



Instructional Materials for English Language Learners in Urban Public Schools, 2012-13

Council of the Great City Schools

An analysis of the quality and accessibility of instructional materials for ELL students in the nation's urban public school systems



About the Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 67 of the nation's largest urban school systems. The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public schools and to assist them in their improvement. To meet that mission, the Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management.

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report, *Instructional Materials for English Language Learners in Urban Public Schools*, is to examine how district- and school-level staff members acquire and use instructional materials for English Language Learners (ELLs). The report also answers questions regarding the preparedness of district and school staff members to ensure that ELLs attain the expectations embodied in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), including factors that practitioners believe are most important in promoting high ELL achievement. The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) worked in partnership with McKinsey & Company to conduct a national survey of teacher and ELL characteristics, instructional practices, and perceived quality of instructional materials for ELLs. (All responses are for the 2012-13 school year.) The Council then extracted responses provided solely by members of the organization and analyzed them for this report. This work by the Council was done in support of common core's implementation and efforts by the group to improve instructional materials for ELLs. Key findings include:

Teacher and Student Characteristics

- ❖ In 2012, 46 percent of all respondents to this survey were ELL teachers/specialists, 13 percent were district-level ELL coordinators, 10 percent were general education teachers, and two percent were school principals. Another 29 percent were made up of other school-based and district-level staff.
- ❖ Half of all respondents indicated that they had obtained an ESL/ELD license, certification, or endorsement. Another 38 percent had obtained an ESL/bilingual certification, while 19 percent did not have any ELL-related certifications.
- ❖ Nearly half of all respondents indicated that over 30 percent of the students at their school were ELL. Another 30 percent indicated that between 10 and 30 percent of the students at their school were ELLs.

Classroom Instruction and the Common Core State Standards

- ❖ Approximately half of all CGCS respondents feel only “somewhat prepared” or “not prepared” at all to **implement the instructional shifts** required by the common core.
- ❖ About half of all CGCS respondents (51 percent) feel “prepared” or “very prepared” to **use specific strategies** to ensure that ELLs meet the requirements of the common core. The other half of respondents (49 percent) only felt “somewhat prepared” or “not prepared” to use strategies focused on ELLs to meet the demands of the common core.
- ❖ Respondents indicated that training more general education teachers and content teachers in ELL strategies would have the greatest impact on improving ELL performance followed by developing better ELL instructional materials.

The Quality and Value of Instructional Materials for ELLs

- ❖ Thirty-four percent of respondents indicated that although they know good materials exist, finding them can be difficult and time consuming. Another 29 percent indicated that while good materials exist, they do not have the resources to purchase them.
- ❖ Approximately half of all respondents indicated they use materials they developed on their own. Forty-eight percent also use their general education basal materials and 42 percent use supplemental ELL materials bundled with their core curriculum.
- ❖ Approximately 82 percent of respondents indicated that current materials either “somewhat” or “not at all” reflected the rigor of the common core.

Summary of the Recommendations

- ❖ Improve the quality of instructional materials for ELLs. There should be strong collaboration between publishers and staff members--teachers, ELL specialists, and instructional coaches--from large urban school districts who work directly with ELL students in order to develop and review instructional materials.
- ❖ Develop high-quality professional development for general education and ESL teachers in ELL strategies that are aligned to the Common Core State Standards. This will require an increased commitment to ELLs to ensure they meet the requirements of the common core.
- ❖ Ensure that high-quality ELL instructional materials are readily accessible for general education and ESL teachers. It is imperative that all those involved in teaching ELLs develop and review high-quality instructional materials and make them available to teachers who need them.

As most states and school districts continue the process of implementing the Common Core State Standards, developing high-quality and accessible instructional materials for ELLs that are aligned with the common core should be a priority for districts and publishers alike. The perceived state of instructional materials for ELLs is an impediment to this goal. We hope that this report contributes to the growing call for improvement in the education of ELLs.

Introduction

In 2012, the Council of the Great City Schools collaborated with McKinsey & Company to conduct a survey gauging the quality, accessibility, and value of instructional materials tailored to English Language Learners (ELLs). The survey was intended as a measure of practitioner use of instructional materials for ELLs across the nation. However, the Council delved further into the national dataset to look specifically at how urban public school districts were using instructional materials for ELL students.

While the main focus of this report is on the quality and use of instructional materials for ELLs, findings are also presented on the preparedness of district and school staffs to ensure that ELLs meet the requirements of the Common Core State Standards, including factors that practitioners believe are the most important in promoting high ELL achievement. These factors provide insight into how district- and school-level staff members are using instructional material for ELLs and identifying areas of needed improvement.

This publication comes at a time of transition in many urban public school districts as work is underway to implement the rigorous benchmarks required by the Common Core State Standards. As this report will make clear, there is still much work to be done to ensure that ELL students are able to meet the rigorous requirements of the common core. The faithful adoption of the Common Core State Standards has the potential to elevate the quality of education for many students, and it is our hope that this report will serve that goal by focusing specifically on the expanding population of ELL students in urban public schools.

The Council would like to thank McKinsey & Company without whose efforts and collaboration in survey design and distribution this report would not have been possible.

Methodology

The Council worked in partnership with McKinsey & Company to develop a survey to collect information on the following areas of interest: characteristics of ELL students and teachers; instructional practices and factors in improving the achievement of ELLs; and the perceived quality of instructional materials for ELL students.

The initial survey was administered *via* Survey Monkey to district- and school-level staff in December 2012. The survey was distributed across various networks, including the Council's membership, Colorin Colorado, the Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents, and Teach for America. The survey yielded 486 responses – 58 percent of which were from CGCS member districts. For the purposes of this report, data on Council-member districts were extracted from the total responses, resulting in 284 responses from 44 Council member districts (a response rate of 66 percent). The number of responses varies by question either because a respondent chose not to answer the question or due to the fact that the particular question did not relate to the respondent's position/role. All data are for the 2012-13 school year.

The Council analyzed the responses from member districts and, in some instances, provided a more detailed view of the data by disaggregating responses according to school and respondent characteristics. For purposes of anonymity, responses are presented in the aggregate.

Teacher and Student Characteristics

- ❖ The respondents to this survey included a mixture of classroom teachers, principals, and central-office administrators from Council-member districts. In 2012, 46 percent of all respondents were ELL teachers/specialists, 13 percent were district-level ELL coordinators, 10 percent were general education teachers, and two percent were school principals. Another 29 percent were made up of other school-based and district-level staff (Figure 1).
- ❖ Respondents were asked to specify what subjects they taught, if any. Approximately 38 percent of respondents taught ESL/ESOL and another 17 percent taught all subjects. Furthermore, approximately 33 percent taught multiple subjects (Figure 2).
- ❖ Approximately 40 percent of respondents indicated that they did not work directly with students, while another 17 percent indicated that they were not the primary instructor but supported teachers by working directly with students in the classroom (Figure 2).
- ❖ Respondents were asked what type of ELL certification, if any, they had received. Half of all respondents indicated that they had obtained an ESL/ELD license, certification, or endorsement. Another 38 percent had obtained an ESL/bilingual certification, while 19 percent did not have any ELL-related certifications (Figure 3).
- ❖ Nearly half of all respondents indicated that over 30 percent of the students at their school were ELL. Another 30 percent indicated that between 10 and 30 percent of the students at their school were ELLs (Figure 4).

