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Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language Academic Performance Summary, 2020–2021

Austin Independent School District

Department of
Research and Evaluation
AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide information about the academic performance of emergent bilingual students in the Austin Independent School District (AISD). This document summarizes performance on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests, end-of-course (EOC) tests, the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), advanced placement (AP) course enrollment, AP exam performance, college readiness indicators, and graduation and dropout rates. Academic outcomes were analyzed for Bilingual Education (BE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) Program participation and student characteristics.

Impact of COVID-19 on Academic Performance in 2020–2021

The percentages of students with STAAR and TELPAS assessment scores were lower than usual across the state and district. Since these exams were only offered in-person, lower testing rates in AISD may have been related to a higher rate of remote students, compared to those across the state. In general, emergent bilingual students had lower performance on standardized tests this year, when compared with prior years. Findings in this report may not be representative of all enrolled students. General trends were compared with those of available prior years to provide context for this year's findings.

Emergent Bilingual Students' Academic Performance

What did we learn?

Elementary level emergent bilingual students scored lower on TELPAS but higher on STAAR, compared with students at the secondary level.

- **Why would this be?** Findings are likely related to the gradual language acquisition of emergent bilingual students as they matriculate through school (for TELPAS) and the added rigor of school curriculum with increased grade levels (for STAAR).

Relative to never emergent bilingual students, emergent bilingual students were less likely to enroll in AP courses and underperformed on the majority of academic tests administered in the 2020–2021 school year.

- **Yes, but**: Emergent bilingual students who attended AISD continuously from 3rd through 8th grade scored equivalently to a comparison cohort of non-emergent bilingual students (matched on ethnicity, economic disadvantage, and schools) on STAAR reading and math in 2016–2021.
- Also note, secondary Dual Language (DL) 8th through 10th graders enrolled in at least one AP course at rates 6.6 and 3.1 times the rates of 8th- through 10th-grade ESL and never emergent bilingual students, respectively.

Relative to emergent bilingual students across the state, AISD emergent bilingual students underperformed on TELPAS, STAAR, and EOC. Some exceptions were that, for TELPAS, 11th and 12th graders scored similarly to students across the state, and for STAAR, 5th graders scored similarly to students across the state on the reading exam.

- **Is this usually the case?** No, AISD emergent bilingual students typically score similarly to or higher than those statewide. As stated above, this was a difficult year

for standardized testing, but it is unclear why performance gaps increased between AISD emergent bilingual students and emergent bilingual students statewide. These findings may be related to issues surrounding teaching during the pandemic, such as lower in-person student attendance in AISD compared to the state and the pandemic's impact on BE/ESL program implementation.

In general, students in BE Programs (DL and Transitional/Late Exit) tended to score lower than students in ESL on standardized tests at the elementary level (e.g., TELPAS, STAAR), but performance evened out across BE/ESL Programs in middle and high school. For example, secondary students in DL passed four out of five EOC exams at significantly higher rates than did secondary students in ESL.

- **What else?** After excluding newcomer students from TELPAS analyses, middle and high school DL students had higher English proficiency than did ESL students. This is an important caveat to examine in future analyses at the secondary level. Elementary school is less affected by newcomer status with respect to how BE/ESL Programs relate to English proficiency since all students are still learning to read, write, and speak during these years.

Emergent bilingual students' dropout rate has been steadily declining over the last 5 years, and their graduation rate has been increasing. This year had the first decline seen in the last 5 years for emergent bilingual students' graduation rate.

Monitored students (formerly emergent bilingual) have traditionally outperformed students who were never emergent bilingual. Generally, with each additional year a student is monitored, higher academic performance on all state assessments is seen; this was also the case on many exams this year. In addition, this year, monitored students were three times more college ready than were emergent bilingual students.

- **What does this mean?** The ability of the BE/ESL Programs at AISD to create academically successful students is apparent.

Major Takeaway

While large performance gaps may be apparent between emergent bilingual students and non-emergent bilingual students on many academic assessments, these findings can be misleading without examination of other factors, such as emergent bilingual students' socioeconomic status, ethnicity, newcomer status, and subsequent performance after exiting emergent bilingual status.

Glossary of Terms

Throughout this report, the following terms are used to refer to student groups:

- **Emergent bilingual:** students eligible for enrollment in a BE/ESL Program (formerly known as English learners; includes actively enrolled and students who declined services).
- **Never emergent bilingual:** students who have never enrolled in a BE/ESL Program.
- **Monitored:** students who have been reclassified from the status of emergent bilingual to English proficient at some point in the last 4 or more years.
- **Non-emergent bilingual:** students who are not currently enrolled in a BE/ESL Program (includes both never and monitored/former emergent bilingual students).
- **Newcomer:** students who have been in the United States for 3 or fewer years.

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Introduction

This report summarizes the academic performance of students in the Bilingual Education (BE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs implemented at the Austin Independent School District (AISD) in 2020–2021. It summarizes academic performance on the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) test, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), the end-of-course (EOC) exams, advanced placement (AP) course performance, graduation and dropout rates, and college readiness. This is the second report in a two-part series of reports on emergent bilingual students, or students previously known as English learners. For more information on the programs offered and student demographics, see Archuleta and Lucas (2021).

TELPAS

TELPAS is the annual state-required assessment for emergent bilingual students. TELPAS assesses English acquisition and proficiency for students in kindergarten (KG) through grade 12 in four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (see sidebar on p. 2 for more information). In Spring 2021, the in-person TELPAS exam was required by the TEA for all emergent bilingual students, and those who were learning remotely were encouraged to participate (for more information, see Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2021a). However, there were far fewer TELPAS test takers in AISD than in previous years, which is likely related to the high percentage of students who were learning remotely in 2020–2021, especially at the secondary level. Almost all elementary level emergent bilingual students took all domains of TELPAS and received a composite score (Table 1) in 2020–2021. Furthermore, in 2020–2021, students had the option use LAS Links to test their English profiency instead of TELPAS.

Table 1.

Percentage of AISD Emergent Bilingual Students With TELPAS Composite Scores, by Grade Level, Spring 2021

Grade level	Enrolled students	TELPAS test takers	Difference	% enrolled students who took TELPAS
KG	1,920	1,885	-35	98%*
1	1,937	1,908	-29	99%*
2	1,915	1,531	-384	80%
3	1,907	1,536	-371	81%
4	1,886	1,477	-409	78%
5	1,820	1,353	-467	74%
6	1,654	618	-1,036	37%
7	1,358	478	-880	35%
8	1,305	462	-843	35%
9	1,439	292	-1,147	20%
10	1,158	205	-953	18%
11	752	120	-632	16%
12	584	90	-494	15%

