expanded the ELA and math testing programs to grades 3-8. Previously, State tests, which included multiple-choice and extended-response questions, were administered in grades 4 and 8 and citywide tests (multiple-choice only) were administered in grades 3, 5, 6, and 7. While the combined proficiency rates for State tests, 3-8, provide a useful overview, deeper analysis in this report relies on State tests for grades 4 and 8 as more thorough and consistent performance indicators over time. Also, performance data from 2008 is routinely compared to 2003 as a more consistent indicator for ELLs, as it is the last testing cycle before ELL reforms were launched in June 2003.

Comparisons presented here are descriptive in nature and graphs are sourced and dated. The population of ELLs often varies for each data set, not only because differing policies apply to each test, but also because ELLs may enter and exit the school system at any time during the school year. The narrative describes populations and conditions as accurately as possible based on the available data.

Executive Summary

Under 2003 Children First reforms launched by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein, a stronger system-wide infrastructure for the education of English Language Learners (ELLs) is starting to bear fruit. Initiatives like a citywide language allocation policy, more comprehensive ELL assessments, thoughtful accountability metrics for schools, better funding allocations for ELLs, and wider, more rigorous professional development are creating gains for ELLs. However, students who receive (current ELLs) or have received (former ELLs) ELL services—currently 26% of the City’s public school student population—are not a monolithic group. To better understand who among them are succeeding (by language group and learning needs), where more work is needed, and how best to define ELL success, a more comprehensive look at the measurement and performance of New York City ELL data is required.

ELLs have made gains on State tests of language, literacy, and mathematics since Children First reforms were enacted for ELLs in 2003. For instance:

- In 2008, 13.4% of ELLs reached English proficiency as determined by the New York State English as a Second Language Test (NYSESLAT) compared with 3.7% in 2003.
- On the State English Language Arts (ELA) test, the share of fourth-grade ELL test takers meeting standards rose from 4.3% in 2003 to 29.4% in 2008, and eighth graders from 0.7% in 2003 to 5.2% in 2008.
- On the State mathematics test, the share of fourth-grade ELL test takers meeting standards rose from 36.1% in 2003 to 63.9% in 2008, and eighth graders from 14.2% in 2003 to 42.4% in 2008.

Elementary ELLs continue to make larger gains than middle school ELLs, highlighting reform work at the elementary level. The less dramatic gains by middle schools ELLs, relatively flat Regents scores, and flat graduation rates (31.6% in 2003 and 30.8% in 2007) underscore the immediate demand for deeper, more focused attention on subpopulations with specialized learning needs. These subpopulations, prevalent in the upper grades, include Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and long-term ELLs.

Finally, the report highlights the outstanding performance of former ELLs, a group that not only outperforms all other groups on State literacy and math tests at all levels, but also has higher graduation rates (70.9%) and lower dropout rates (9.7%) than even English proficient students who were never ELLs (63.5% and 13.0%, respectively). Including the performance of former ELLs is key to evaluating the overall effectiveness of ELL programs under reforms.

By targeting supports, providing rigorous core academics, and focusing on academic language development and literacy in the native language and English, schools can unlock the potential shown in the successful outcomes of former ELLs at all levels of schooling. Schools that nurture multi-linguistic skills create academic and cognitive benefits for their students, and make schools richer places to learn, placing them at the heart of stronger, more responsible communities for our youngest new citizens.

Introduction

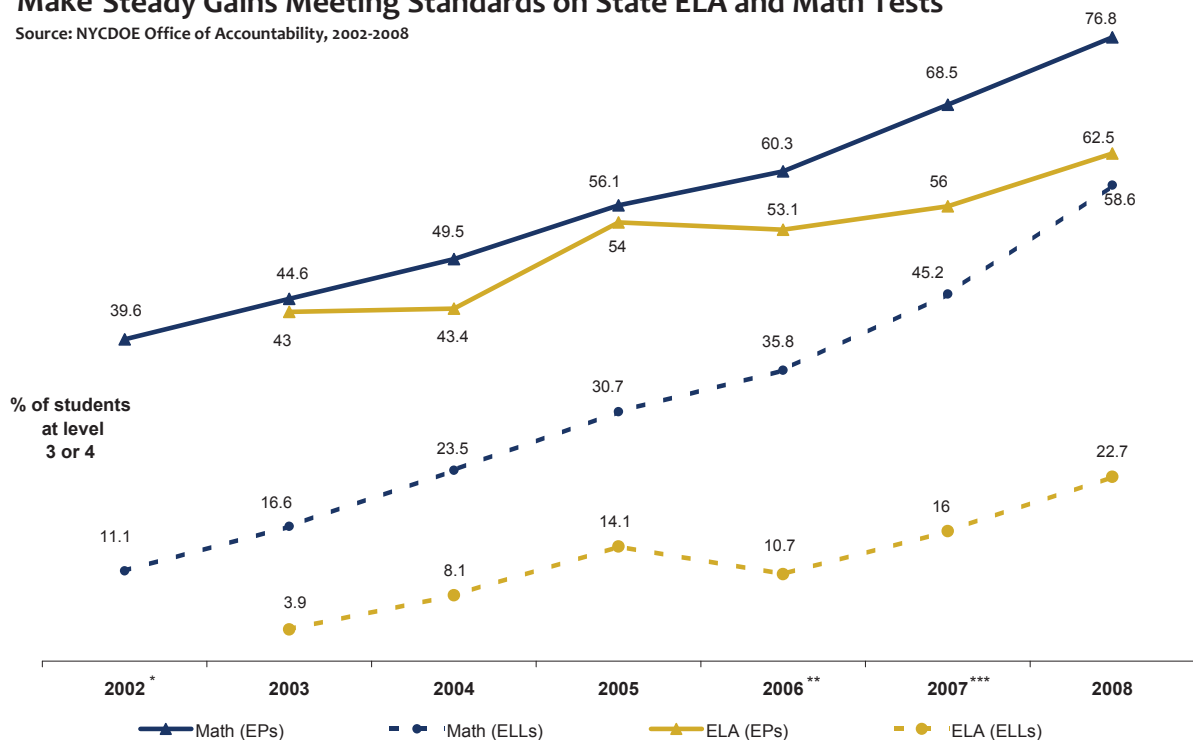
In October 2002, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel I. Klein unveiled a new plan for New York City (NYC) public schools called the Children First reform agenda. In June 2003, as part of this bold agenda, the Chancellor allocated an unprecedented amount of resources and attention to improve education for English Language Learners (ELLs), mainly by

- aligning ELL programs to the new English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics core curriculum and standards,
- building the capacity of all educators to deliver coherent programs and high-quality instruction,
- implementing effective assessments,
- holding schools and principals accountable, and
- increasing parental participation in the education of ELLs.

As a result, key ELL initiatives have resulted in a stronger, system-wide infrastructure for ELL education, including a citywide language allocation policy, periodic ELL assessments, thoughtful

Figure 1. ELLs and English Proficient (EP) Students, Grades 3-8, Make Steady Gains Meeting Standards on State ELA and Math Tests

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2002-2008



Notes:* In 2002, Grade 7 test ELA scores were not released because they appeared inconsistent with other available information. ** In 2005-06, the NYSED expanded the ELA and mathematics testing programs to Grades 3-8. *** In 2006-07, ELL testing policy expanded to include all ELLs in an ELSS more than one year.

accountability metrics for schools, appropriate allocations for ELLs through fair student funding and specialized grants, and widely used quality teaching practices for ELLs through rigorous and sustained professional development. Within this new environment, overall improvements by ELLs on State tests for grades 3-8 have generally met or exceeded gains made by English proficient students (see Fig. 1). While these results are a move in the right direction, educators acknowledge that higher gains are needed to narrow the achievement gap.

This report presents performance data to demonstrate both the inroads that have been made since the implementation of ELL reforms, as well as areas that continue to require attention, especially among subpopulations of ELLs with specialized needs. To deepen the discussion of how ELL improvements are measured, the report presents familiar measures in more comprehensive ways. For instance, the analysis of how ELLs are faring is no longer limited to current ELLs—a group whose performance is disproportionately influenced by new arrivals who have no command of English and struggling learners who require more time to learn English. The high performers of the ELL subgroup are typically excluded as they become proficient in English, becoming *former ELLs* (see Table 1). This report includes the performance of

Table 1. English Language Learners (ELLs) and Subgroups

English Language Learners (ELLs)	ELLs are students who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken and who score below a State-designated level of proficiency on a test of English language skills.
Former ELLs	Students that have reached proficiency on a test of English language skills and no longer require ELL services.
Long-term ELLs	Students who have completed at least six years of ELL services in New York City schools and continue to require them.
Special Education ELLs	ELLs served by an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). An IEP team determines eligibility for special education services and, if eligible, the language in which the special education service is delivered.
Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE)	ELLs who have entered a US school after second grade; have had at least two years less schooling than their peers; function at least two years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics; and may be pre-literate in their first language.

both ELLs and former ELLs who, combined, account for 26% of the student population in New York City public schools (General Register, November 2008, n=1,190,186). In other words, one out of every four students in New York City participates or has participated in ELL programs, and are the beneficiaries of departmental and school improvements for ELLs. Including former ELLs in performance analyses provides a more complete picture of ELL program effectiveness and emphasizes the significance of English proficiency benchmarks as a predictor of success.

This report also acknowledges the diversity among ELLs by looking at performance by subpopulations—not just by language groups and school levels—but also by the types of learners who make up the ELL population. By looking at subgroups of learners with specific needs (Table 1), such as Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) or long-term ELLs, we can anticipate where stronger, more targeted academic supports are critical to create the dramatic, long-lasting improvements we seek. This is especially the case for adolescent ELLs who enter the system with a variety of challenges, often including interrupted or intermittent schooling.

Looking at the performance of various ELL subgroups alongside former ELLs allows schools to acknowledge what their school might look like if the needs of all ELLs are met. By targeting supports, providing rigorous core academics, and focusing on academic language development and literacy in the native language and English, schools can unlock the potential shown in the successful outcomes of former ELLs at all levels of schooling. Schools that place a premium on knowing more than one language and nurture these skills create academic and cognitive benefits for their students. More broadly, it makes schools richer places to learn, placing them at the heart of stronger, more responsible communities for our youngest new citizens.

Language and Literacy

Table 2. ELL Proficiency Rates on the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT)

Source: ATS, 2003-08

Year	Number	(%) of ELLs
2003	4,306	3.7
2004	15,839	12.0
2005	19,237	14.4
2006	23,121	16.7
2007	15,932	12.0
2008	17,986	13.4

Note: These numbers represent different ELL cohorts. In addition, the State has refined assessments each year during these testing cycles.

Initially, ELLs are identified and placed using the Language Assessment Battery-Revised (LAB-R), a test of English proficiency originally created by the New York City Department of Education, and adopted by the State Education Department. Once a student is designated an ELL, the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) is administered each spring to determine continued eligibility for ELL services. The NYSESLAT assesses English language development skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. ELLs who score at or above proficiency on the NYSESLAT are no longer eligible for ELL services the following school year (but may receive up to two years of extra language

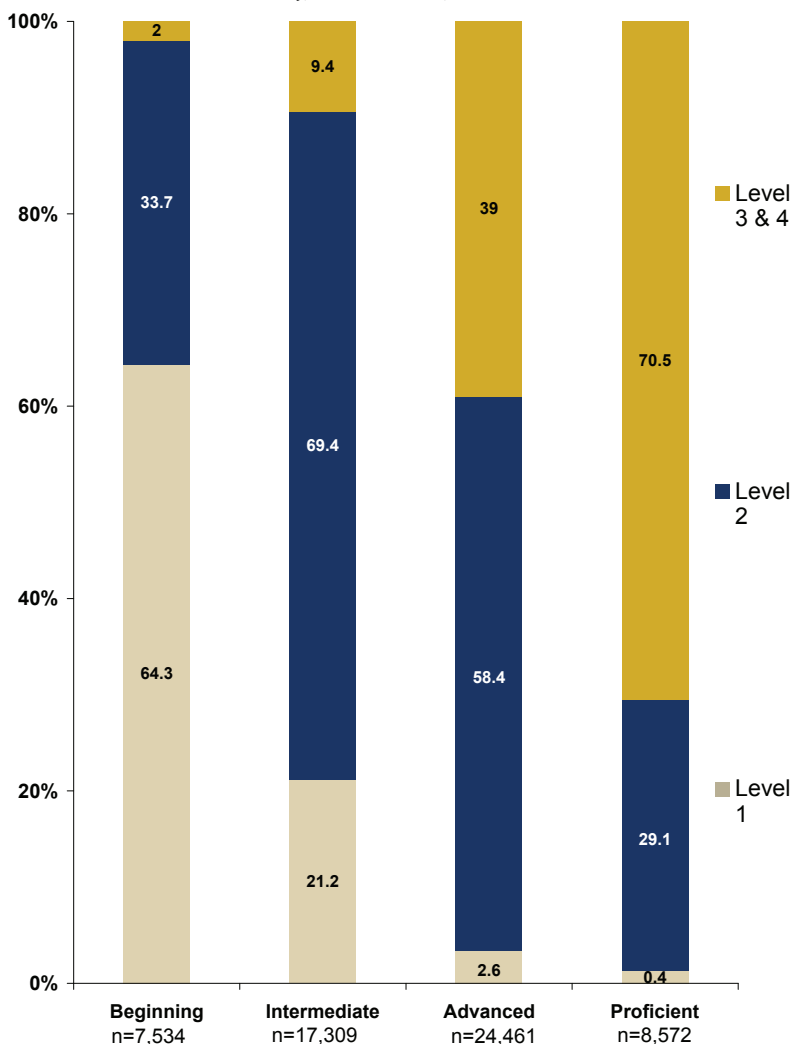
support, as needed). Teachers also use NYSESLAT results to guide instruction and document the progress of each student's English language development.