Figure 1. Percentage of CGCS respondents by position/title (n=284)

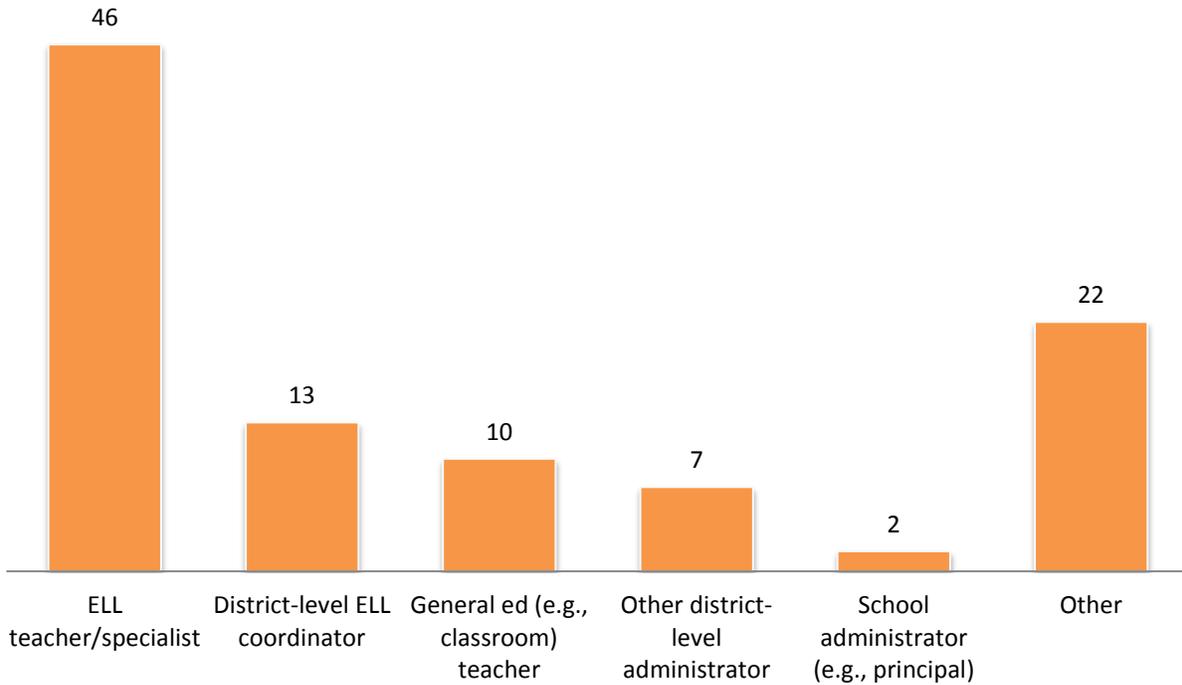


Figure 2. Percentage of CGCS respondents reporting subjects taught (n=284)

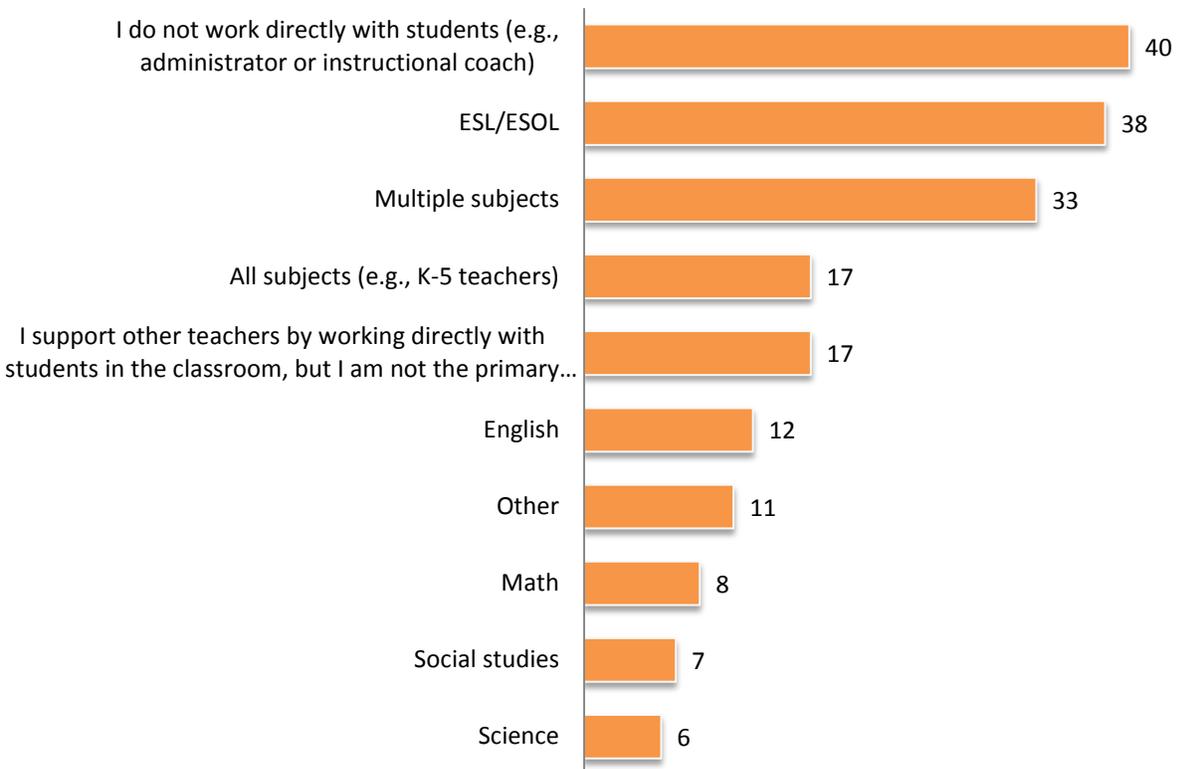


Figure 3. Percentage of CGCS respondents with ELL certification (n=284)