Source. AISD student enrollment table and AISD TELPAS data

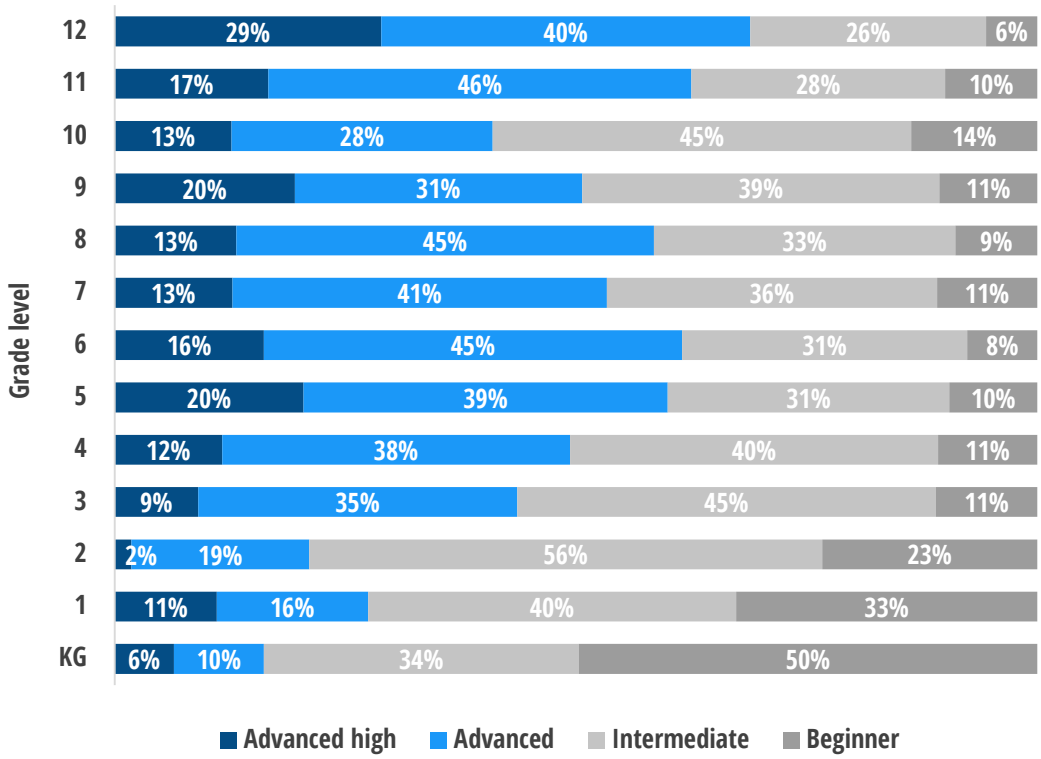
Note. Data include students enrolled at the end of the 2021 school year.

*Kindergarten and 1st grade TELPAS scores were holistic, based on teacher observation.

A greater percentage of students scored advanced or advanced high composite ratings at upper elementary grades than at lower elementary grades, which is consistent with gradual language acquisition of emergent bilingual students as they matriculate through school (Figure 1). From 5th grade through 12th grade, except 10th grade, more than half of emergent bilingual students at each grade level received composite TELPAS ratings of advanced or advanced high. A dip in 9th- and 10th-grade TELPAS scores has also been seen in past years and is likely related to the adjustment to the added rigor of high school curriculum. The highest percentages of students attained advanced and advanced high ratings in grades 6, 11, and 12. Students in 11th and 12th grades had higher rates of advanced and advanced high scores, compared with last year (8 and 17 percentage points higher, respectively). However, less than one fourth of the typical number of students was tested this year in those grade levels, so differences should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 1.

AISD TELPAS Composite Ratings, by Grade Level, 2021



Source. AISD student enrollment table and AISD TELPAS data

In comparison with statewide TELPAS composite results, AISD emergent bilingual students scored below the state in KG through 5th grades and in 7th through 10th grades. That is, significantly fewer AISD students than those across the state scored advanced or advanced high in those grade levels. In 6th, 11th, and 12th grades, AISD students did not have significantly different test scores compared to the state. However, in-person testing rates were lower for all students in AISD (62% on average, across all grade levels for STAAR, STAAR Alternate 2, TELPAS, TELPAS Alternate, and/or SAT/ACT), compared to the state (88%; TEA, 2021a). Furthermore, AISD had more remote students overall (73%; TEA student records, 2021), compared to the state (46%, as of October 2020; TEA, 2021b). Thus, caution should be taken in making direct comparisons between AISD and statewide test scores.

TELPAS Composite Rating

In KG and 1st grade, all four domains are holistically rated based on classroom observations and student-teacher interactions. In grades 2 through 12, reading, listening, and speaking are standardized online assessments. Writing for grades 2 through 12 is holistically rated based on writing collections completed by the student. All four domains are combined to create a composite TELPAS score.

A student can receive one of four composite proficiency ratings: beginning, intermediate, advanced, or advanced high.

To achieve the advanced high composite proficiency rating, a student must receive

- **a composite score greater than or equal to 3.5 or**
- **a minimum proficiency level 3 (advanced) in all four domains.**

To achieve the advanced composite proficiency rating, a student must receive

- **a composite score greater than or equal to 2.5 or**
- **a minimum proficiency level 2 (intermediate) in all domains**
- **or a minimum proficiency level 3 (advanced) in at least half of the domains assessed.**

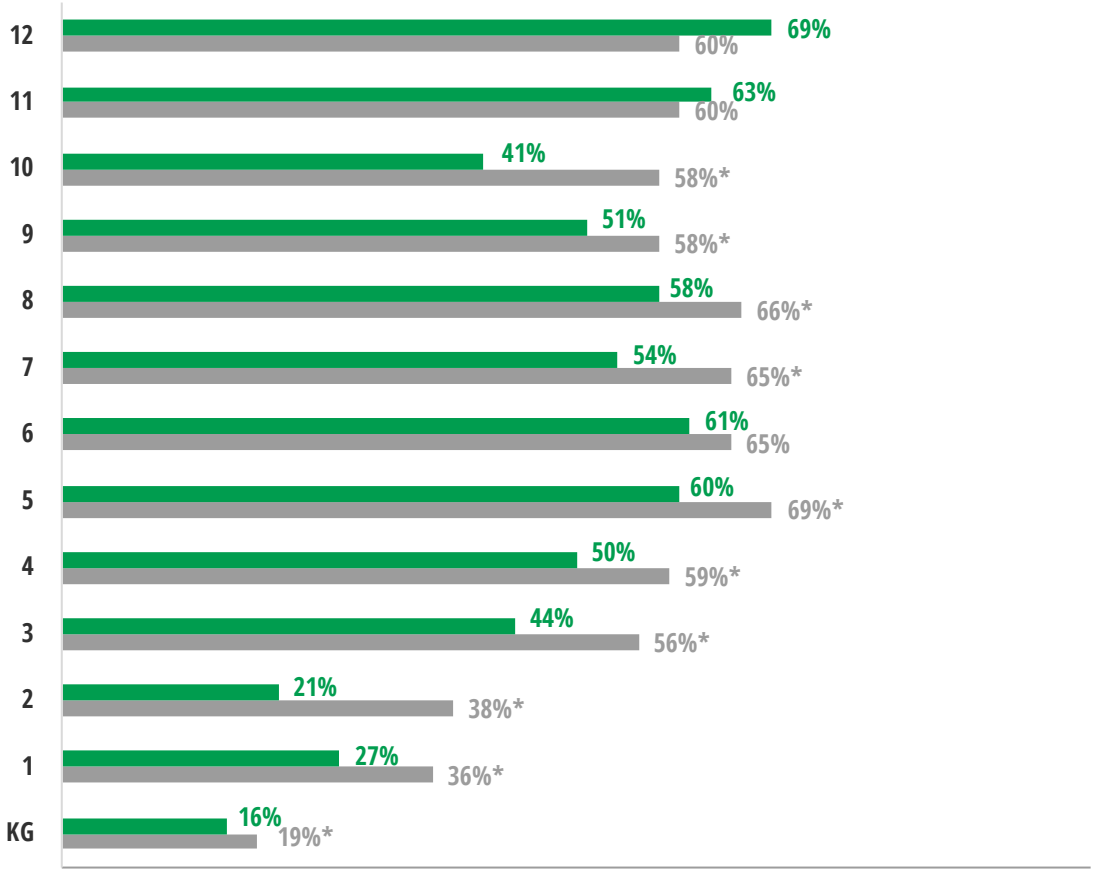
To achieve the intermediate composite proficiency rating, a student must receive

- **a composite score greater than or equal to 1.5 or**
- **a minimum proficiency level 2 (intermediate) in at least half of the domains assessed.**

For more information, see https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/testing/telpas/telpas-resources.