More than four times as many ELLs reached English proficiency (as determined by the NYSESLAT) in 2008 (17,986 or 13.4% of ELLs) compared with 2003 (4,306, or 3.7%). The percentage of ELLs reaching English proficiency on the NYSESLAT each year is the share of students who become former ELLs the following school year (as they are no longer eligible for ELL services). Since 2004, the share has fluctuated within a relatively limited range of 12-16.7%, with the caveat that the test has changed each year.

The New York State Education Department's English Language Arts (ELA) test for grades 3-8 measures students' reading, listening, and writing abilities in English. The test, administered each January, is based on what students should know and be able to do in English Language Arts at their grade level according to State standards. ELLs are allowed a limited number of accommodations, including extended time, separate location, bilingual glossaries, and a third reading of listening selections. While there are State diagnostic and new interim assessments of native language literacy that schools can use as needed (e.g., the Spanish Language Assessment Battery), there are no high-stakes native language arts tests comparable to the ELA 3-8 for use in a citywide analysis of parallel schooling and native language literacy.

Figure 2. Performance of ELLs on the 2008 State ELA Test, Grades 3-8, by NYSESLAT Proficiency Level

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2008. Notes: n=57,876



Coupling 2008 NYSESLAT results with scores from the 2008 State ELA tests for grades 3-8 highlights the NYSESLAT as an important benchmark for predicting performance on other tests in English. In Figure 2, most beginning- and intermediate-level ELLs do not meet standards (scoring a 3 or 4) on the ELA, but instead score a 1 or 2. Among ELLs at the advanced level of the NYSESLAT, 39% meet ELA standards and very few score a 1 on the ELA exam. Of those proficient in English on the NYSESLAT, a majority (70.5%) meet ELA standards. This analysis more fully illustrates how ELL subgroup performance

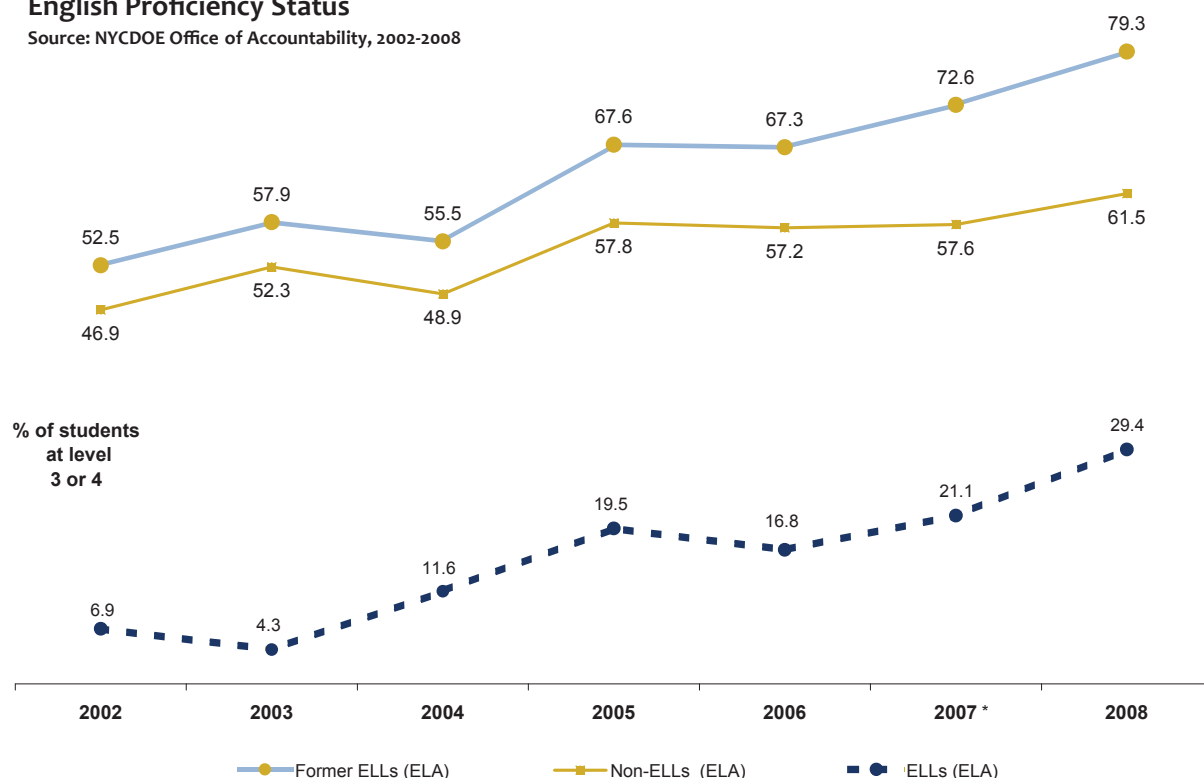
measures are disproportionately affected by the scores of newcomers with little or no English, while those reaching English proficiency who tend to do well on measures of literacy leave the subgroup. Because a majority of the ELLs who met standards on the March 2008 ELA, grades 3-8, also tested proficient on the NYSESLAT in the 2007-08 school year, their performance on State tests do not count in the ELL subgroup in the 2008-09 school year. When 2008-09 State test results are reported, the performance of former ELLs will be included among English proficient students.

To capture ELLs who have met the benchmark of English proficiency on the NYSESLAT, the Department now tracks and reports performance measures by English proficiency status (ELL, non-ELL, or former ELL). (Non-ELLs are students who are English proficient and have never required ELL services during their tenure.)

Compared with proficiency rates when Children First reforms for ELLs were implemented in 2003, the percentage of ELLs meeting ELA standards, grades 3-8, is now 18.8 percentage points higher (Figure 1, p. 3). This is despite a change in the ELA exemption policy* for ELLs in 2006-07 requiring all ELLs in a US school system for more than one year (previously it was three years) to take the ELA. This change resulted in more than doubling the number of ELL test takers in 2006-07 compared with the year before, yet gains continued.

Figure 3. Students Meeting Standards on 4th Grade State ELA Tests by English Proficiency Status

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2002-2008



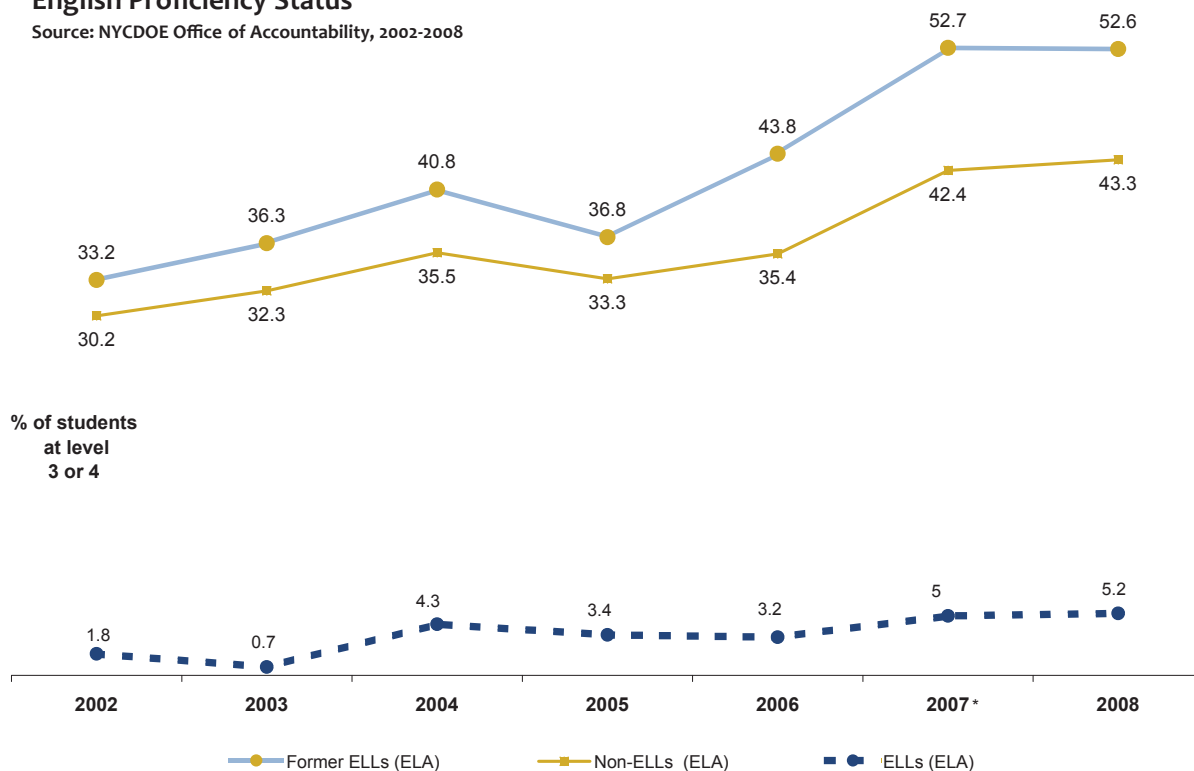
Notes: *Starting in 2006-07, all ELLs in US schools more than one year are required to take the ELA. Before 2006-07, ELLs in US schools less than three years were exempt from taking the ELA test.

While these are promising results, a closer look at State ELA tests for grades 4 (Figure 3) and 8 (Figure 4, next page) by English proficiency status show different levels of progress among ELLs. Gains among fourth-grade ELLs are steady (up 25.1 percentage points since the 2003 reforms began) and strong. In fact, in the last year, fourth-grade ELLs more than doubled (up 8.3 percentage points) and former ELLs nearly doubled (up 6.7 percentage points) the gains made by non-ELLs (up 3.9 percentage points) on the ELA. However, ELLs meeting learning standards in grade 8 made

*Before 2006-07, exemptions were allowed on the ELA exam for ELLs enrolled less than three years in an English language school system, or students in year four or five who qualified for a State Education Department approved Extension of Services.