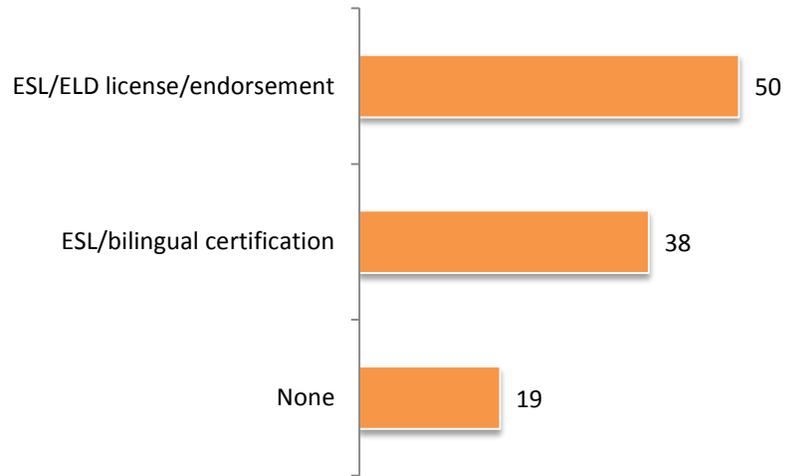
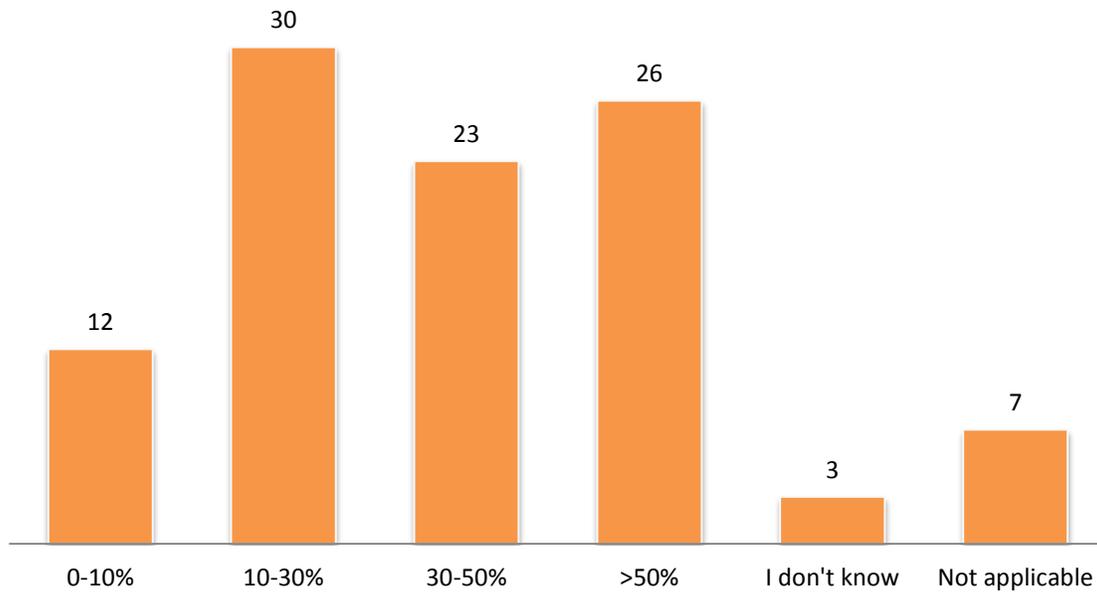


Figure 4. Percentage of CGCS respondents indicating the percentage range of ELL students at their school (n=250)



Classroom Instruction and the Common Core State Standards

- ❖ Respondents were asked to select a statement that best described the instruction of ELLs at their school. The majority of respondents (63 percent) indicated that instruction is provided in English with native language support, if needed and available. Meanwhile, 17 percent indicated that instruction is given in both English and native language with the goal of bi-literacy (Figure 5).
- ❖ Approximately half (49 percent) of all CGCS respondents feel “prepared” or “very prepared” to **implement the instructional shifts** required by the Common Core State Standards. However, 51 percent of respondents feel that they are only “somewhat prepared” or “not prepared” at all to implement the instructional shifts of the common core (Figure 6).
- ❖ Some 60 percent of school administrators feel “prepared” or “very prepared” to **implement the instructional shifts** required by the common core. Meanwhile, about half of responding ELL teachers (52 percent) and general education teachers (48 percent) feel only “somewhat prepared” or “not prepared” at all to implement these instructional shifts (Table 1).
- ❖ When asked about specific strategies required to ensure that ELL students meet the common core, about half of all CGCS respondents (51 percent) feel “prepared” or “very prepared” to **use specific strategies**. The other half (49 percent) felt only “somewhat prepared” or “not prepared” at all to use specified strategies focused on ELLs to meet the demands of the common core (Figure 7).
- ❖ Eighty percent of school administrators feel “prepared” or “very prepared” to **use specific strategies** to ensure that ELLs meet the common core. However, nearly half of ELL teachers (46 percent) and general education teachers (48 percent) feel only “somewhat prepared” or “not prepared” to use specific strategies to ensure ELLs meet the common core (Table 2).
- ❖ Respondents were presented with a list of instructional practices and were asked to rank them in order of which ones would have the most impact on their ability to instruct ELLs. In general, respondents believed that improving the skills of general education teachers to teach ELLs and the availability of higher-quality ELL instructional materials would have the greatest impact on their ability to instruct ELLs. The two lowest ranked practices included having more ESL teachers and more training for ESL teachers (Figure 8).
- ❖ As a follow-up question, respondents were asked to rate practices according to the impact they would have on improved ELL performance. Respondents indicated that training more general education teachers and content teachers in ELL strategies would have the greatest impact on improving ELL performance, followed by developing better ELL instructional materials (Figure 9).
- ❖ During the previous year, respondents indicated that, on average, they had received about 18 hours of professional development on ELL instruction and about 20 hours of professional development on the common core.

Figure 5. Percentage of CGCS respondents selecting statement that best describes ELL instruction at their school (n=218)

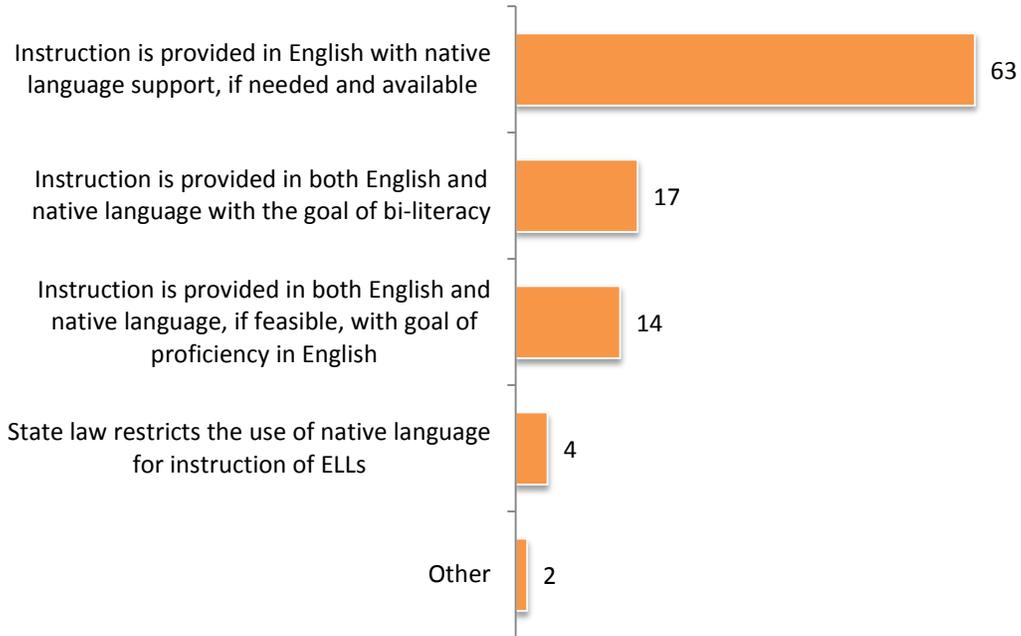


Figure 6. Percentage of CGCS respondents who feel prepared to implement instructional shifts required by the common core (n=252)