Figure 2.

Percentage of AISD and State Emergent Bilingual Students' Advanced and Advanced High TELPAS Composite Scores, by Grade Level, 2021



Source. AISD TELPAS records 2021 and TEA TELPAS state records 2021

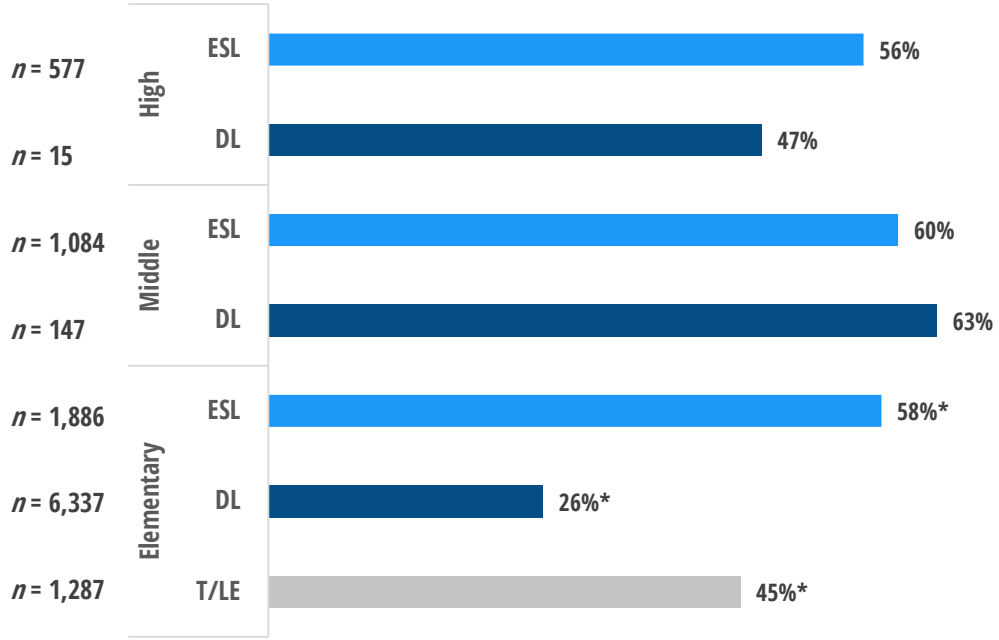
* Indicates difference between AISD and Texas percentages within the grade level are significant.

TELPAS Performance, by BE/ESL Program and Grade Level

In the elementary grades, a smaller percentage of students in BE Programs (DL and Transitional/Late Exit [T/LE]) than of students in ESL scored advanced or advanced high on TELPAS (Figure 3). However, in middle school and high school, DL and ESL students were equally likely to score advanced or advanced high. Statewide TELPAS composite results also showed that students in a BE Program begin to outperform ESL students (at statistically significant rates), starting in 6th grade (TEA, 2021c). It may take students in BE Programs a few extra years to catch up to students in ESL in their English proficiency, since the goals of BE Programs are not exclusively about English proficiency and include biliteracy and biculturalism. A nationwide study of English proficiency in BE Programs also found a slower rate of English proficiency for students in BE Programs than for other students, but overall, more BE students than other students achieved English proficiency and had high academic achievement (Umansky & Reardon, 2014).

Figure 3.

Advanced/Advanced High TELPAS Composite Scores by BE/ESL Program and School Level, 2021



Source. AISD TELPAS records and student program enrollment table

Note. When accounting for newcomer status, two-way DL Spanish students outperformed ESL students in secondary grade levels.

*Indicates differences between each program at the elementary level are significant.

It takes new emergent bilingual students, on average, 3 to 5 years to gain oral proficiency in the new language and 4 to 7 years to develop academic proficiency (Hakuta & Butler, 2000). Thus, it makes sense that by the end of elementary school, most emergent bilingual students reach English proficiency and exit emergent bilingual status (Umansky & Reardon, 2014). In the secondary grade levels, it is more difficult to predict English proficiency based on grade since many emergent bilingual students in the upper grades likely entered the United States at the end of or any time after elementary school. In fact, when TELPAS scores were examined for each program in the secondary school level, without including newcomer students, two-way DL Spanish students outperformed ESL students on TELPAS. In contrast, when newcomer students were included, ESL students appeared to score higher than DL students on TELPAS. In comparison to the secondary ESL program, the sample of secondary DL students is much smaller with a higher concentration of newcomer students. This contrast in program performance based on newcomer status was not seen in elementary school TELPAS scores. Elementary level English proficiency is likely unaffected by newcomer status and program type since all students are still learning to read, write, and gain vocabulary during these years. Across grade levels, the percentage of newcomers achieving an advanced or advanced high composite score was much lower than that of non-newcomers. This is expected because these students did not have as much time in the United States to become English proficient. With each additional year in the United States, AISD students' TELPAS scores increased, with more than 60% of students who were in the United States for 5 or more years scoring advanced or advanced high.

Performance, by Economic Disadvantage

Students' socioeconomic status is measured by their qualification for free- or reduced-price school lunch. In prior years, academic performance was examined in relation to the socioeconomic status of students as well as campuses. However, in 2020–2021, families were not required to submit records of their income. Thus, analyses regarding socioeconomic status were excluded from this report.

STAAR

AISD students in grades 3 through 8 took the state-required STAAR in the academic subject areas of reading (grades 3 through 8), writing (grades 4 and 7), math (grades 3 through 8), science (grades 5 and 8), and social studies (grade 8). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, students were not required to take the STAAR exam. In 2021, the in-person STAAR exam was required by the TEA, and students who were learning remotely were encouraged to participate. Students who did not meet the standard on the STAAR exam were not required to repeat a grade level or retest, as was required in years prior (TEA, 2021d). Fewer students in AISD took the STAAR exam in 2021 than in previous years, potentially due to the high percentage of students who were learning remotely (TEA student records, 2021). Table 1 shows the percentages of AISD students who had a valid score for the STAAR reading test out of all students actively enrolled at the end of the 2020–2021 school year. Reading was chosen as the STAAR subject to examine testing rates because it has the highest rate of test takers and is typically required for students in grades 3 through 8.

In prior years, almost all enrolled students took the STAAR reading exam (Jensen, 2019). This year, 82% of emergent bilingual students in elementary school and 49% of emergent bilingual students in middle school took STAAR reading. Emergent bilingual students took the STAAR reading exam at a significantly higher rate than did all AISD students.

Table 2.