Figure 4. Students Meeting Standards on 8th Grade State ELA Tests by English Proficiency Status

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2002-2008



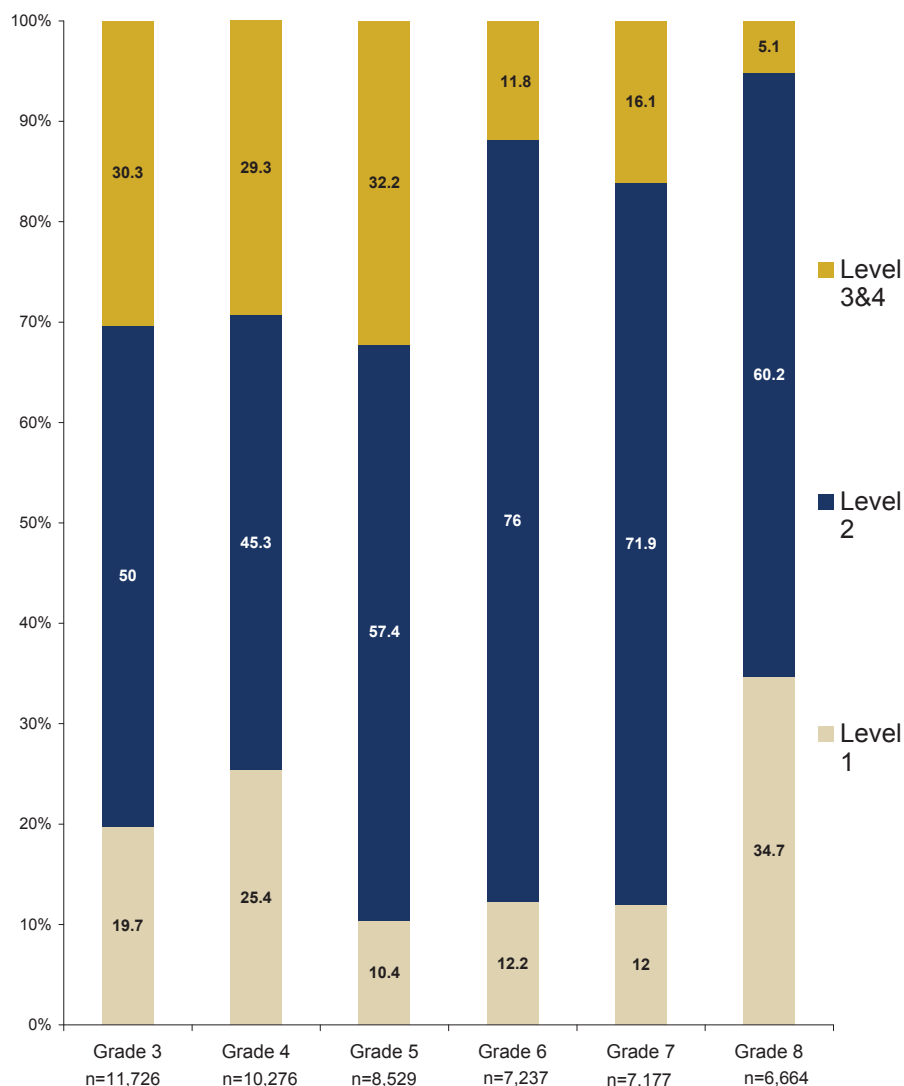
Notes: *Starting in 2006-07, all ELLs in US schools more than one year are required to take the ELA. Before 2006-07, ELLs in US schools less than three years were exempt from taking the ELA test.

only slight gains, both in the last year and since 2003. Eighth-grade ELLs have gained only 4.5 percentage points since the beginning of Children First reforms, compared with an 11.0 point gain by non-ELLs and a 16.3 percentage point gain by former ELLs.

Results from the 2008 State ELA, grades 3-8, among ELLs by grade level provide another view of ELLs in the early grades outperforming middle school ELLs (Figure 5). In particular, more eighth graders score at level 1 on the ELA than any other grade. A look at the demographic makeup of 2008 eighth-grade ELL test takers reveals that, not only is it the smallest population of ELL test takers among grades 3-8, but its students face a variety of academic challenges. More than one-third (37%) are newcomers, almost 40% are either Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) or Special Education ELLs, and about one-third (33%) are long-term ELLs. Research on the characteristics of both SIFE and long-term ELLs in New York City finds that, while these are two distinct subgroups with specialized needs, both groups share histories of inconsistent schooling and program participation resulting in low literacy levels. The prevalence of specialized needs among

Figure 5. More ELLs in Elementary Grades Reach Proficiency on the 2008 State ELA Test Than ELLs in Middle School

Source: Office of Accountability, 2008



eighth-grade ELLs, and the significant increase in academic English language and subject matter demands from the fourth to the eighth grade, are two factors that may explain why few reach standards.

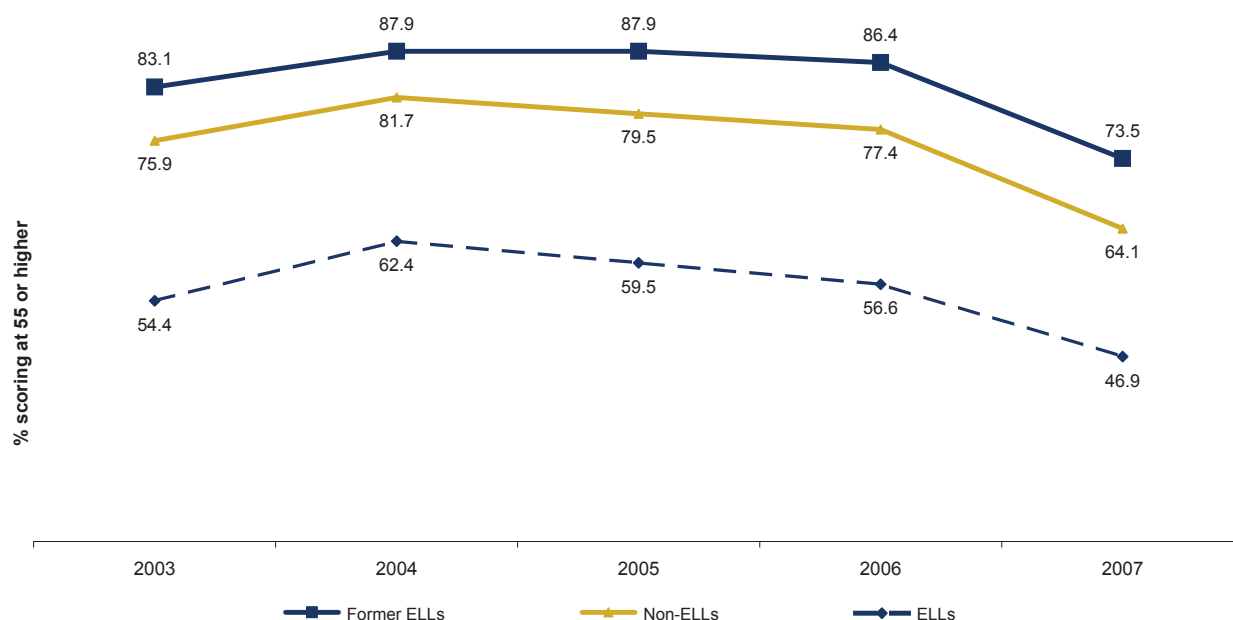
Struggling ELL subpopulations also tend to exist in higher concentrations among high school ELLs, a population assessed using the New York State Regents exam for English Language Arts. Passing this exam is a requirements for graduation. The exam measures students' reading,

writing, and listening abilities based on State standards and related to information and understanding; literary response and expression; and critical analysis and evaluation. Regents ELA data from 2003-07 show that, while the percentage of ELLs scoring at 55 or above is consistently lower than those of non-ELLs and former ELLs (Figure 6, next page), results tend to trend together over time, indicating that factors such as year-to-year changes in the test have an impact on all groups.

The lack of strong ELA performance gains among middle school ELLs, especially eighth graders, and high school ELLs underscores the importance of targeting the academic needs of specialized

Figure 6. Students Scoring at 55 or Above on the English Language Arts Regents Exam by English Proficiency Status

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2003-2007



populations, mainly to strengthen literacy skills in the native language as students develop English. The benchmark of English proficiency is further highlighted by the performance of former ELLs, who, on all indicators, outperform ELLs and non-ELLs.

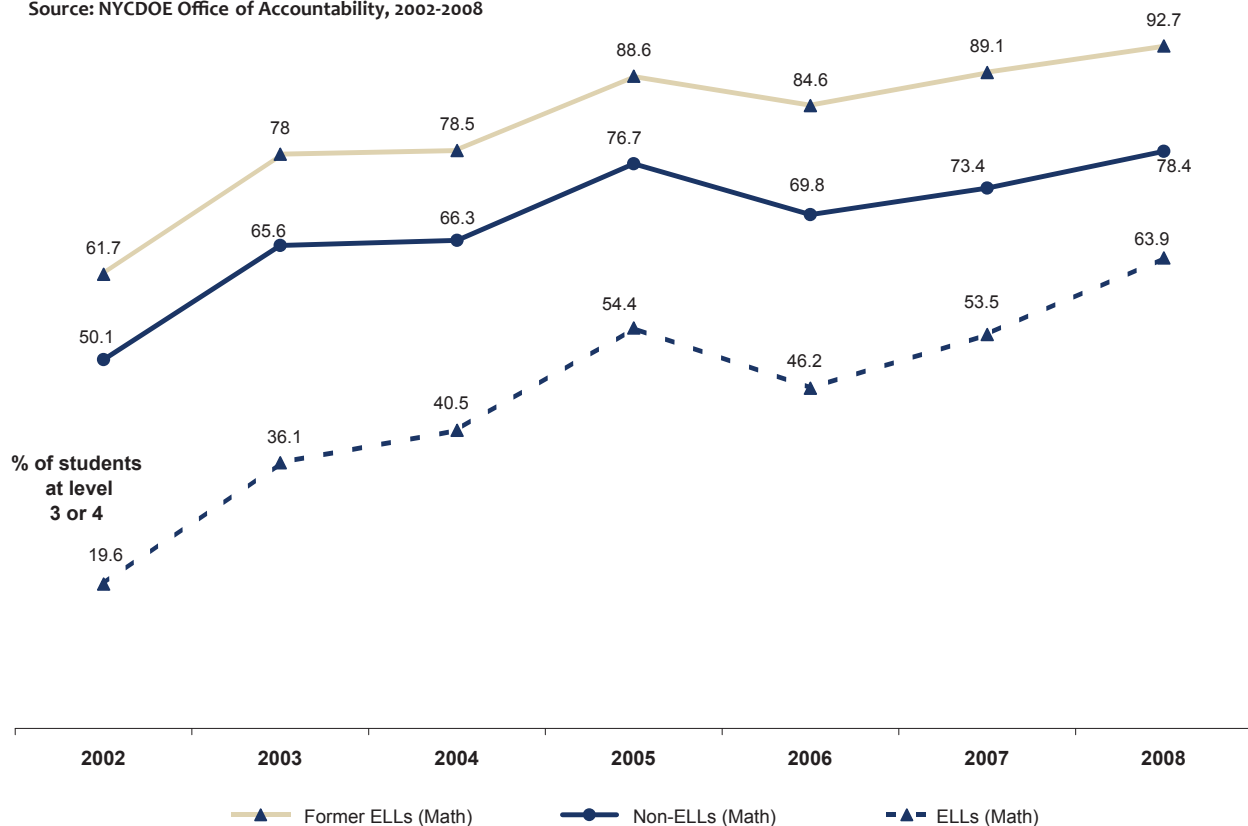
The results of this analysis are in keeping with early Children First reforms to strengthen language development and literacy teaching and learning skills for ELLs, especially in the early grades. Curriculum coherence, strengthening the alignment between English as a Second Language (ESL) and ELA, deep and sustained professional development (e.g., Quality Teaching for English Learners, Native Language and Literacy Institutes), and access to native language resources (e.g., native language libraries) have generated gains for many ELLs. Also, collaborative planning and co-teaching by general education and ESL teachers in the elementary grades may have contributed to gains for these students. However, the analysis of the various academic challenges faced by eighth-grade ELLs highlights an area of critical and immediate need on which many of the current initiatives focus (see Conclusion). Efforts to create secondary school gains focus on more collaborations between ELA and ESL teachers using inquiry teams and/or professional learning communities, structures, and protocols. Schools are also encouraged to provide extended time to build literacy competencies in English and the native language while accelerating background knowledge in ELA content, an effective strategy for adolescent ELLs.

Mathematics

The New York State Mathematics test for grades 3-8 assesses students abilities to solve problems and to demonstrate an understanding of basic concepts and procedures. The test is administered to all ELLs, grades 3-8, each spring, and measures what students should know and be able to do in mathematics at their grade level based on State standards. Testing accommodations for ELLs are permitted including extended time, separate testing locations, simultaneous use of English- and alternative language-editions, use of bilingual dictionaries/glossaries, oral translations for lower-incidence languages, and written responses in the native language.