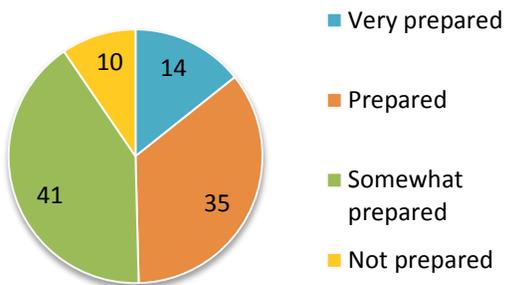


Figure 7. Percentage of CGCS respondents who feel prepared to use specific strategies to ensure ELLs meet the common core (n=252)

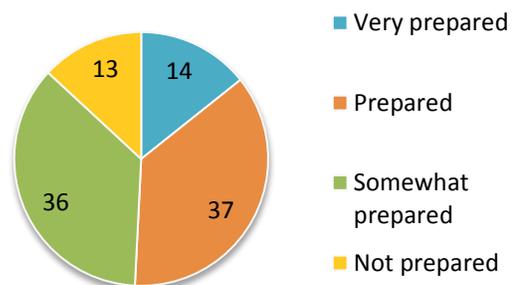


Table 1. Percentage of CGCS respondents who feel prepared to implement the instructional shifts required by the common core by position/title, 2012 (n=252)

	Very prepared	Prepared	Somewhat prepared	Not prepared
ELL teacher/specialist	17.5	30.8	40.0	11.7
General education teacher	12.0	40.0	36.0	12.0
School administrator	20.0	40.0	20.0	20.0
District-level ELL coordinator	3.0	30.3	57.6	9.1
Other district-level administrator	11.8	35.3	52.9	0.0
Other	15.4	40.4	40.4	3.8

Table 2. Percentage of CGCS respondents who feel prepared to use specific strategies to ensure ELLs meet the common core by position/title, 2012 (n=252)

	Very prepared	Prepared	Somewhat prepared	Not prepared
ELL teacher/specialist	19.2	35.0	34.2	11.7
General education teacher	20.0	32.0	28.0	20.0
School administrator	40.0	40.0	0.0	20.0
District-level ELL coordinator	0.0	36.4	45.5	18.2
Other district-level administrator	11.8	35.3	47.1	5.9
Other	7.7	38.5	42.3	11.5

Figure 8. Percentage of CGCS respondents ranking factors in order of impact they would have on their ability to instruct ELLs (n=218)

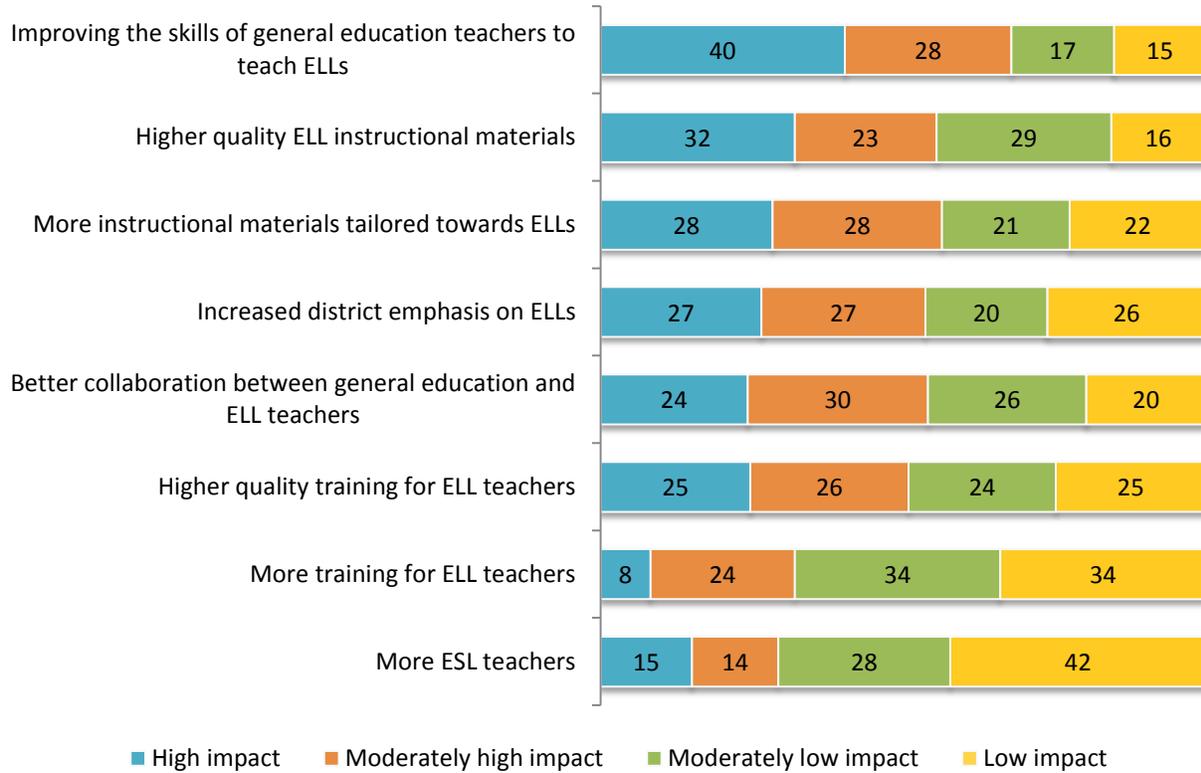
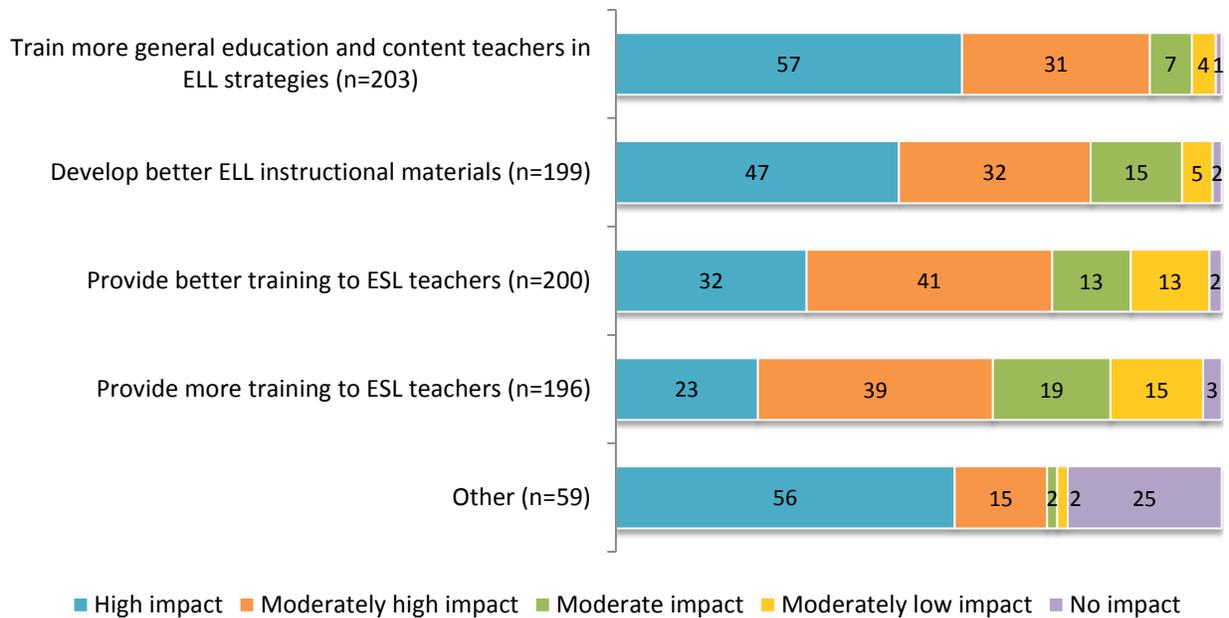