AISD Districtwide and Emergent Bilingual Students' STAAR Reading Testing Rates, 2021

Grade level	Enrolled students	STAAR reading test takers	Difference	% enrolled students who took STAAR reading
All AISD students				
3	5,670	4,305	-1365	76%
4	5,595	4,159	-1436	74%
5	5,537	3,953	-1584	71%
6	5,469	2,499	-2970	46%
7	5,423	2,098	-3325	39%
8	5,450	1,628	-3822	30%
Emergent bilingual students				
3	1,907	1,603	-304	84%
4	1,886	1,537	-349	81%
5	1,820	1,450	-370	80%
6	1,654	871	-783	53%
7	1,358	686	-672	51%
8	1,305	557	-748	43%

Source. AISD student records and STAAR 2021 data

All emergent bilingual students, regardless of program enrollment, followed a similar STAAR performance pattern in reading and math throughout grade levels. Emergent bilingual students' performance was better in 3rd than 4th grade but best in 5th grade. In middle school, performance was lower for all students, especially in math. The drop in

STAAR

The STAAR assessments are state-mandated tests for students in grades 3 through 8, for content areas in reading, math, writing, science, and social studies. The Student Success Initiative (SSI) requires that students in 5th and 8th grades pass the reading and math tests to move on to subsequent grades. For more information on SSI, see https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/testing/student-assessment-overview/student-success-initiative.

In addition to the grade-3 through grade-8 assessments, students are required to pass five STAAR EOC assessments (algebra I, English I & II, biology, and U.S. history) to receive a high school diploma.

The STAAR minimum passing standard, referred to as *approaches grade level*, indicates students who are able to apply assessed knowledge and skills in familiar contexts and who are likely to succeed in the next grade or course, with some targeted intervention. Many students performed at a higher level than the minimum passing standard.

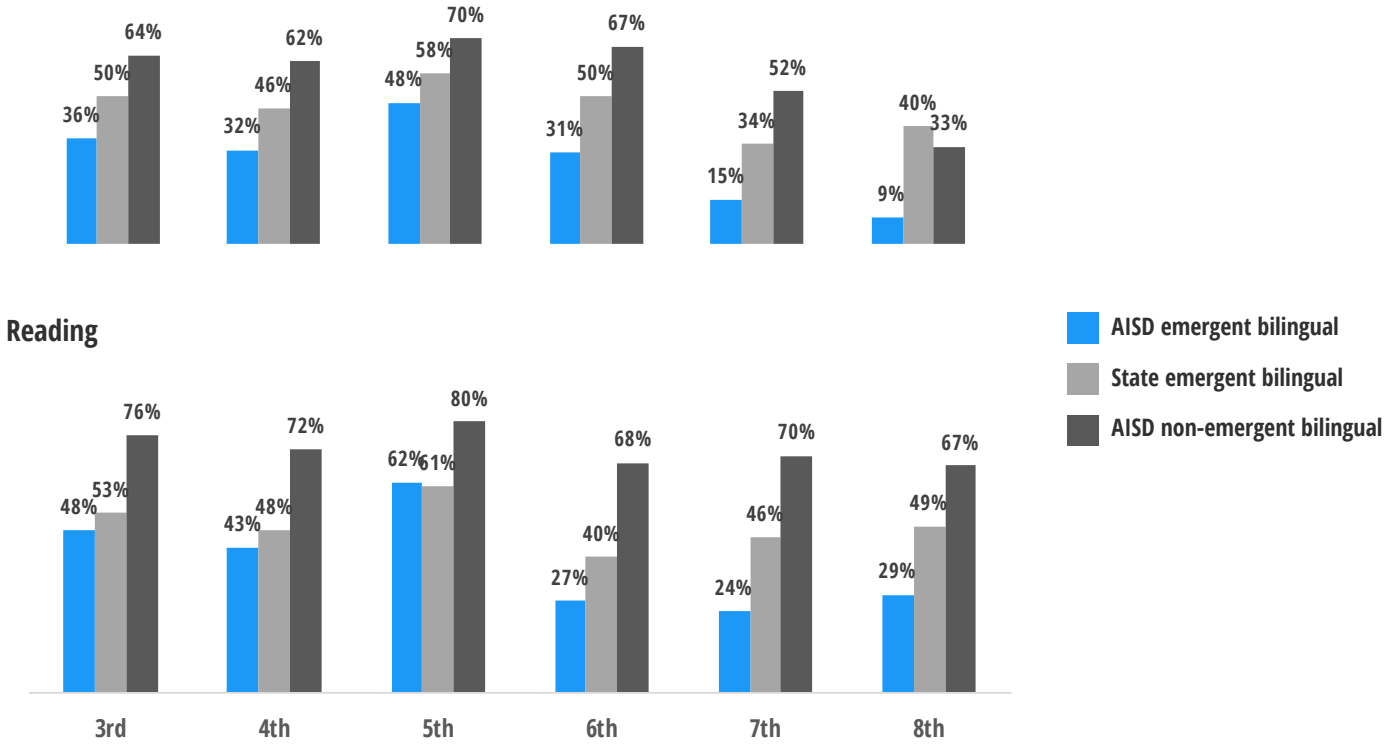
The TEA recognizes two higher performance levels. *Meets grade level* indicates students have the ability to think critically and apply the assessed knowledge and skills to familiar contexts and are highly likely to succeed in the next grade level, with minimal interventions.

***Masters grade level* indicates students are able to think critically and apply the assessed knowledge and skills in familiar and unfamiliar contexts and are expected to succeed in the next grade level, without interventions (see the TEA's STAAR website for more information: https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/testing/staar/staar-resources).**

emergent bilingual students' STAAR performance after 5th grade is similar to what was observed for all students across AISD and may indicate an increase in the complexity and difficulty of academics in middle school, compared with that in elementary school. Overall, emergent bilingual students underperformed in comparison with never emergent bilingual students (i.e., those who had never been in a BE/ESL Program and thus were not being monitored) on STAAR reading and math (Figure 4). This is a trend seen statewide as well as in past years at AISD. However, this year, the performance gap between emergent bilingual students and never emergent bilingual students was larger at elementary grade levels than it was in the previous test year, 2019. In both subjects, emergent bilingual students underperformed in comparison with never emergent bilingual students at statistically significant rates.

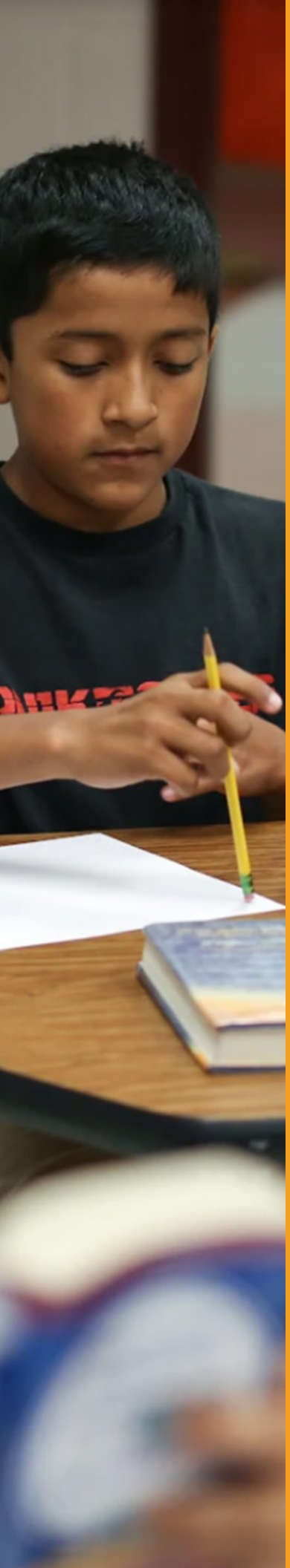
Figure 4.

In most grade levels, AISD emergent bilingual students underperformed on STAAR reading and math, in comparison with state emergent bilingual students and AISD non-emergent bilingual students, in 2021.