Figure 7. Students Meeting Standards on 4th Grade State Math Tests by English Proficiency Status

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2002-2008



The percentage of ELLs meeting standards in grades 3-8 (Figure 1, p. 3) rose 13.4 percentage points (45.2% to 58.6%) since last year, surpassing yearly gains of 8.3 points by English proficient students (68.5% to 76.8%). This continues a trend of overall gains by ELLs on mathematics tests since the 2003 reforms began (up 42 percentage points compared with 32.2 for English proficient students). Among fourth and eighth graders, ELLs, non-ELLs, and former ELLs all made gains. The percentage of fourth-

Figure 8. Students Meeting Standards on 8th Grade State Math Tests by English Proficiency Status

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2002-2008

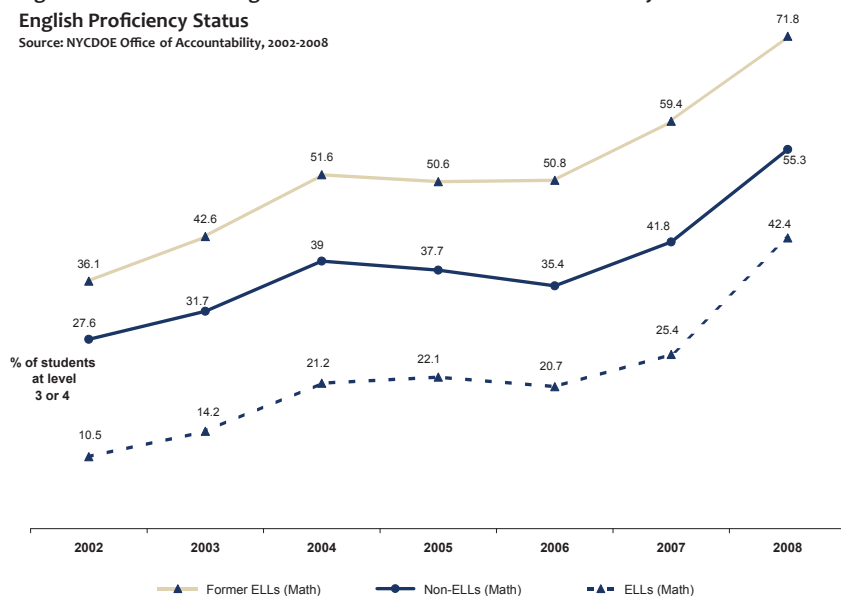
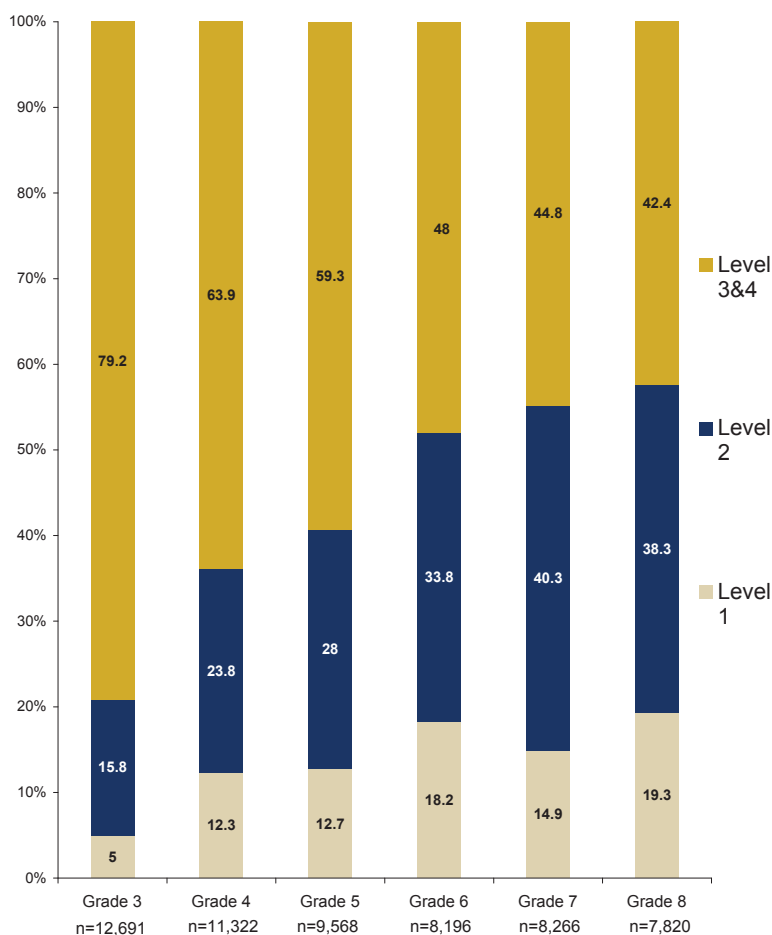


Figure 9. More ELLs in the Elementary Grades Reach Proficiency on the 2008 State Math Test Than ELLs in Middle School

Source: Office of Accountability, 2008



grade ELLs meeting standards increased 10.4 percentage points since last year and 27.8 percentage points since the 2003 reforms began, narrowing the difference in proficiency rates between ELLs and non-ELLs (Figure 7). More dramatically, 42.4% of eighth-grade ELLs met math standards in 2008 (Figure 8), outpacing gains by non-ELLs and former ELLs and showing a 28.2 percentage point gain since the 2003 reforms began.

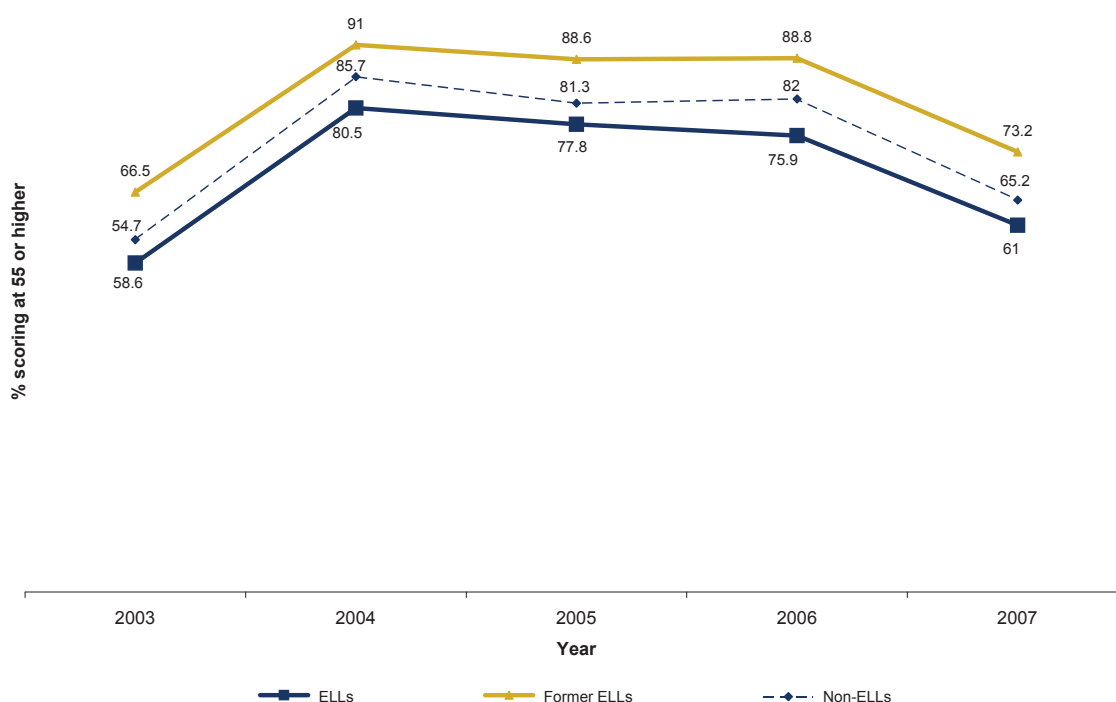
Similar to data from the 2008 ELA by grade, ELLs in the early grades outperform middle school ELLs (Figure 9) with more eighth graders scoring at level 1 and 2 than any other grade. However, compared with the low eighth-grade ELA scores that have moved little over the years, math improvements by this group underscore the differences surrounding the subject and testing environments of the two tests. Similarly, a look at how high school students perform on the Math A Regents—a test that measures abilities in

mathematical reasoning, numbers and numeration, operations, modeling and multiple representation, measurement, probability, and patterns and functions—shows that the percentage of ELLs scoring at 55 is much closer to that of non-ELLs than former ELLs (see Figure 10). All groups, again, tend to trend in the same directions.

Compared with the low performance of secondary school ELLs on state ELA tests, math results show that many secondary school ELLs may enter our schools with prior mathematics knowledge, despite having little English. They also, most likely, benefit from accommodations provided on content area tests (e.g., translated versions). Also, ELLs may be receiving the benefits of a more coherent math curriculum, standardized citywide, as opposed to the literacy curriculum, which can vary from school to school. Finally, the efforts of the Department to look at areas of need within demographic and academic subgroups has allowed a number of targeted initiatives, especially in mathematics. Efforts to raise the academic achievement of ELLs by building strong networks among school-based math and ELL leaders, especially in middle schools and for Spanish-speaking ELLs, have proven effective. The promising ELL math performance data highlights the necessity of continuing this momentum. However, compared with ELA results, it underscores the challenges adolescent ELLs face in having to accelerate language development skills to become fully literate in academic English.

Figure 10. Students Scoring at 55 or Above on the Math A Regents Exam by English Proficiency Status

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2003-2007



ELL Subgroups: Language Groups and Learning Needs

A review of proficiency rates among native languages groups and subpopulations with specialized learning needs is necessary when gauging the academic progress of City ELLs, especially when targeting academic support. In New York City, the diversity among ELLs' backgrounds and schooling experiences is vast. Schools that identify ELL subpopulations have a better chance at allocating resources to meet their needs compared with schools that treat ELLs as a homogenous population that only shares the need to learn English while mastering core academic subjects.

Language Groups: Students who speak the most prevalent 12 languages other than English make up 95% of the entire population of ELLs. In the student population, Spanish is the home language for a majority (68%) of all current ELLs, and roughly 11% speak Chinese at home. Arabic, Bengali, and Haitian Creole are each spoken by between 2.3-2.9% of ELLs. Spanish-, Chinese-, and Haitian Creole-speaking ELLs are historically the top three ELL language groups (see year-to-year proficiency rates for ELLs and former ELLs in these groups in the Appendix); however, the Arabic and Bengali language groups have grown steadily since 2002. When performance results for State tests, grades 3-8, are arranged by the population size of test takers in each language group, Spanish and Chinese, respectively, mirror the overall ELL population.

A review of 2008 ELA proficiency rates of the top 12 home languages among ELLs show how citywide averages are influenced by the rates of Spanish speakers, the most populous subgroup among

Table 3. Percentage of ELLs Meeting Standards by Top 12 Home Languages on the 2008 ELA State Test

Source: BESIS and Office of Accountability, 2008

Language (in descending order of population size citywide)	Grade 4		Grade 8	
	n of test takers	% meeting standards	n of test takers	% meeting standards
Spanish	7,702	26.2	4,868	3.7
Chinese	760	46.1	591	11.3
Bengali	252	42.1	135	9.6
Arabic	242	27.8	156	3.8
Haitian Creole	178	25.3	134	6.0
Russian	150	34.0	97	13.4
Urdu	181	38.1	110	6.4
French	74	43.2	86	4.7
Korean	74	50.0	59	13.6
Albanian	90	27.8	51	11.8
Polish	43	51.2	35	14.3
Punjabi	68	41.2	43	9.3
All ELLs	10,308	29.4	6,674	5.2

test takers. (This is also illustrated in comparing ELA and math proficiency rates for Spanish-speaking ELLs in Appendix 1 with overall ELL rates.) ELA proficiency rates for Spanish-speaking ELLs fall slightly

below the ELL citywide averages for fourth and eighth grade while Asian language groups (Chinese, Bengali, Korean, Punjabi), along with Russian- and Polish-speaking ELLs, exceed them in both grades.

On State math tests for grade 4, a majority of ELLs in each language group meet standards, with the exception of Haitian Creole-speaking students. For eighth graders, fewer than half of test takers speaking

Table 4. Percentage of ELLs Meeting Standards by Top 12 Home Languages on the 2008 Math State Test

Source: BESIS and Office of Accountability, 2008

Language (in descending order of population size citywide)	Grade 4		Grade 8	
	n of test takers	% meeting standards	n of test takers	% meeting standards
Spanish	8,206	59.4	5,459	33.2
Chinese	892	92.3	799	83.6
Bengali	277	76.9	173	59.5
Arabic	319	63.6	203	45.8
Haitian Creole	236	47.0	175	39.4
Russian	176	77.3	132	59.1
Urdu	199	73.4	134	57.5
French	97	62.9	118	39.8
Korean	90	93.9	87	83.9
Albanian	100	72	59	59.3
Polish	56	78.6	41	78.0
Punjabi	73	76.7	48	58.3
All ELLs	11,295	63.9	7,811	42.4

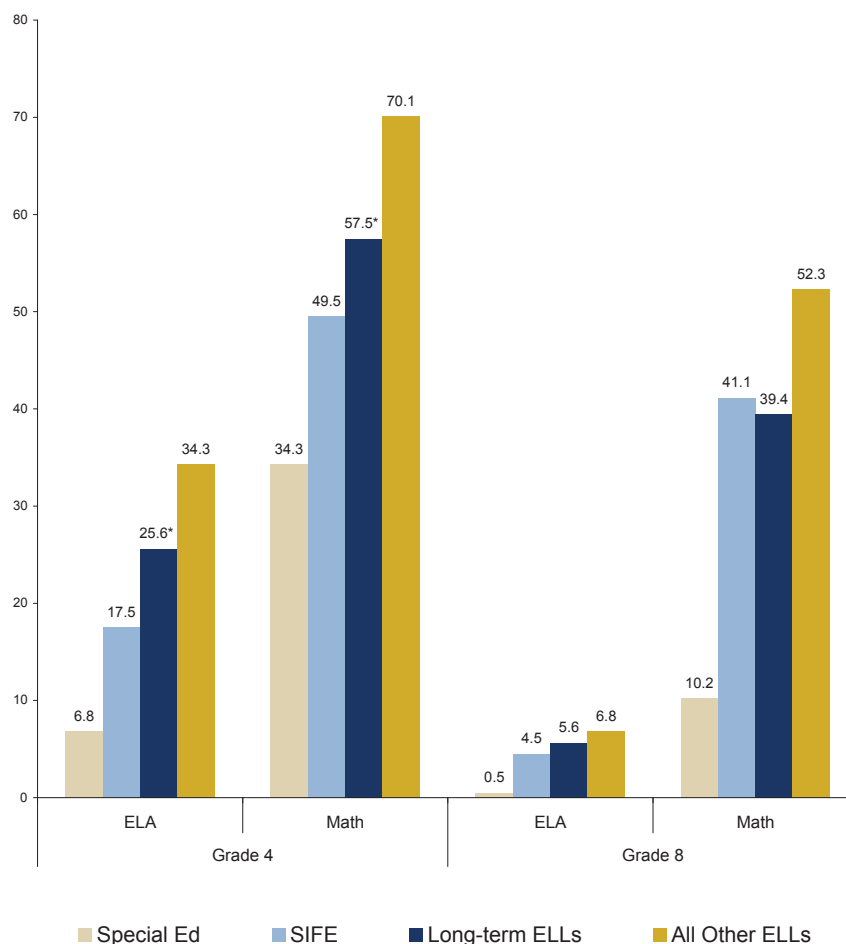
Spanish, Arabic, Haitian Creole, or French meet math standards, while the majority of students in other groups do. For both grades, high percentages of Chinese- and Korean-speaking students meet math standards, far exceeding citywide averages for even non-ELLs.