Figure 9. Percentage of CGCS respondents rating the impact of the following factors on improving ELL performance



The Quality and Value of Instructional Materials for ELLs

- ❖ The most common ways respondents choose materials for ELL students is through recommendations from other teachers (46 percent) and materials districts require teachers to use (37 percent) (Figure 10).
- ❖ When asked about the greatest challenges in selecting instructional materials for ELLs, 34 percent of respondents indicated that, although they know good materials exist, finding them can be difficult and time consuming. Another 29 percent indicated that, while they know good materials exist, they do not have the resources to purchase them (Figure 11).
- ❖ A quarter of respondents (25 percent), in schools where over 50 percent of students are ELLs, can find materials but believe them to be of poor quality. Moreover, in schools where over 30 percent of the students are ELL, respondents indicated that instructional materials are time consuming to find and expensive to purchase (Table 3).
- ❖ Half of all respondents indicated they use materials they develop on their own. Forty-eight percent also use general education basal materials and 42 percent use supplemental ELL materials bundled with core curriculum. Among the least-used materials for ELLs were subject-specific supplements not affiliated with a basal program (25 percent) and basal ESL programs (24 percent) (Figure 12).
- ❖ The majority of respondents did not feel that the materials they used to instruct ELLs met specified criteria for raising the performance of ELL students – particularly in regards to the common core. Approximately 82 percent of respondents indicated that the current materials they used reflected the rigor of the common core only “somewhat” or “not at all.” (Figure 13).
- ❖ Respondents rated the quality of instructional materials by type, content, grade, and in terms of students with differing levels of English language proficiency. Twenty-eight percent of respondents rated supplemental materials packaged with core basal programs as low quality. However, 61 percent rated the quality of basal ESL programs as either “average” or “high” (Figure 14).
- ❖ When respondents rated the quality of instructional materials for ELLs by content, roughly a third believed that instructional materials were of low quality across content areas. However, about half of respondents believed ESL (50 percent) and ELA (47 percent) materials were of “average” or “high” quality (Figure 15).
- ❖ Only 39 percent of respondents rated instructional materials for ELLs at the elementary grade levels (K-5) as being of either “average” or “high” quality. Fewer respondents thought materials for ELLs were of “average” or “high” quality in the middle school (6-8) and high school grades (9-12) – 36 percent and 26 percent, respectively (Figure 16).
- ❖ Materials were judged of lesser quality for students with lower levels of English proficiency. While roughly half of respondents rated materials as “average” or “high” quality for students one year behind grade level, that percentage dropped for students two years and three years behind grade level – 32 percent and 20 percent, respectively (Figure 17).

Figure 10. Percentage of CGCS respondents indicating how they choose instructional materials for ELLs (n=218)

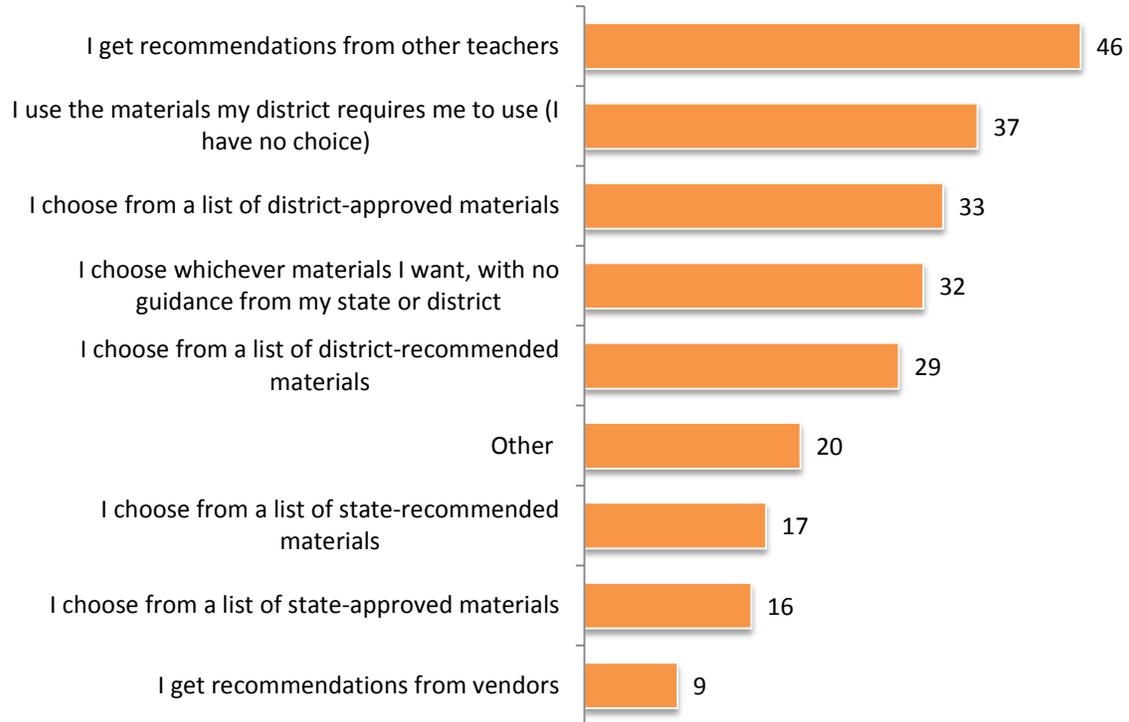


Figure 11. Percentage of CGCS respondents indicating their greatest challenges in selecting and procuring instructional materials for ELL students (n=218)