Source. AISD and Texas STAAR reports, 2021

Note. Best score out of English and Spanish versions. Differences between AISD and the state are statistically significant, except for 5th-grade reading. Differences between emergent and non-emergent bilingual students at AISD are statistically significant. Non-emergent bilingual students include monitored students.



AISD emergent bilingual students passed at a similar rate to students across the state in 5th-grade reading, with 1 percentage point more AISD students passing than state students (Figure 4). For reading, differences in passing rates were less dramatic for elementary grade levels (AISD scored 5 percentage points lower than the state at 3rd and 4th grade) than middle school grade levels (AISD scored 13 to 26 percentage points lower than the state). In AISD, emergent bilingual students passed the STAAR math exams at a rate between 10 and 31 percentage points lower than emergent bilingual students statewide. All differences between AISD and the state were significant, except for 5th-grade reading.

STAAR Performance, by Testing Language

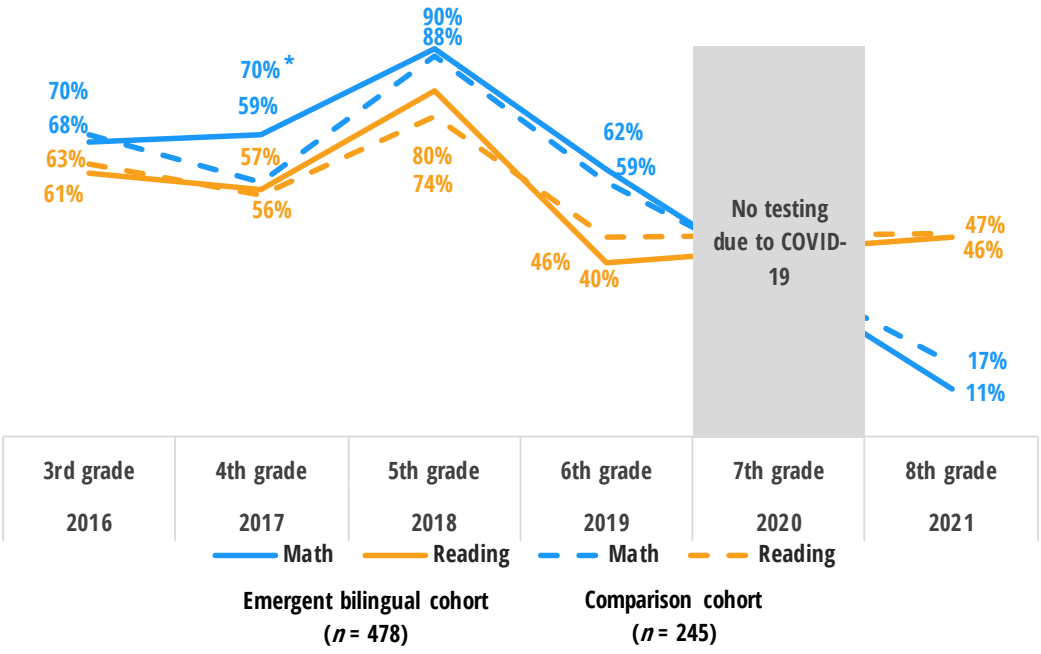
In grades 3 through 5, STAAR is offered in both Spanish and English. Notably, fewer than half of all Spanish-speaking emergent bilingual students were given the STAAR test in Spanish. Overall, Spanish-speaking emergent bilingual students who tested in English passed the STAAR reading test at a significantly lower rate (40%, $n = 4{,}308$, $p < .0001$) than did those who were tested in Spanish (47%, $n = 1{,}655$). However, this trend was not seen for math, writing, or science. Instead, only 2% more students passed the Spanish than passed the English STAAR writing test. On the math and science STAAR tests, students tested in Spanish passed at significantly lower percentages than did those tested in English ($p < .0001$). However, unlike science, math is not taught in Spanish in the BE Programs. The decision to test a student in either English or Spanish on the STAAR exam is based on a number of variables and led by the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee.

STAAR Emergent Bilingual Student Cohort Longitudinal Analysis, 2016–2021

Figure 5 shows the STAAR reading and math performance of an emergent bilingual cohort over 6 years. This longitudinal analysis followed emergent bilingual students who were continuously enrolled at AISD since 3rd grade in Spring 2016 and took STAAR reading and math each year through Spring 2021. Originally, the cohort consisted of 2,453 emergent bilingual 3rd grade students, with 1,245 comparison students. Of those students, 478 from the emergent bilingual cohort and 245 from the comparison cohort stayed enrolled at AISD through 8th grade and took the STAAR exam each year it was offered. The comparison cohort of non-emergent bilingual 3rd graders was closely matched by socioeconomic status (qualifying for free- or reduced-price school lunch), race/ethnicity and campus. In the emergent bilingual cohort, 91% of students qualified for free- or reduced-price school lunch and 94% were Hispanic. In the comparison cohort, 78% qualified for free- or reduced-price school lunch and 89% were Hispanic. Students in both groups were enrolled in the same group of schools. Although the emergent bilingual cohort started out as emergent bilingual in 3rd grade, many became English proficient during the 6-year analysis.

Figure 5.

Third-Grade Cohort's STAAR Math and Reading Passing Rates Across 6 Years, 2016–2021



Source. STAAR 2016–2021 records

Note. Analyses only include students with scored tests for each of the 6 years and unmodified test versions. The comparison cohort included non-emergent bilingual students matched by socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and school enrollment.

* Indicates a statistically significant difference between the emergent bilingual cohort and the comparison cohort for STAAR math.

For both STAAR reading and math, emergent bilingual students' and non-emergent bilingual students' passing rates followed a similar pattern, with a peak in passing rate at 5th grade (Figure 5). The emergent bilingual cohort scored significantly higher than did the comparison group on 4th-grade math ($p < .05$). No other significant differences between cohorts were found. STAAR data are missing for students' 7th-grade year in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings are consistent with a similar longitudinal STAAR analysis of cohorts' STAAR math and reading performance (Jensen, 2019) in that both analyses showed a trend of increasing passing rates until 5th grade, followed by a decline. In contrast, in 8th grade, the previous analysis showed a substantial increase in passing rates from 6th to 8th grade, which was not seen in this year's analysis.