Struggling Learners: While newcomers drive the number of ELLs with special needs in the early grades, beginning in fourth grade, other subpopulations begin to make up a larger share of ELLs requiring specialized attention. For instance, Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE), by definition, are ELLs who have come to a US school after second grade, have less schooling than their peers, function below grade level in reading and math, and are commonly pre-literate in their native language. Early results from research on the characteristics of long-term ELLs in New York City divide these students into three groups: transnational students who move between the US and their native home; students with inconsistent schooling who move among bilingual, ESL, and in some instances, general education programs; and transitioning students who simply need more time to gain English proficiency and content area knowledge (Menken, Kleyn, and Chae, 2008). While SIFE and long-term ELLs are two distinct populations, both require specialized supports to build competencies in English and/or native language literacy, and content areas where subject matter was missed. All of these subgroups must accelerate academic English language development while acquiring the content

Figure 11. Percentage of ELL Subpopulations Meeting Standards on State ELA and Math Tests, Grades 4 and 8, 2008

Source: BESIS, 2007 and Office of Accountability, 2008.

Notes: 1) Overall test taking populations do not include charter school students. 2) Long-term ELLs are those ELLs who have completed six years of ELLs services in NYC and are not designated Special Education or SIFE. *The test taking population of long-term ELLs in 4th grade is less than 100 students.



needed to meet State graduation requirements. In grade 6 and above, the number of ELLs who are SIFE, long-term ELLs, or new arrivals outnumber general ELLs—a dramatic statistic that highlights the need for innovative approaches to secondary ELL education.

Overall ELL performance rates, reported citywide, typically do not distinguish between the performance of specialized learners in the ELL population and all other ELLs.

However, when

disaggregated, the impact subgroup proficiency rates make on the overall performance of ELLs is evident. As shown in the analysis of eighth-grade ELA scores on page 8, SIFE, long-term ELLs and newcomers make up most of the test-taking population, greatly affecting indicators of ELA and math proficiency. Similarly, on 2008 State ELA and math tests for grades 4 and 8 (see Figure 11), proficiency rates for ELLs without specialized needs are consistently higher than ELLs identified as Special Education, SIFE, or long-term. In all grades and subject areas, ELLs who have interrupted formal education or who are considered long-term ELLs characteristically drive down overall ELL performance data, mainly due to below-grade-level literacy and numeracy skills. Math proficiency rates of ELLs who have no identified specialized learning needs (other than to develop English

language proficiency) compared with non-ELLs may provide the closest indicator we have, in the absence of native language literacy tests, of how parallel schooling supports transferability of grade-level native language literacy and content skills. Proficiency rates for ELLs without specialized needs (70.1% for fourth graders and 52.3% for eighth graders) are much closer to those of non-ELLs (78.4% and 55.3%, respectively).

New Tools to Identify SIFE:

Differentiating among the performance of ELL subpopulations provides insight into the role that native language literacy plays in being able to transfer literacy and content skills to English. Based on SIFE performance data and the need for better identification for this unique population, the Department has worked with researchers to develop a new diagnostic tool called the *Academic Language and Literacy Diagnostic* (ALLD). Available in English and Spanish, this tool identifies the literacy and numeracy levels of students who enter our schools with limited or interrupted formal education, helping educators plan more responsive programs. In addition to participating in ESL or bilingual programs, these students benefit from literacy development in the native language and targeted academic interventions that accelerate vocabulary and background content knowledge.

Proficiency rates by native language are influenced by the diverse schooling experiences students bring with them, be they groups of foreign-born students from countries with strong or limited educational opportunities, or students (foreign and native) who may experience interruptions in schooling for personal or political reasons. For instance, most SIFE are Spanish speakers (64%). Among new Spanish-speaking SIFE (those who entered our schools within the past year), half are from the Dominican Republic. While most of the high-incidence ELL language groups include some SIFE, there are increasingly more new SIFE from several lesser-spoken language groups, mainly Tibetan (although students originate from various countries like India and Nepal), as well as Fulani and Mandinka (spoken in West African countries).

A majority of long-term ELLs are Spanish speakers (83.5%), most of whom are native-born. However, of those foreign-born, 13.2% are from the Dominican Republic, almost 6% are from Mexico, and 4.1% are from Puerto Rico. Only 5% of long-term ELLs are Chinese speakers and 2.6% are Haitian Creole.

While measures like the language allocation policy, which ensures coherent programs within schools, are in place, the Office of ELLs continues to collaborate with researchers on new identification tools (see inset), placement structures that direct students to appropriate settings, and ways to promote the importance of consistent programming for ELLs throughout their schooling prior to reaching English proficiency.

Secondary Outcomes: Challenges and Improvements

In order to graduate from New York City high schools, all students are required to pass five Regents exams in various subject matters, including ELA and Math. These exams are designed by the University of the State of New York's Board of Regents. Between 1996 and 1999 (the 2000 to 2003 graduating cohorts), the State required students to pass more Regents exams each year in order to receive a diploma (see Table 5). In recent years, students could receive a local diploma if they scored 55 or above on exams. However, the State has phased out local diplomas, now requiring all students to score 65 or above on all five Regents exams to receive a Regents diploma.

While the additional exam requirements did not have a negative impact, overall, on graduation rates for any group, the impact of stricter scores now required for Regents diplomas has yet to be measured. (The 2007 cohort entered in 2003 when reforms were first being implemented.) However, stricter requirements underscore how important it is for students to have the academic language and content knowledge required to master high school course work. Adolescent ELLs entering in the secondary grades must accelerate their language development, including the scholarly language used in specialized content areas, to be successful on Regents exams in various core subjects. However, the prevalence of

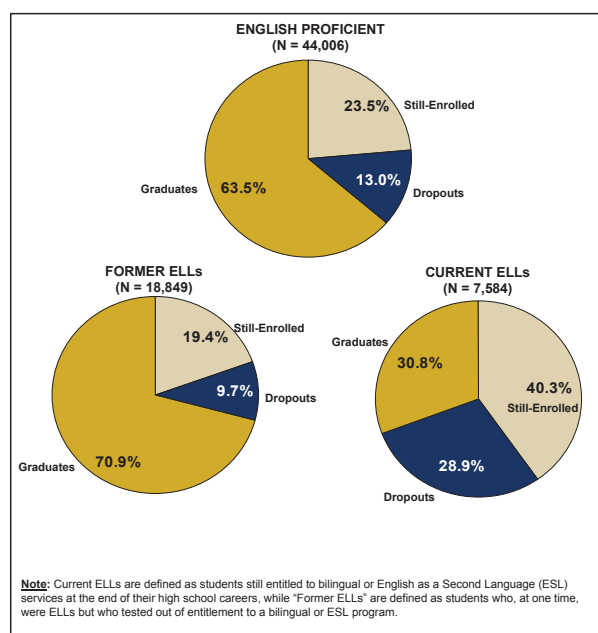
Table 5. Graduation Rates by Year and Language Proficiency Status, Given Applicable New York State Diploma Requirements

Source: Office of Accountability, 2008

Class	Diploma Requirements		Graduation Rates*		
	Local Diploma	Diploma-Regents Endorsed	ELL	Former ELL	Non-ELL
2009 (entering ninth grade in 2005)	No longer available	Score 65 or above on 5 Regents (English, Math, Global History & Geography, US History & Government, and Science)	na	na	na
2008 (entering ninth grade in 2004)	Scoring 55-64 on 5 Regents (English, Math, Global History & Geography, US History & Government, and Science)	Score 65 or above on 5 Regents (English, Math, Global History & Geography, US History & Government, and Science)	na	na	na
2007 (entering ninth grade in 2003)			30.8	70.9	63.5
2006 (entering ninth grade in 2002)			26.2	69.1	61.1
2005 (entering ninth grade in 2001)			35.3	66.6	59.3
2004 (entering ninth grade in 2000)	Scoring 55-64 on 5 Regents (English, Math, Global History & Geography, US History & Government, and Science)	Score 65 or above on 8 Regents (English, Math, 2 nd Math, Global History & Geography, US History & Government, Science, 2 nd Science, and Second Language)	31.8	64.0	54.8
2003 (entering ninth grade in 1999)	Scoring 55-64 on 5 Regents (English, Math, Global History & Geography, US History & Government, and Science)		31.6	61.4	54.4
2002 (entering ninth grade in 1998)	Scoring 55-64 on 4 Regents (English, Math, Global History & Geography, US History & Government)		30.3	58.6	51.9
2001 (entering ninth grade in 1997)	Scoring 55-64 on 2 Regents (English, Math)		31.3	58.6	52.6
2000 (entering ninth grade in 1996)	Scoring 55-64 on 1 Regents (English)		30.3	58.2	52.1

* includes students who received a high school diploma, GED or special education certificate.

Figure 12. The Class of 2007, Four-Year Longitudinal Report and 2006-2007 Event Dropout Rates



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

specialized learning needs among middle and high school grades is greater than elementary school-level ELLs, requiring double and sometimes triple the work of most students. In 2008, the number of ELLs in the upper grades who were either new to our schools, or who had specialized learning needs (SIFE and long-term ELLs), outnumbered general ELLs. A review of subpopulations among all ELLs who reached English proficiency from 2002-2008 (n=82,206) shows that about 17% are designated SIFE, long-term, and/or requiring Special Education services. However, in grades 6 and above, between 28.6% (grade 12) and 43.6% (grade 9) of all ELLs have specialized needs. These students report longer tenures in ELL programs, on average, than ELLs who do not have specialized needs. For instance, an ELL who passed the

NYSESLAT in ninth grade required, on average, 3.5 years of ELL services. However, a SIFE exiting ELL services in ninth grade required 4.6 years; a Special Education student 7.7 years; and, a long-term ELL (without any other special needs designations) 9.2 years.

Set against this backdrop, it is not surprising that four-year graduation outcomes for current ELLs fall short of those for non-ELLs and former ELLs. According to Department cohort data for the class of 2007 (Figure 12), ELLs have lower four-year graduation rates (30.8%) and experience more dropouts (28.9%) than non-ELLs (referred to as English proficient in the chart above) (63.5%), and former ELLs (70.9%). However, current ELLs are still enrolled at a much higher rate (40.3%) than either group. A high rate of enrollment after four years along with ELL program exit information indicate many of these students need more than four years to master English and meet increasingly stricter graduation requirements. While the general education community may see high rates of students still enrolled as a negative indicator, in the context of ELLs with specialized needs, these students continue to be academically engaged, working toward graduation. In three-year follow-up studies on these cohorts, ELL graduation rates typically improve in years 5 to 7. For instance, ELLs in the Class of 2004 had a four-year graduation rate of 31.8%. However, by year 7, more than half had graduated (55.1%). While, compared with non-ELLs and former ELLs, these are still relatively low rates, it translates into 1,574 more students who now have a high school diploma.