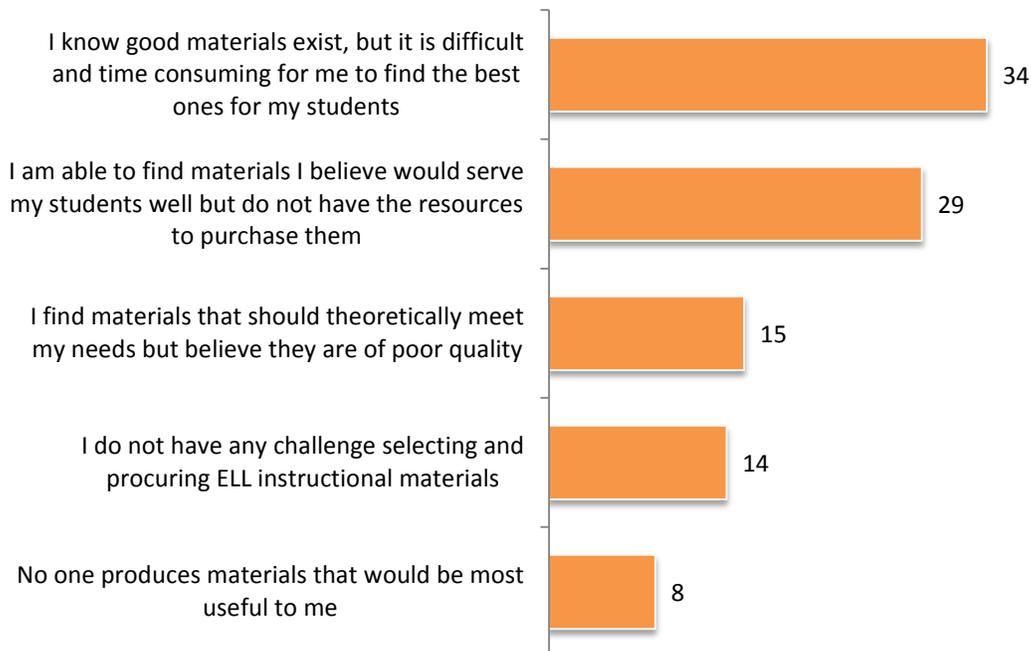


Table 3. Percentage of CGCS respondents indicating their greatest challenge in selecting and procuring ELL instructional materials by the percentage of students considered ELL in school, 2012 (n=216)

	0-10%	10-30%	30-50%	>50%	I don't know	Not applicable
I find materials that should theoretically meet my needs, but believe they are of poor quality	4.5	14.9	8.3	25.0	0.0	14.3
I am able to find materials I believe would serve my students well, but do not have the resources to purchase them	40.9	29.9	31.3	21.7	0.0	35.7
I do not have any challenge selecting and procuring ELL instructional materials	22.7	9.0	16.7	13.3	20.0	14.3
No one produces materials that would be most useful to me	4.5	14.9	4.2	6.7	0.0	7.1
I know good materials exist, but it is difficult and time-consuming for me to find the best ones for my students	27.3	31.3	39.6	33.3	80.0	28.6

Figure 12. Percentage of CGCS respondents using various types of instructional materials for ELL students (n=284)

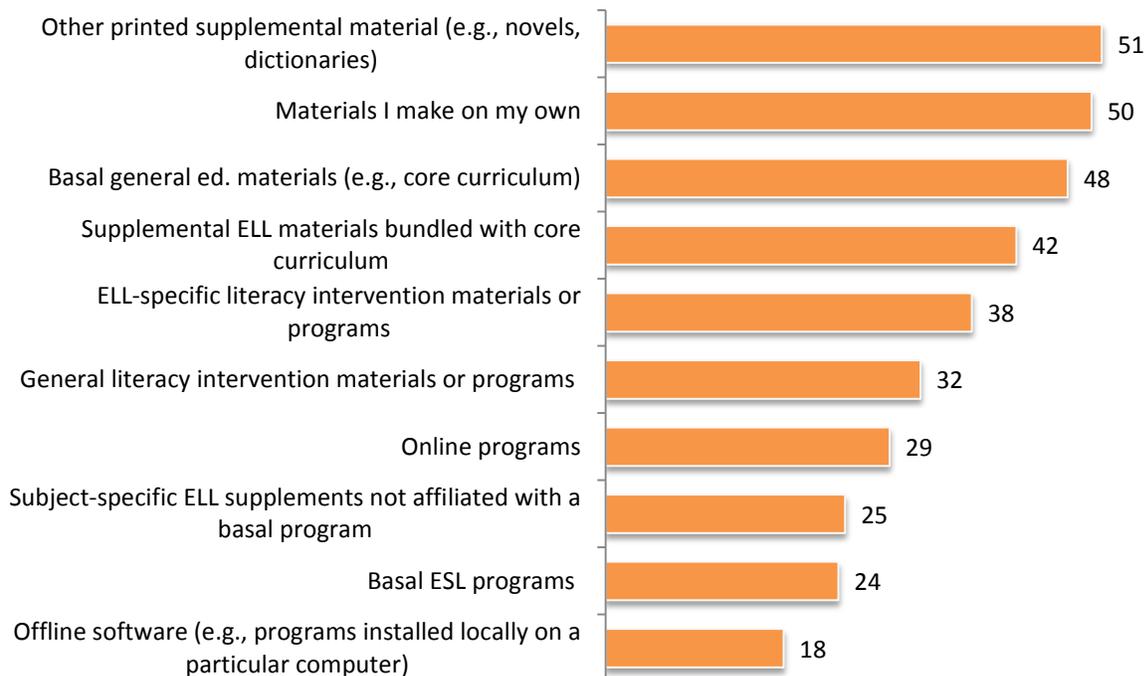


Figure 13. Percentage of CGCS respondents rating ELL materials based on how well materials meet the following criteria

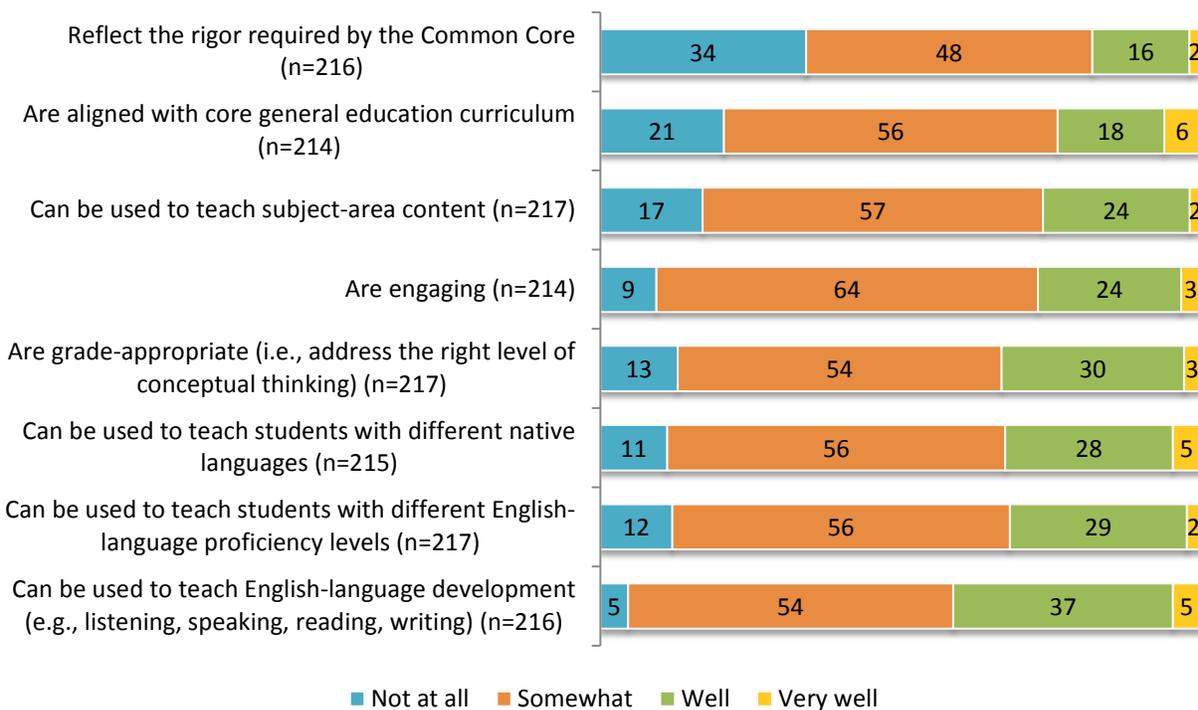


Figure 14. Percentage of CGCS respondents rating ELL instructional materials by type of material