STAAR Performance of Current, Monitored, and Never Emergent Bilingual Students

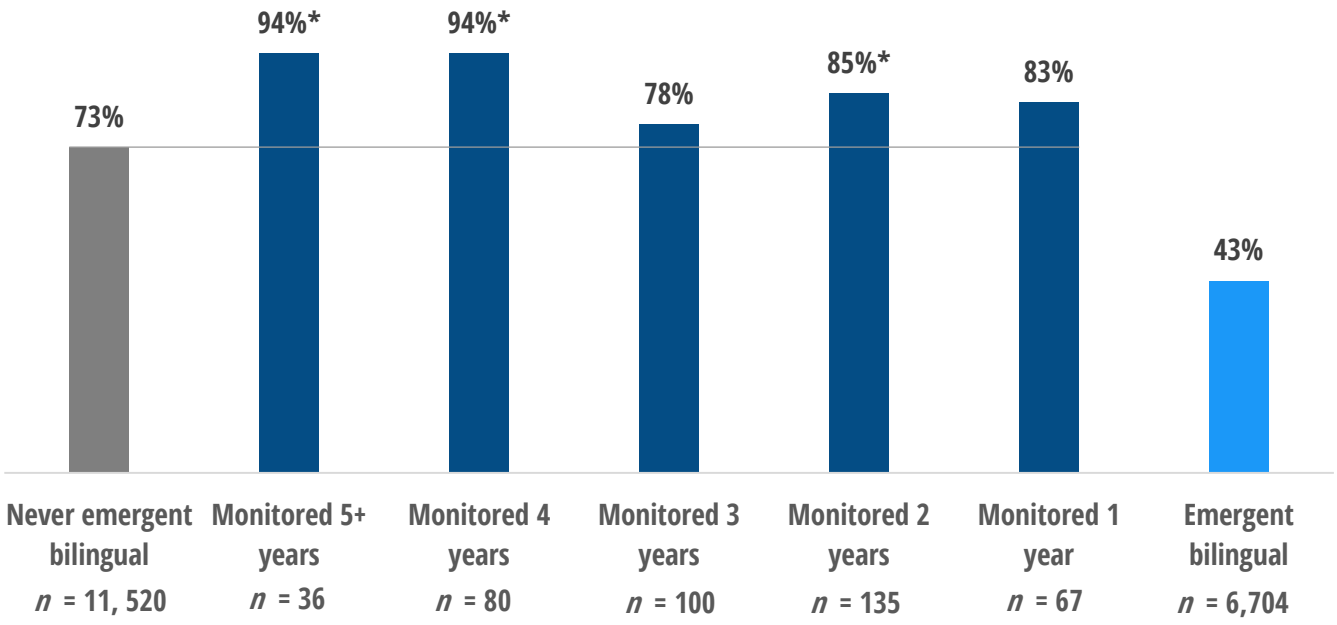
This section presents 2021 STAAR performance for three student types: current emergent bilingual students, students who exited emergent bilingual status by testing proficient in English (these students are monitored for the first 5 years after exiting), and students who have never had emergent bilingual status. The comparison between emergent bilingual and never emergent bilingual students appeared to show a large performance gap, which may be misleading without an examination of the performance of monitored students.

As emergent bilingual students became English proficient and exited emergent bilingual status, a substantial increase was seen in their passing rates of all subjects over the 5 years they were monitored. On average, monitored students performed better than both emergent bilingual students and never emergent bilingual students (Figure 6), indicating that after students exited emergent bilingual status, they sustained high academic achievement levels. The most common grade level for AISD students to exit emergent bilingual status is 5th grade (Jensen, 2019). This is likely because it takes about 3 to 5 years for a student to gain proficiency in a new language (Hakuta & Butler, 2000), and many emergent bilingual students enter the school system around KG. According to the state commissioner's rules concerning the state plan for educating emergent bilinguals, students in a BE Program may not exit any BE Program until after 6 years of enrollment in school; ESL does not have the same exiting requirements. Because monitored students were more scarce in elementary school than in secondary school, analyses focused only on middle school students.

Figure 6 shows the upward trajectory of scores associated with additional years of monitoring former emergent bilingual students' STAAR reading passing rates in middle school. Monitored students at every stage outperformed never emergent bilingual students on STAAR reading. The phenomenon of monitored students outperforming never emergent bilingual students is also seen in statewide STAAR results (TEA, 2021e).

Figure 6.

Middle School Passing Rates on STAAR Reading for Emergent Bilingual, Monitored, and Never Emergent Bilingual Students, 2021



Source. AISD STAAR data, 2021

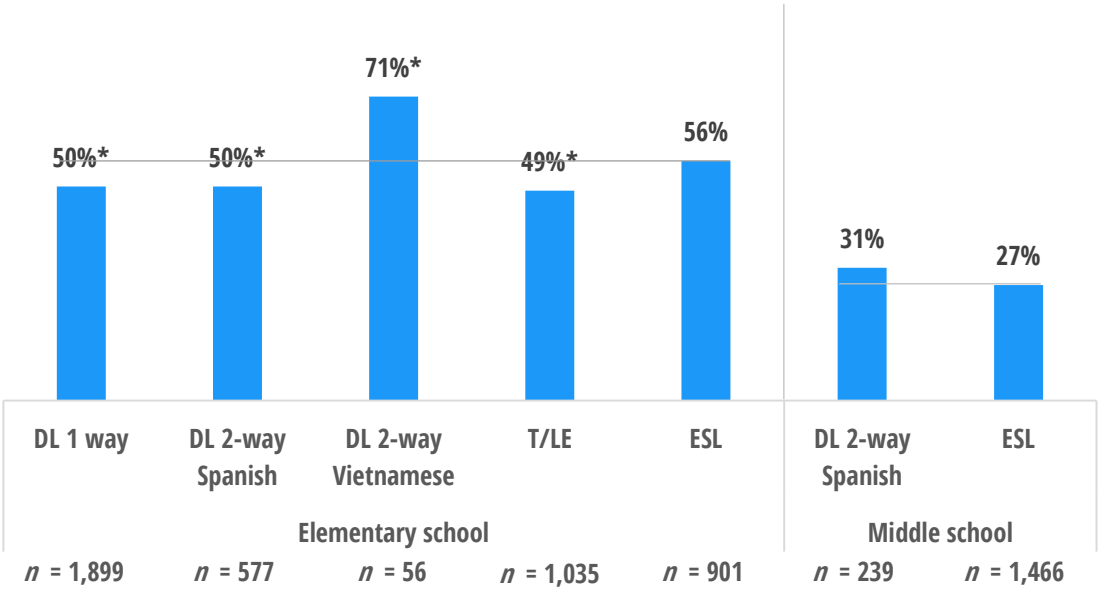
* Indicates a statistically significant difference between monitored students and never emergent bilingual students (indicated by horizontal line).

STAAR Performance, by BE/ESL Program and School Level

This section covers STAAR performance for students in DL, T/LE, and ESL Programs. The T/LE, DL one-way, DL two-way Mandarin, and DL two-way Vietnamese Programs were offered from KG to 5th grade; the DL two-way Spanish Program was offered from prekindergarten (pre-K) through 10th grade; and ESL was offered from pre-K through 12th grade. Emergent bilingual elementary students in a BE Program (DL one-way, DL two-way Spanish and T/LE) underperformed on the STAAR exams in all subjects, compared with elementary students in ESL, except for those in DL two-way Vietnamese, who outperformed ESL students (Figure 7). However, in middle school, DL two-way Spanish students (the only BE Program in middle school) performed similarly to ESL students on STAAR exams (Figure 7). To examine whether newcomer status might affect program outcomes, the same analysis was run excluding students who had only been in the United States 4 or fewer years. After accounting for newcomers, there were no statistical differences between BE and ESL students' performances across grade levels, except for DL two-way Vietnamese students, who still outperformed ESL students. In statewide STAAR results, students in BE Programs typically outperform those in ESL (TEA, 2021d). The last recorded AISD STAAR performance outcomes, from the 2018–2019 school year, showed students in BE Programs performed similarly to or outperformed students in ESL, across grade levels. It is unclear why this was not apparent in AISD's STAAR results this year, but it may be related to low testing rates, issues related to teaching during the pandemic, such as the pandemic's impact on implementation.

Figure 7.

Emergent Bilingual Students' Passing Rate on STAAR Reading, by BE/ESL Program and School Level, 2021



Source. AISD STAAR data, 2021

Note. When excluding newcomers, there were no statistical differences between BE and ESL students' performances across grade levels, except for DL two-way Vietnamese students, who still outperformed ESL students.

* Indicates a statistically significant difference between a BE Program passing rate and the ESL passing rate (indicated by horizontal line).