Secondary Improvements

Improving ELL graduation rates is a Departmental priority, requiring a deployment of resources and information not only at the high school level, but in middle school where adolescent ELLs begin to prepare academically for the challenges of high school. Efforts to bolster middle school education for ELLs is part of a wider system-wide campaign to improve middle school outcomes overall. As part of this campaign, the Office of ELLs provides coaching to more than 20 high-needs middle schools as well as one-on-one technical assistance from ELL specialists through the Adopt-a-Middle-School program. To help middle and high schools, both large and small, provide a quality education that moves ELLs toward achieving post-secondary success, the Office of ELLs offers sustained professional development that builds academic literacy and language in content area subjects such as mathematics, social studies, English, and science. Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL) institutes have reached thousand of NYC educators and continue to widen in scope (content areas, ESL) and deepen in breadth (providing curriculum enhancements, leadership institutes). To help high schools structure their ELL programs to be more flexible and responsive to the needs of adolescent ELLs, the Office of ELLs provides a summary of research and promising practices, *Designing Better High Schools for ELLs*.

Direct support to secondary schools is also provided through funding opportunities targeted to struggling learners. For example, in 2008-09, 51 secondary schools have received ELL Success Incentive Grant funding while 49 schools have received funding to support Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and long-term ELLs. Collaborations with grant-funded schools, researchers and educational publishers have culminated in sets of resources and practice-based solutions (e.g., RIGOR, Achieve 3000, Destination Math) that address struggling learners. These solutions require an administrative commitment to many of the organizational and instructional elements proven to create positive changes for ELLs, including professional development, academic language development, native language support, extended-day programs, small class size, and technological support. Also, the Office of ELLs is developing an early warning system for high schools—using indicators like attendance, course completion rates, and years of ELL service—to identify and help students potentially at risk.

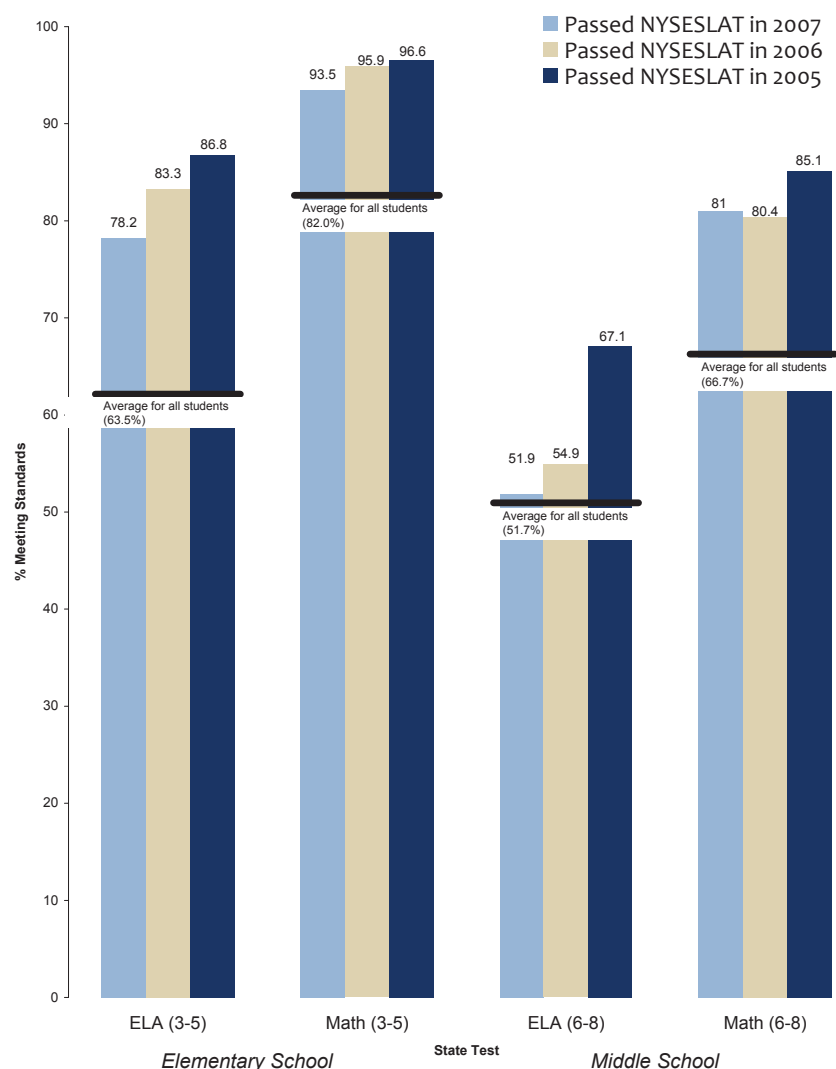
Collaborations with the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center are building a body of knowledge, tools, and capacity development resources. Focused on struggling ELLs in secondary schools, CUNY has provided research on the characteristics and learning needs of SIFE, culminating in the ALLD (see p. 17), and providing the basis for a SIFE handbook to strengthen instruction for this population. Similarly, the Office works closely with CUNY on looking at the characteristics of long-term ELLs and is collaborating on a study about structured interventions that work. CUNY is documenting best ELL practices employed by schools that are beating the odds for struggling ELL learners. Resources and guides are shared citywide as they are produced so that educators and administrators at the secondary level can best identify and address the instructional needs of struggling learners.

Former ELLs: Top Performers

When describing the impact of reform work of the last several years, the performance of students who were once designated as ELLs but gained proficiency in English—former ELLs—is critical to the analysis. As the main beneficiaries of a more rigorous and coherent core curriculum, including

Figure 13. Higher Percentages of Former ELLs Meet Standards on 2008 State Tests Compared with All Students Citywide

Source: Office of Accountability, 2005-2008. Notes: Former ELL population sizes for the groups shown below range from 2,270-6,484 students.



instructional shifts in practice experienced since Children First reforms for ELLs were enacted in 2003, former ELLs may provide a richer indicator of progress. Analyses of State data, grades 3-8, Regents, and school completion outcomes give strong, consistent results: former ELLs outperform all other groups, including non-ELLs.

More interestingly, in comparing proficiency rates year to year since the beginning of 2003 reforms on State ELA and math tests for grades 4 and 8, ELLs

and former ELLs tend to experience wider and steeper gains, trending more closely with each other as opposed to non-ELLs. By contrast, non-ELLs consistently see the lowest gains among ELLs, non-ELLs, and former ELLs, perhaps signaling the benefits of knowing more than one language, especially when accompanied by a strong foundation in literacy and core subjects. (Also see

Table 6. Former ELLs Make Up Majority at Nearly All Nine Elite High Schools

Source: October 31 General Register, 2008

Schools	(%) of Former ELLs in Student Population
Brooklyn Technical High School	64.7
Bronx High School of Science	57.9
Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School	56.6
The Brooklyn Latin School	56.5
Stuyvesant High School	56.3
High School of American Studies	55.1
Queens High School for the Sciences	54.9
High School for Mathematics, Science & Engineering at City College	53.6
Staten Island Technical High School	47.4

Appendix figures by top three language groups.) An alternative look at the performance of former ELLs on 2008 State tests, grades 3-8, each year since passing the NYSESLAT shows how well former ELLs do compared with citywide averages beyond program exit. Figure 13 once again underscores the need to ensure all ELLs meet the important benchmark of reaching English proficiency as measured by the NYSESLAT.

On school completion outcomes, former ELLs continue to demonstrate more successful results than all other groups, with fewer dropouts (9.7%) and more graduates (70.9%) than English proficient students (13.0% and 63.5%, respectively), continuing an ongoing trend since data on former ELLs began to be reported in 2000. It is important to note that New York City graduation reports before 2000 defined an ELL as any student identified as eligible for bilingual or ESL services at any time during the first four years of high

school—regardless of whether students subsequently tested out of ELL programs. In other words, the performance of former ELLs was combined with those of current ELLs, resulting in what might appear to be higher graduation rates for the ELL subgroup. In 2000, a revised definition of ELLs was implemented, and data was reported using the current definition, differentiating between current ELLs, former ELLs, and non-ELLs. The favorable influence of performance data that includes former ELLs cannot be overstated, as bilingual students fluent in English are actually contributing to the overall citywide averages of monolingual students. Once again, these indicators highlight the importance of accelerating academic language and literacy development so that students meet English proficiency.

Conclusion

The New York City Department of Education continues to implement Children First reform initiatives that bolster a more rigorous and responsive education for ELLs. Performance data presented in this report show that current efforts are building momentum most evident in the early grades and among former ELLs. However, performance indicators show some populations need more targeted support to create the dramatic system-wide change necessary to create successful outcomes for all ELLs. Secondary ELLs and ELLs with specialized needs continue to shape current projects and initiatives so that all ELLs are served well.

From the beginning of the 2003 reforms, one of the main improvement goals has been to align all programs for ELLs to State standards and to a coherent and comprehensive core curriculum in all academic subjects. Using a citywide language allocation policy (LAP) created in 2004, schools prioritize ELL program planning and instructional improvements so that high expectations for ELLs are included as part of the school's mission. Other priorities—such as sustained professional development, periodic ELL assessments, thoughtful accountability metrics for schools, and appropriate allocations for ELLs through fair student funding—have built capacity and provided the infrastructure required to systemically improve ELL performance.

Because ELLs require accelerated development of academic language and content area skills, schools receive support—through information, resources,

The Five Principles of Quality Teaching for ELLs

Sustain academic rigor in teaching ELLs:

Promote deep disciplinary knowledge and develop central ideas of a discipline in all their interconnectedness and interrelationships. Central to this principle is the development of students' capacity to use higher-order thinking skills, by teaching them how to combine facts, synthesize and evaluate ideas, and generate new meanings and understanding.

Hold high expectations in teaching ELLs:

Engage students in high-challenge and high-support activities that provide multiple entry points to address the academic and linguistic heterogeneity of the classroom.

Engage ELLs in quality interactions:

This principle refers to the enactment of interactions that are sustained, deep, and build knowledge in relevant aspects of the discipline being taught.

Sustain a language focus in teaching ELLs:

Explicitly develop disciplinary language, discussing how language works and the characteristics of different genres and subject-specific discourse.

Develop a quality curriculum for ELLs:

A curriculum with long-term goals and benchmarks that is problem-based and requires sustained attention beyond a single lesson.

Office of ELLs Professional Learning Strategies

Build collaborations among ESL and subject matter (ELA, social studies, math, and science) teachers.

Create ELL-focused inquiry leadership teams (e.g., principal, coaches, parent coordinators, School Accountability Facilitator).

Establish and support ongoing professional learning communities of content area and ESL/bilingual teachers.

Conduct weekly ELL professional planning periods (at a minimum of 45 minutes) embedded in the school day.

Analyze multiple data sources to inform ELL instruction and program services.

Use common assessments and lesson development that include scaffolds for ELLs.

Create measurable student performance targets

Implement observable practice shifts in ELL teaching and learning.

For professional development listings, visit the Office of ELLs website at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/ELL>.

and new funding opportunities—to build and enrich first-language literacy, especially through expanded bilingual and dual language program options. Native language literacy development and support is also provided to students in English as a Second Language programs. A highly effective and innovative strategy for secondary schools—an area where this work is most needed—is to develop a Native Language Arts course sequence that leads to the successful completion of native language Advanced Placement courses.

The Office of ELLs also provides solutions and pilot programs so that schools can implement effective academic interventions designed for struggling ELLs. To meet the diverse needs of ELLs, schools are encouraged to consider allocating resources for extended-day and small-class-size options in addition to meeting mandated services. Professional learning opportunities provided through the Office of ELLs emphasize distributed leadership among school staff, and include a variety of strategies which help schools focus on ELLs (see sidebar).

Work in the Office of ELLs is organized through initiatives (see sidebar on the following page) that are designed to sustain promising practices and close achievement gaps between ELLs and non-ELLs, as well as among ELL subpopulations. Initiatives ensure all schools 1) create a strong infrastructure in which ELLs are a priority; 2) adopt the principles of Quality Teaching for English Learners in every classroom; 3) engage parents in strong and meaningful learning experiences (e.g., Math and Parents in Partnership programs, native literacy and/or an ESL courses); 4) partner with community groups, universities,

and parents; and 5) make plans and results transparent.

This report focuses on what these initiatives already take into account: ELLs are not a monolithic group, and those with specialized needs require equity and access to a rigorous education.

However, when measuring outcomes, if accountability metrics for ELLs do not differentiate among a variety of schooling opportunities and academic needs, results will not reflect the complexity of the challenge or the conditions for success. For instance, graduation rates that do not anticipate (based on historical data) or capture ELLs that graduate beyond four years do little to address the needs of ELLs who require more time. Similarly, if the ultimate goal of programs for ELLs is to prepare them to succeed in general education programs once they become proficient in English, we must continue to track their performance once they meet that benchmark.