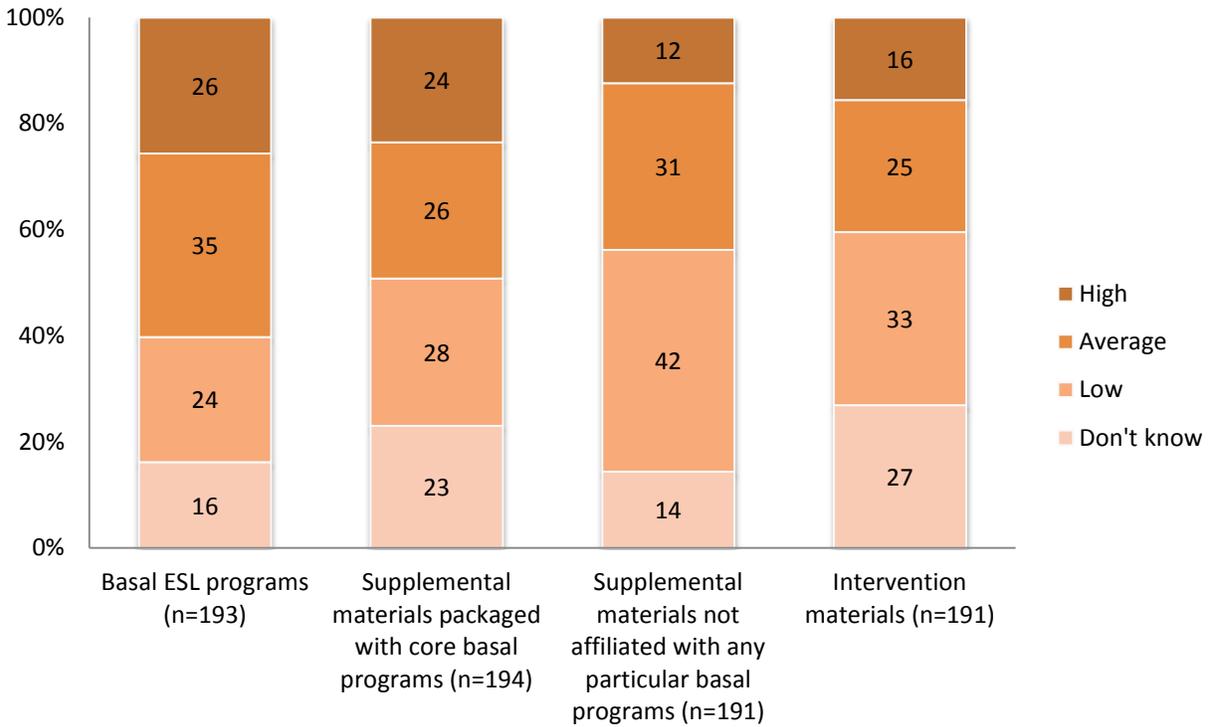


Figure 15. Percentage of CGCS respondents rating ELL instructional materials by content area

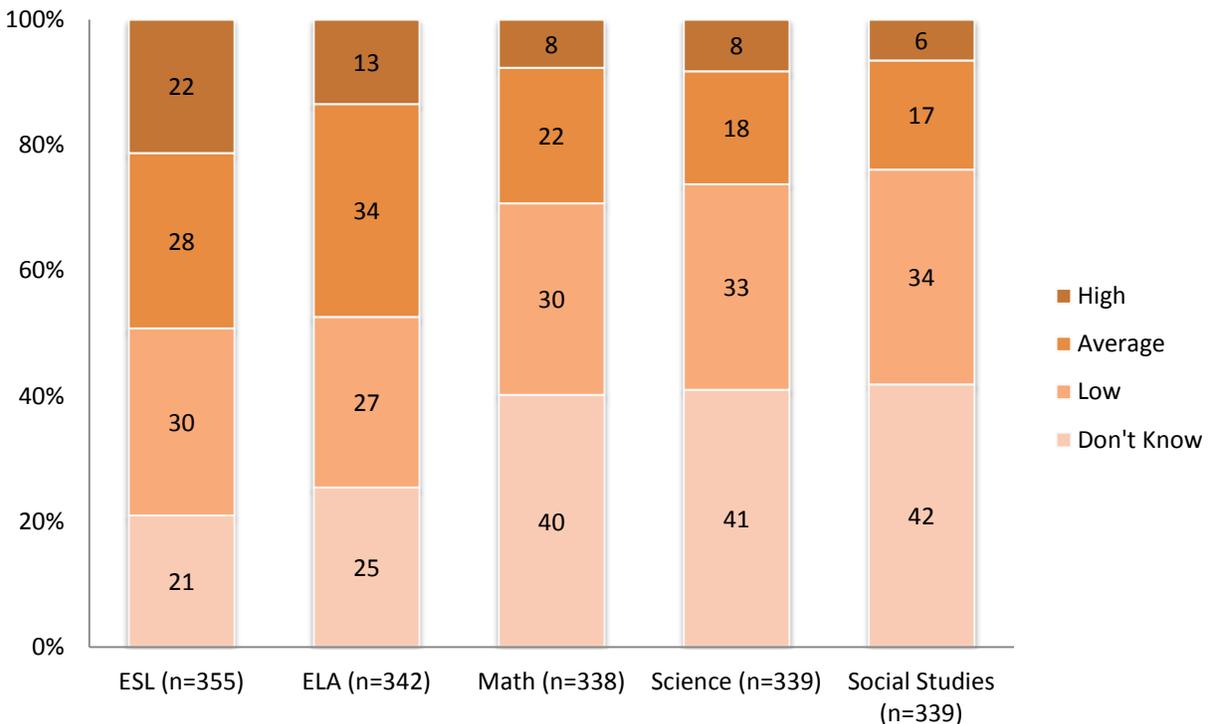


Figure 16. Percentage of CGCS respondents rating ELL instructional materials by grade level