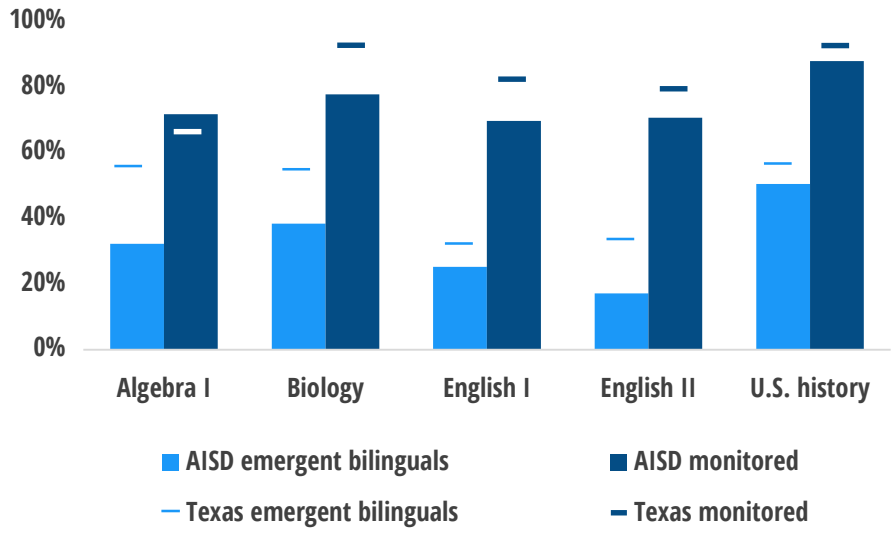
EOC

Overall, between 811 and 1,691 emergent bilingual students, depending on subject, took the Spring 2021 EOC assessments (Appendix A), which is slightly greater than the number of emergent bilingual students who tested in Spring 2019. The majority of test takers were in the 9th through 11th grades, though some took the exams in grades 8 and 12.

Figure 8 shows the EOC performance of AISD emergent bilingual and monitored students, compared with that of Texas emergent bilingual and monitored students. AISD emergent bilingual students passed all EOC exams at significantly lower rates than did those in Texas. Similarly, AISD monitored students passed all EOC exams at significantly lower rates than did Texas monitored students, except for algebra I. AISD and Texas monitored students' passing rates for algebra I were not significantly different. Overall, EOC exam performance trends contrast with those seen in 2019, when both AISD emergent bilingual and monitored students outperformed or had a similar performance to Texas emergent bilingual and monitored students (Jensen, 2019).

Figure 8.

EOC Exam Passing Rates for AISD Emergent Bilingual and Monitored Students, Compared With Rates Statewide, Spring 2021



Source. AISD EOC records and TEA records, Spring 2021

Note. Monitored students are those who exited emergent bilingual status up to four years prior. Analyses include unmodified test versions. All differences between AISD and Texas emergent bilingual students were significant. For AISD and Texas monitored students, differences were significant for all subjects except algebra. Texas emergent bilingual *n*s ranged between 41,926 and 75,386; Texas monitored student *n*s ranged between 13,997 and 25,293.

EOC Performance of Current, Monitored, and Never Emergent Bilingual Students

The majority of emergent bilingual students who took the algebra I, biology, and English I exams were in 9th grade and passed at 33%, 29%, and 31% for 9th graders, respectively. A higher percentage of 8th-grade emergent bilingual students who took the algebra I exam

EOC Testing Throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic

The STAAR EOC assessments measure students' academic performance in the core high school subjects of algebra I, English I and II, biology, and U.S. history. Students must pass EOC tests prior to graduation from high school.

In Spring 2020, due to consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the TEA waived EOC graduation requirements. Thus, no prior year test scores are available for comparisons with the 2020–2021 school year.

In Spring 2021, school systems that were offering remote instruction were required to encourage participation in EOC assessments by adjusting the testing environment for safety and by reaching out to parents of students receiving remote instruction. In addition, testing windows for Spring EOC assessments were extended by 5 weeks (TEA, 2021d).

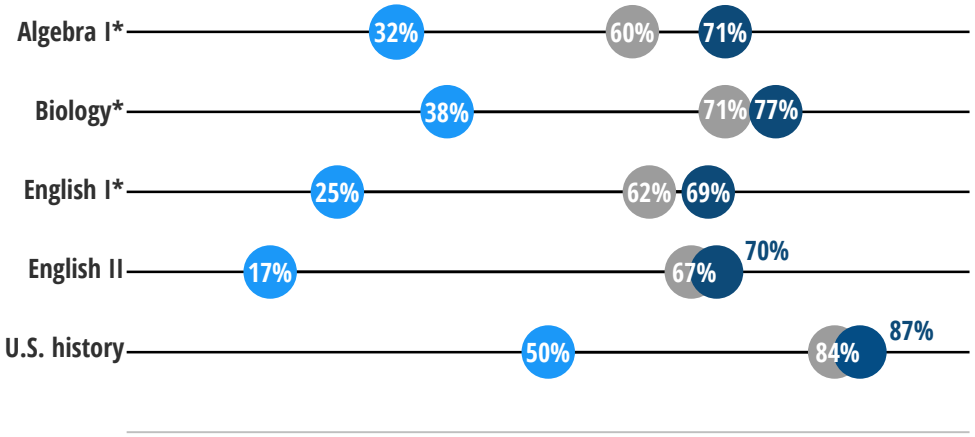
In AISD, administrators advised that although students may have future opportunities to take EOCs prior to graduation, it was important for students to participate in EOCs at the immediate conclusion of the course to have the best chance of success.

passed (61%, $n = 152$) compared with 9th grade emergent bilingual students who took the exam (33%, $n = 774$, $p < .001$), potentially because students taking the exam in 8th grade were already performing at an academically advanced level. The majority of emergent bilingual students who took the English II exam were in 10th grade and passed at 17%. Of all EOC subjects, performance was highest for students taking the U.S. history exam, who tended to be in 11th grade and passed at 49%. Note that between 3 and 6 percent of EOC test takers were newcomers (in the United States for ≤ 3 years).

Aggregated across all grade levels, significantly lower percentages of emergent bilingual students than of never emergent bilingual students met or exceeded passing standards on every EOC subject (Figure 9). However, on average, significantly higher percentages of monitored students than of never emergent bilingual students passed the algebra I, biology, and English I EOC exams (Figure 9).

Figure 9.

AISD monitored students outperformed never emergent bilingual students and emergent bilingual students on EOC exams, Spring 2021.



Source. AISD EOC records, Spring 2021

Note. Percentages represent passing rates of all tested students, regardless of grade level. Monitored students exited emergent bilingual status up to 4 years prior. Analyses include unmodified test versions. Differences in passing rates between emergent bilingual and never emergent bilingual students were significant for all subjects.

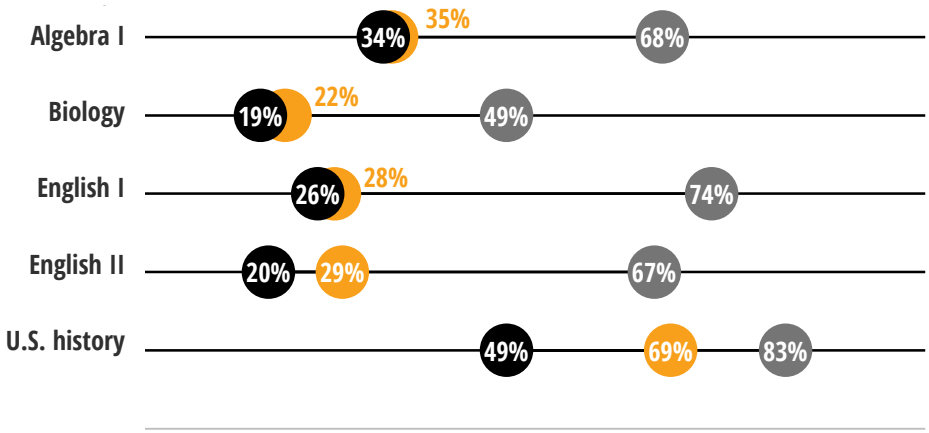
* Differences between monitored students and never emergent bilingual students were significant for algebra I, biology, and English I exams.