Finally, you cannot acknowledge the gains of ELLs and former ELLs without acknowledging where more work is needed, mainly among secondary school ELLs and ELLs with specialized academic needs. With any report that presents measures in new ways, more research and more sophisticated statistical modeling is needed to better explain questions that arise. For instance, knowing that there is diversity even among types of long-term ELLs, what are the interventions best suited to each of their respective needs? What is the role of parallel schooling in how long it takes an ELL to become proficient in English? What role do demographic shifts, changes in policy, and different school structures have on ELL graduation rates?

Continuing to pursue these questions with the best available data is at the heart of maximizing ELL resources, allocating them where they will make the biggest difference for our students. Sharing what we find is part of our commitment to a more transparent and accountable school system, and reinforces our commitment to meet the diverse needs of all students on their road to success.

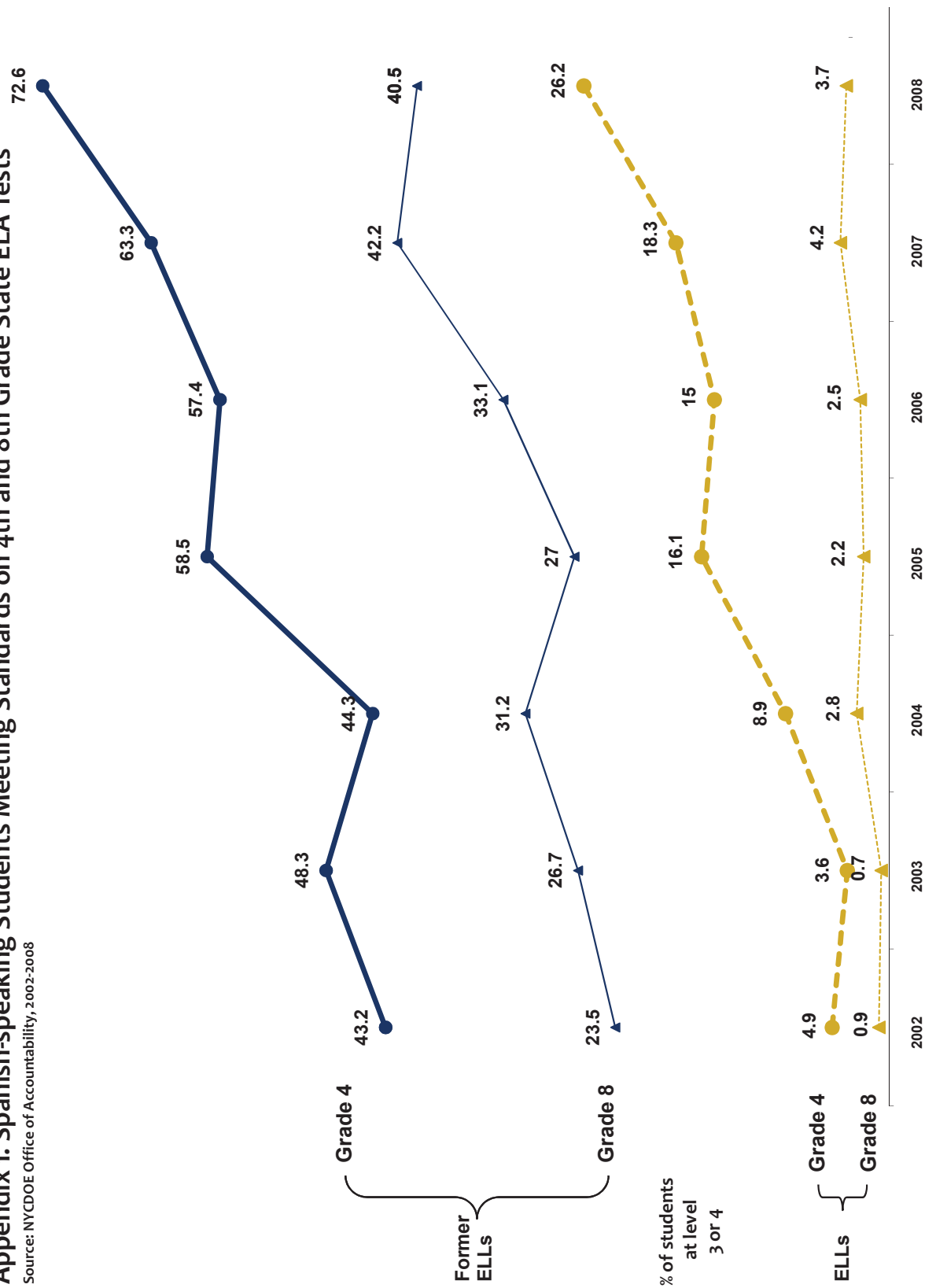
Initiatives in the Office of ELLs

The Best Practices Initiative
The Classroom Resource Initiative
The Dual Language Network Initiative
The ELL Success Incentive Grants
The Language Allocation Policy (LAP)
The Literacy Initiative
The Math Initiative
The Middle School Initiative
The Native Language Arts (NLA) Initiative
The Parent Outreach Initiative
Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL) Professional Development
The Science Initiative
The Secondary Schools Initiative
The Small Schools Initiative
The Social Studies Initiative
Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) Grants Project
The World Languages Initiative
The Writing Initiative

For more information, visit the Programs and Services subchannel on the Office of ELLs website at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/ELL>.

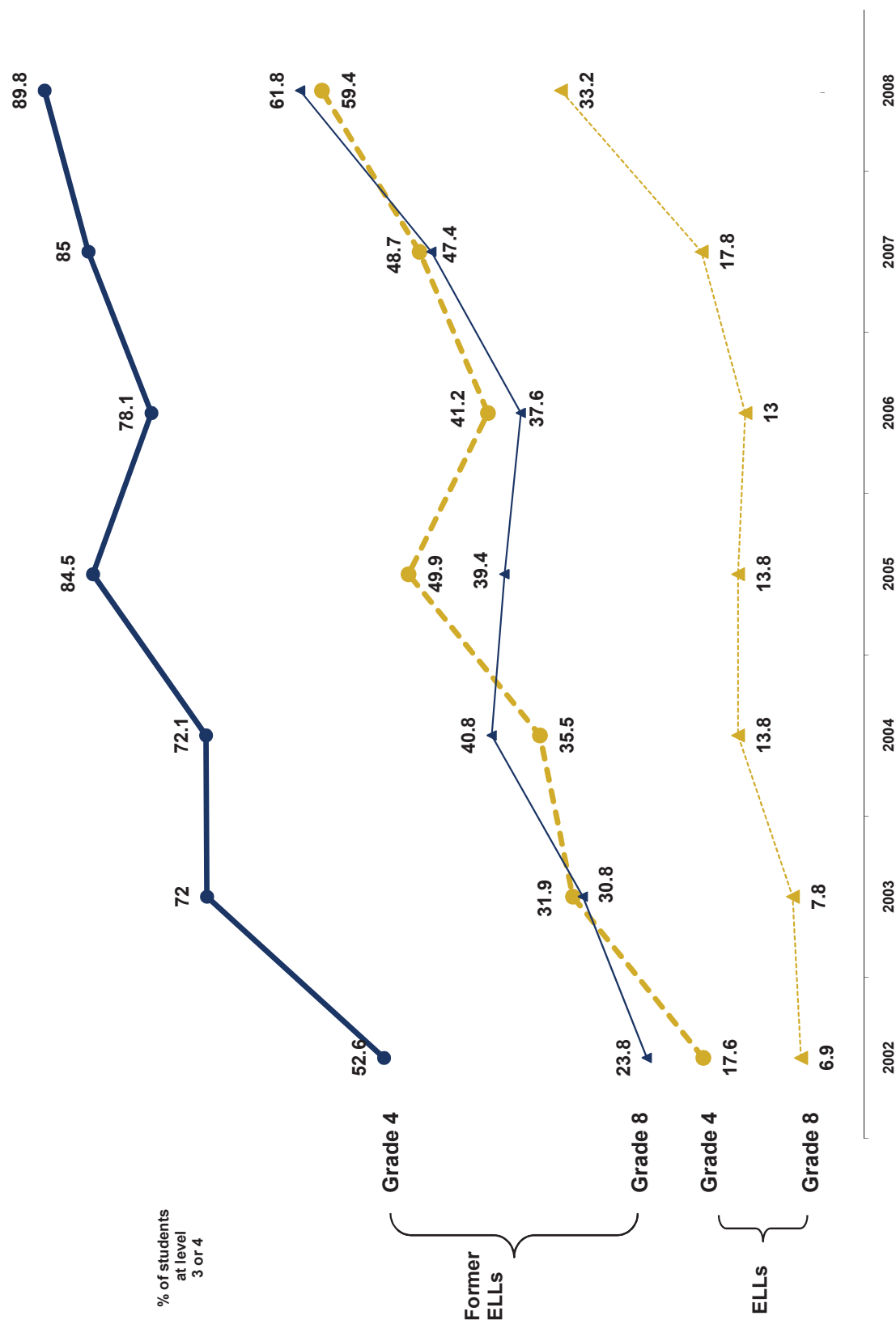
Appendix 1. Spanish-speaking Students Meeting Standards on 4th and 8th Grade State ELA Tests

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2002-2008



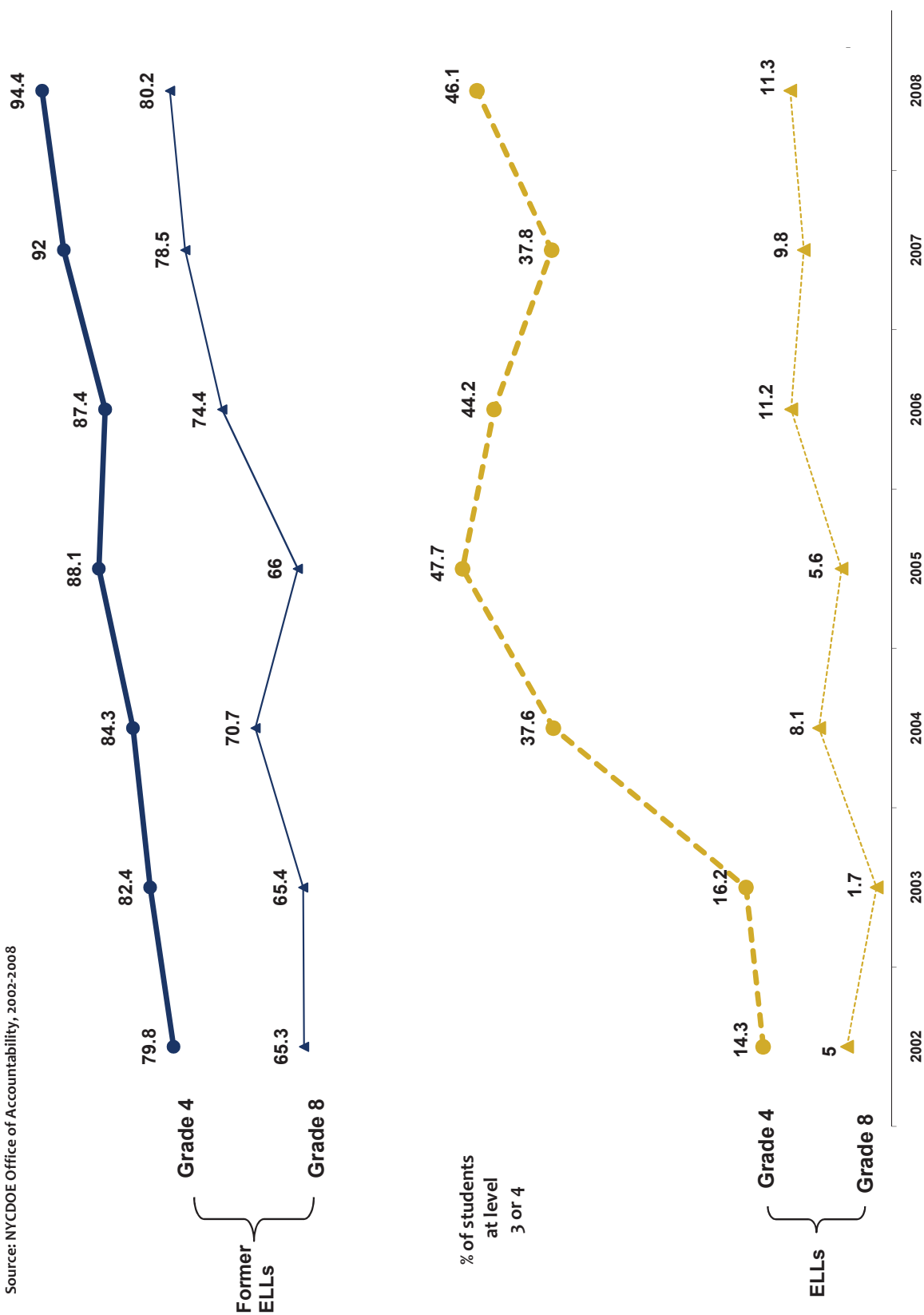
Appendix 2. Spanish-speaking Students Meeting Standards on 4th and 8th Grade State Math Tests