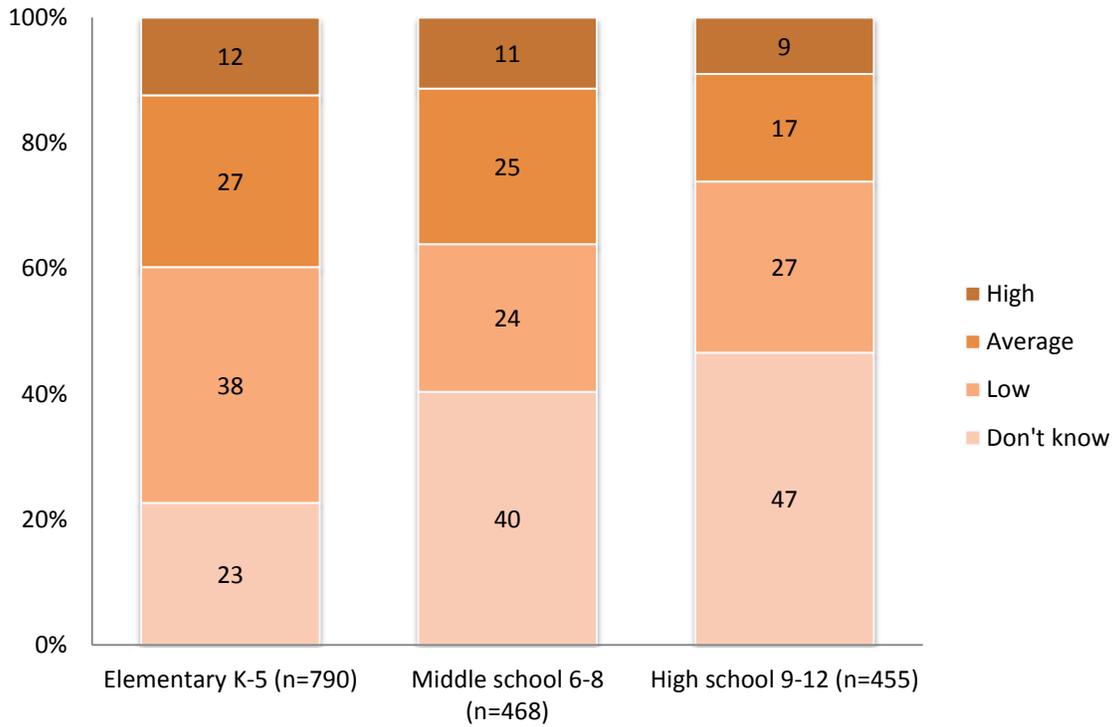
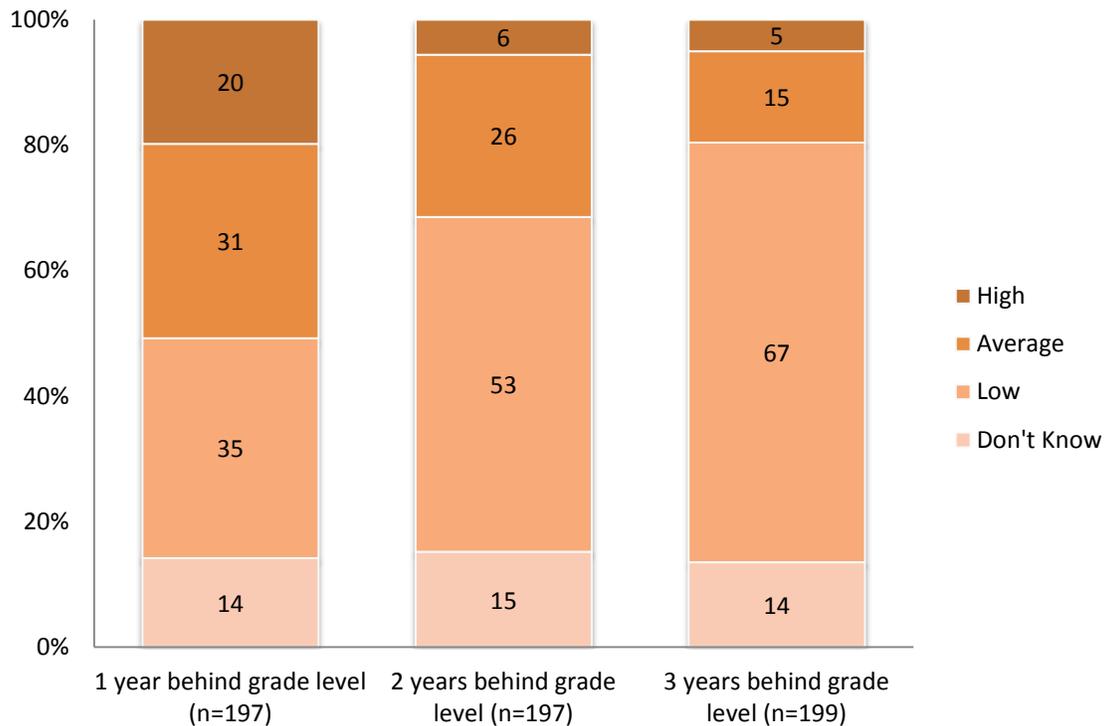


Figure 17. Percentage of CGCS respondents rating ELL instructional materials by levels of English language proficiency



Conclusion and Recommendations

Students classified as English Language Learners are a significant, and growing, group of pupils in our nation's public schools. As their numbers increase, more materials and other resources devoted to ensuring that they are able to meet the requirements of rigorous coursework are being identified and developed. The findings in this report make clear that there is much work to be done to improve the quality of ELL instructional materials and professional development for teachers. However, the findings also point to actionable solutions for addressing the shortcomings in the instruction of ELLs.

First, improving the quality of instructional materials for ELLs should be a priority. The findings show that the quality of instructional materials was perceived to be low across grade levels, content areas, and varying levels of English language proficiency. Furthermore, respondents indicated that current instructional materials failed to meet specific criteria related to the Common Core State Standards. These findings suggest the need for stronger collaboration between publishers and others involved in developing and reviewing instructional materials for ELLs, including teachers, ELL specialists, and instructional coaches from large urban school districts.

Second, high-quality professional development for general education and ESL teachers in second-language acquisition, language development, and ELL strategies aligned to the Common Core State Standards should be put into place. Given that a significant number of practitioners develop their own ELL materials alongside their efforts to prepare for the Common Core State Standards, it is clear that additional supports are needed. This will require an increased commitment to ELLs to ensure they meet the requirements of the common core.

And finally, energy should be devoted to ensuring that high-quality ELL instructional materials are made readily accessible to general education and ESL teachers. The greatest challenges to selecting and acquiring instructional materials for ELL students involve how time consuming and expensive the process is. Many practitioners thus resort to word of mouth when selecting materials or developing their own materials for ELL students. Districts should pursue a more systematic approach to developing and reviewing high-quality instructional materials and making them available to teachers who need them.

As states and school districts continue the process of implementing the Common Core State Standards, developing high-quality and accessible instructional materials for ELLs that are aligned with the common core should be a priority for all. The current state of instructional materials for ELLs is an impediment to this goal. We hope that this report contributes to the growing call for improvement in the education of ELLs.

Participating CGCS Districts

Albuquerque Public Schools	Kansas City (MO) Public Schools
Anchorage School District	Long Beach Unified School District
Atlanta Public Schools	Los Angeles Unified School District
Austin Independent School District	Memphis City Schools
Boston Public Schools	Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Broward County Schools	Milwaukee Public Schools
Buffalo City School District	New York City Department of Education
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	Newark Public Schools
Chicago Public Schools	Oakland Unified School District
Clark County School District	Omaha Public Schools
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	The School District of Palm Beach County
Dallas Independent School District	Portland Public Schools
Dayton Public Schools	Providence Public School District
Denver Public Schools	Richmond Public Schools
Des Moines Independent Community School District	Rochester City School District
District of Columbia Public Schools	San Diego Unified School District
Duval County Public Schools	San Francisco Unified School District
East Baton Rouge Parish School System	Sacramento Unified School District
Fresno Unified School District	Seattle Public Schools
Guilford County Public Schools	St. Paul Public Schools
Hillsborough County Public Schools	Toledo Public Schools
Houston Independent School District	