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2002-2008



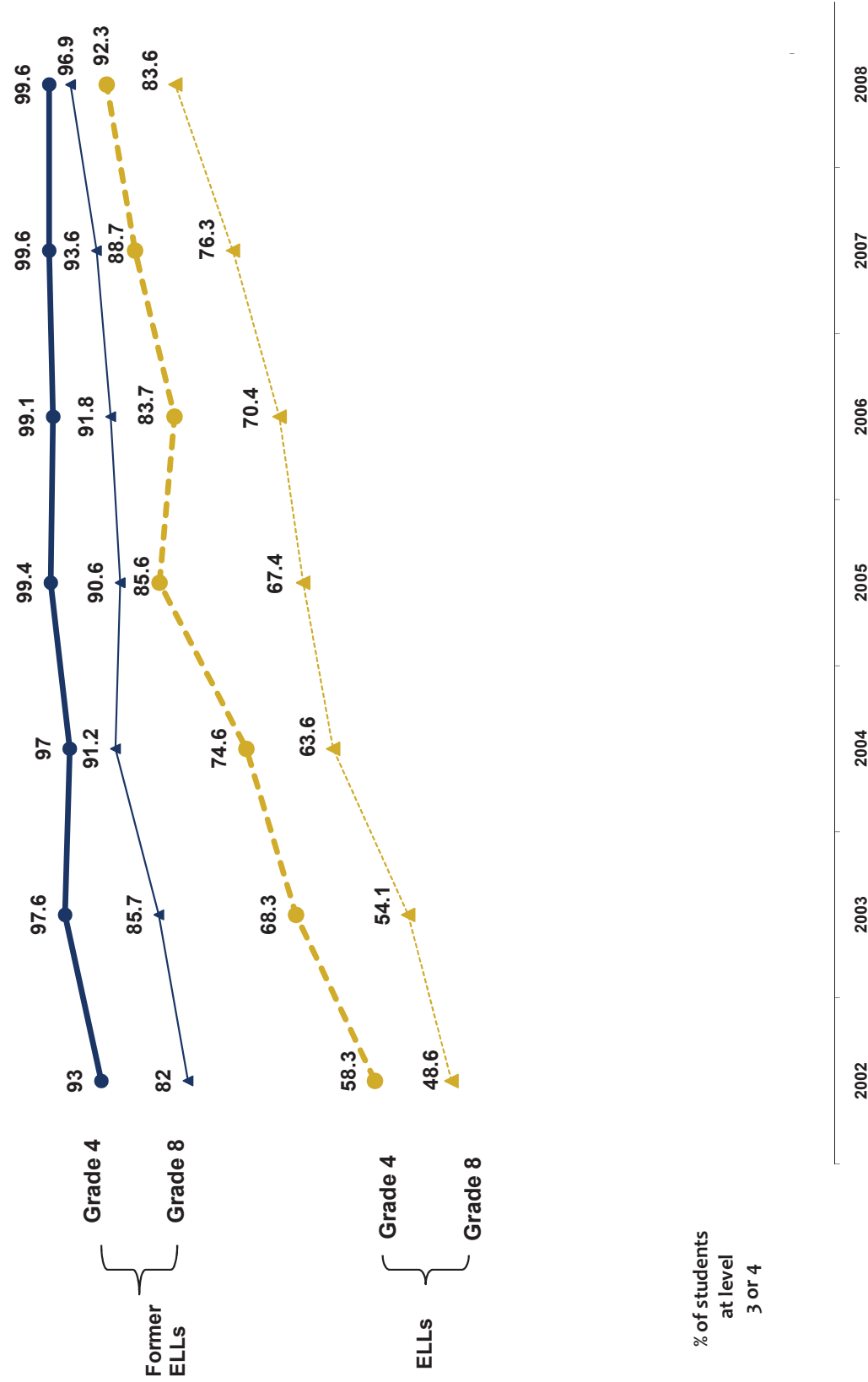
Appendix 3. Chinese-speaking Students Meeting Standards on 4th and 8th Grade State ELA Tests

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2002-2008



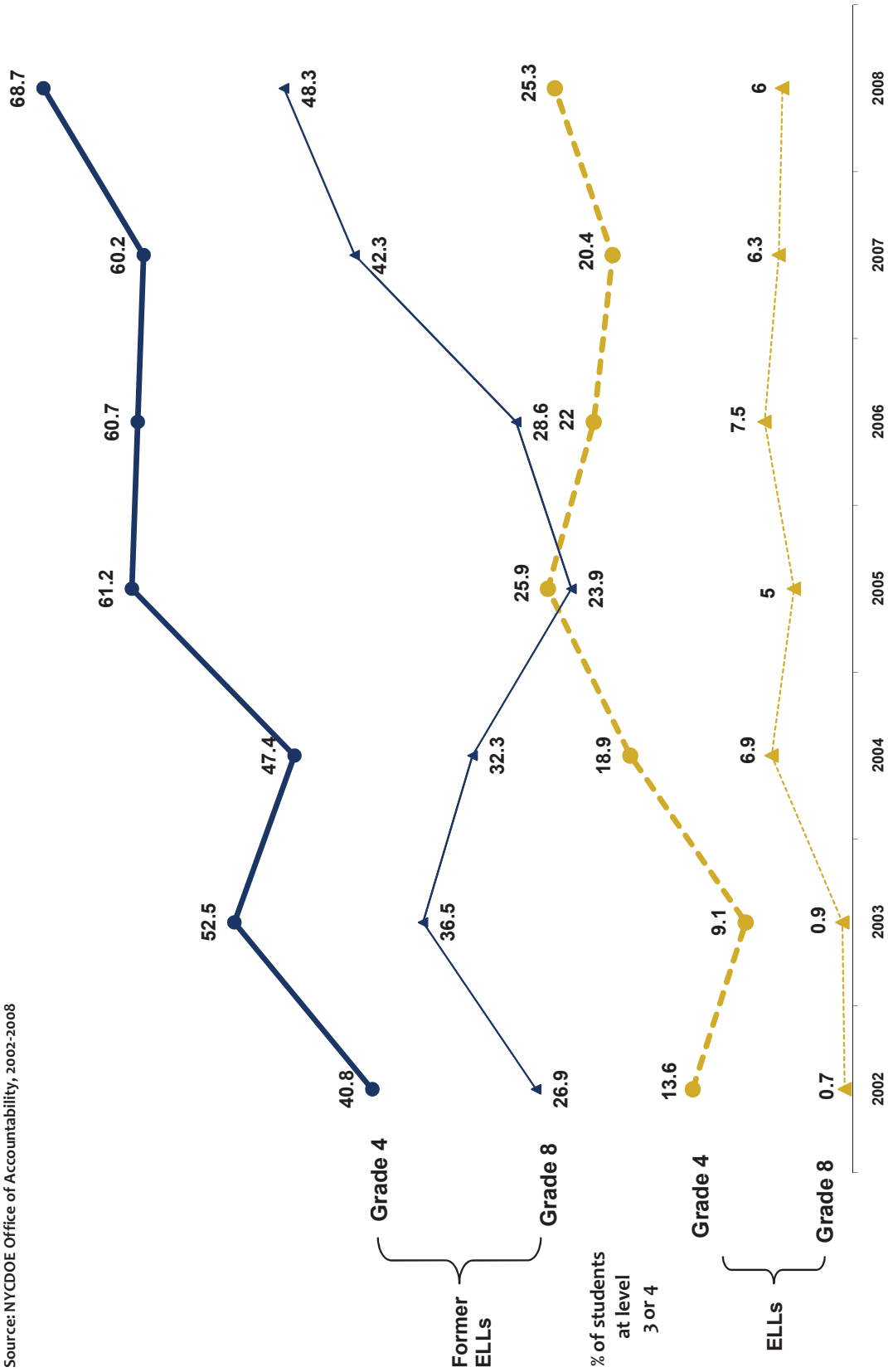
Appendix 4. Chinese-speaking Students Meeting Standards on 4th and 8th Grade State Math Tests

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2002-2008

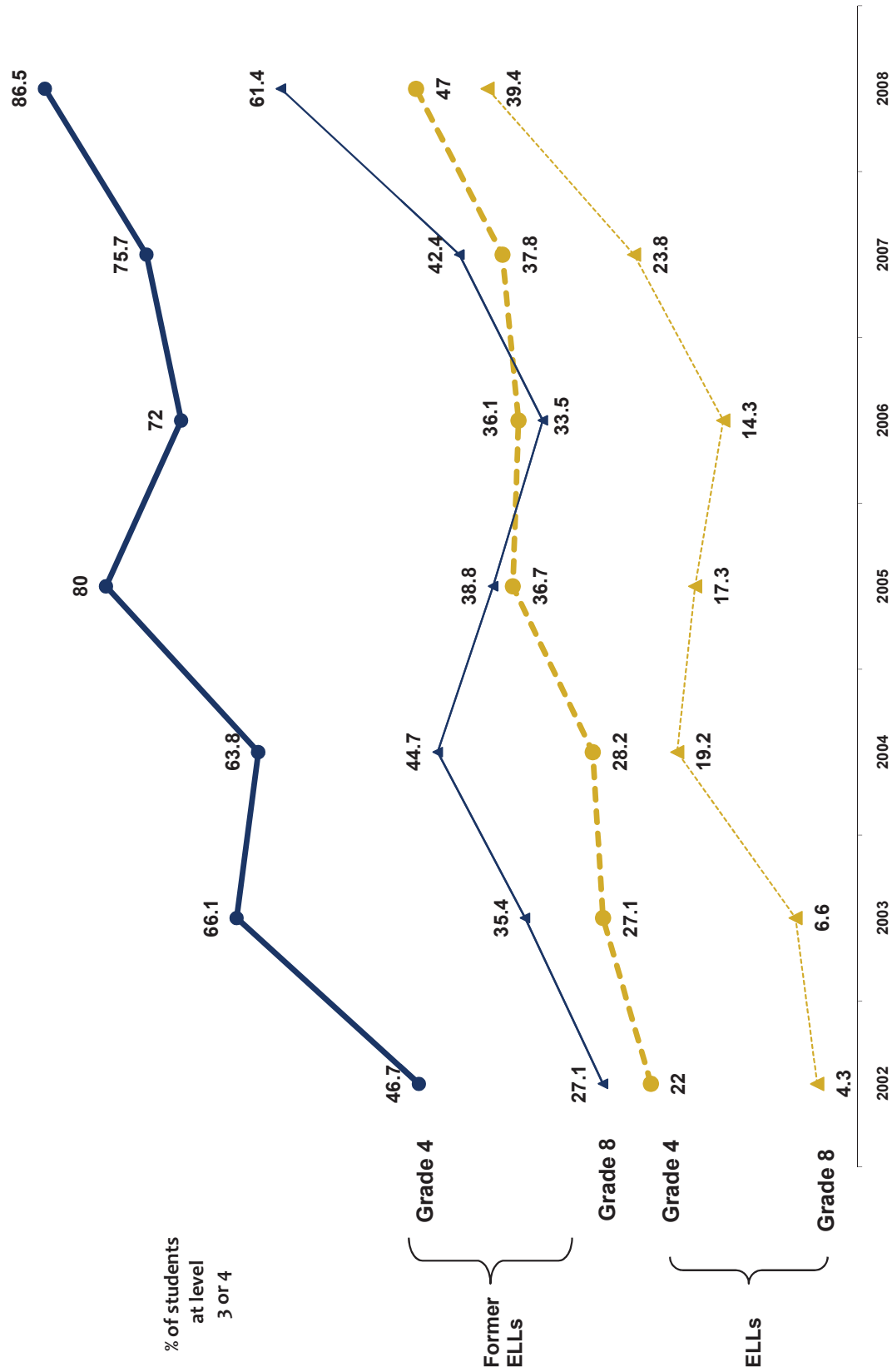


Appendix 5. Haitian Creole-speaking Students Meeting Standards on 4th and 8th Grade State ELA Tests

Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2002-2008



Appendix 6. Haitian Creole-speaking Students Meeting Standards on 4th and 8th Grade State Math Tests
 Source: NYCDOE Office of Accountability, 2002-2008



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“There is no reason why this population’s linguistic and cultural diversity should place them at educational risk for failure in US schools.”

*—Eugene E. García, Teaching and Learning in Two Languages:
Bilingualism and Schooling in the United States*