EOC Performance by BE/ESL Program

Emergent bilingual students in DL and ESL had similar scores on each EOC exam, but non-emergent bilingual DL students significantly outperformed emergent bilingual students in both DL and ESL on all EOC exams (Figure 10). Note that about half of non-emergent bilingual DL students were also classified as monitored and thus had been emergent bilingual students at some point in the last 4 years. In addition, between 3 and 9% of emergent bilingual DL students were newcomers, compared with between 12 and 17% of ESL students who were newcomers (across all EOC subjects). Very few emergent bilingual DL students took the EOC U.S. history exam ($n = 13$); thus, these analyses should be interpreted with caution. One-way DL and T/LE were not offered in high school; thus, scores are unavailable for comparison with these groups.

Figure 10.

Compared to ESL students, emergent bilingual Dual Language (DL) students had similar performance on EOC exams, but non-emergent bilingual DL students had higher passing percentages in Spring 2021.



Source. AISD EOC records, Spring 2021

Note. About half of non-emergent bilingual DL students were also classified as monitored and thus had been emergent bilingual students at some point in the last 4 years. Analyses include unmodified test versions. Emergent bilingual DL *n*s ranged between 13 and 121; students were in grades 8 through 11. ESL *n*s ranged between 737 and 1,353; students were in grades 8 through 12. Differences between DL and ESL performances were only significant for non-emergent bilingual DL students. Between 3 and 9% of emergent bilingual DL students were newcomers, compared with between 12 and 17% of ESL students who were newcomers (across all EOC subjects).

AP Course Enrollment and Exams

Students are offered several pre-AP and AP courses at the middle school level. Many more AP courses are available at the high school level. College credit is earned if students enrolled in AP courses score a 3 or higher (out of 5) on the corresponding AP exam. In Spring 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the College Board offered several AP exams in a digital format and allowed students to take the exams at home.

In 2020–2021, emergent bilingual students who were enrolled in AP courses were in grades 8 through 12. Out of 5,310 total 8th- through 12th-grade emergent bilingual students, 14% enrolled in at least one AP course. In comparison, 31% (n = 19,130) of never emergent bilingual 8th through 12th graders were enrolled in at least one AP course. AP enrollment rates for both groups were the same as those seen in 2019–2020. Monitored 8th through 12th graders (n = 2,315) enrolled in AP courses at the same rate as did never emergent bilingual students, and 8% of newcomer 8th through 12th graders (n = 880) enrolled in one or more AP course. Note that 73% of emergent bilingual high school students attended Title I high school campuses (compared with 26% of never emergent bilingual students), which offered half as many AP courses as did non-Title I high school campuses.

As part of the secondary DL Program requirements, students are required to take AP Spanish Language and Culture. DL was not offered in grades 11 and 12, so AP exam performance was only examined in grades 8 through 10. Not surprisingly, the percentage of DL 8th through 10th graders (54%, n = 290) enrolled in at least one AP course was 6.6 times

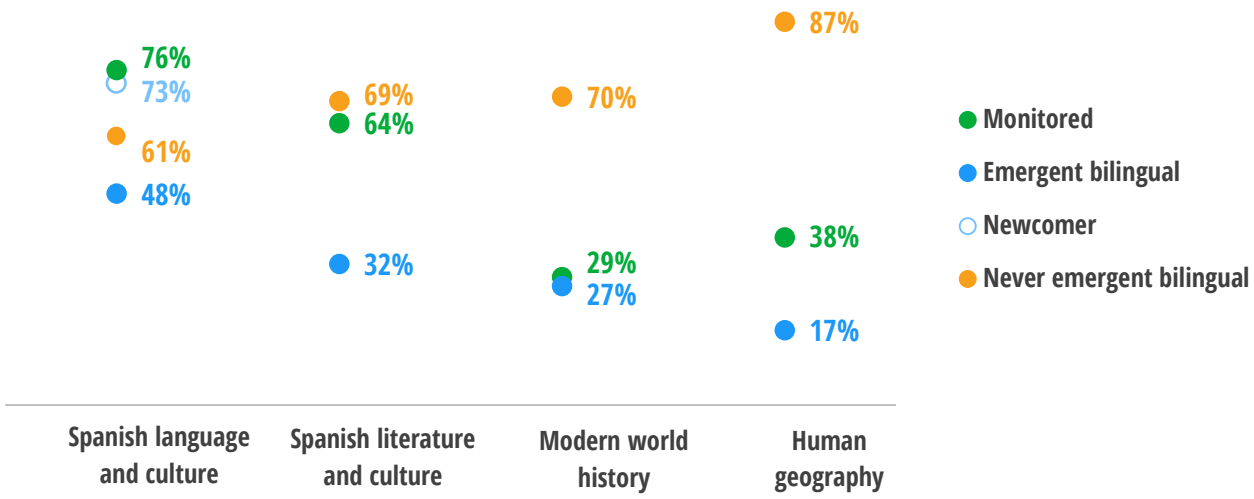
greater than that of 8th- through 10th-grade ESL students (8%, *n* = 2,896) and 3.1 times as many as never emergent bilingual 8th through 10th graders (17%, *n* = 11,444). In addition, a greater percentage of 8th- through 10th-grade DL students who were enrolled in both AP Spanish courses (Language and Culture, and Literature and Culture) took the corresponding exams (97% and 100%, respectively), compared with 8th- through 10th-grade ESL students enrolled in the same courses (43% and 17%, respectively). However, ESL students also took the Spanish language and culture exam in grades 11 and 12, bringing the total ratio of enrolled to exam takers equivalent to that of DL students.

Four AP exams were taken most often by emergent bilingual students (the remaining exams were taken by fewer than 10 students). The most common AP exams taken by emergent bilingual students were, in descending order, Spanish language and culture, Spanish literature and culture, modern world history, and human geography. Note that the world history and human geography exams were only offered in English.

Figure 11 shows the percentages of emergent bilingual, monitored, and never emergent bilingual students who earned college credit (i.e., scored a 3 or higher) on the top four AP exams taken by emergent bilingual students. Emergent bilingual students had lower passing rates than did all other student subgroups on all four exams. However, monitored students had either higher or similar passing rates to never emergent bilingual students on both the Spanish language and Spanish literature and culture exams.

Figure 11.

The percentage of students earning college credit on AP exams was higher for monitored than emergent bilingual students, 2020–2021.



Source. AISD student AP exam 2021 records

Note. Monitored students are those who exited emergent bilingual status up to 4 years prior; *n*s = 8–63 monitored students, 12–128 emergent bilingual students, < 10 newcomer students for Spanish literature and culture, modern world history, and human geography exams, 15 newcomer students for Spanish language and culture exam; < 10 denial students for each exam; 18–1,069 never emergent bilingual students. Newcomer students were a subset of the emergent bilingual student group.

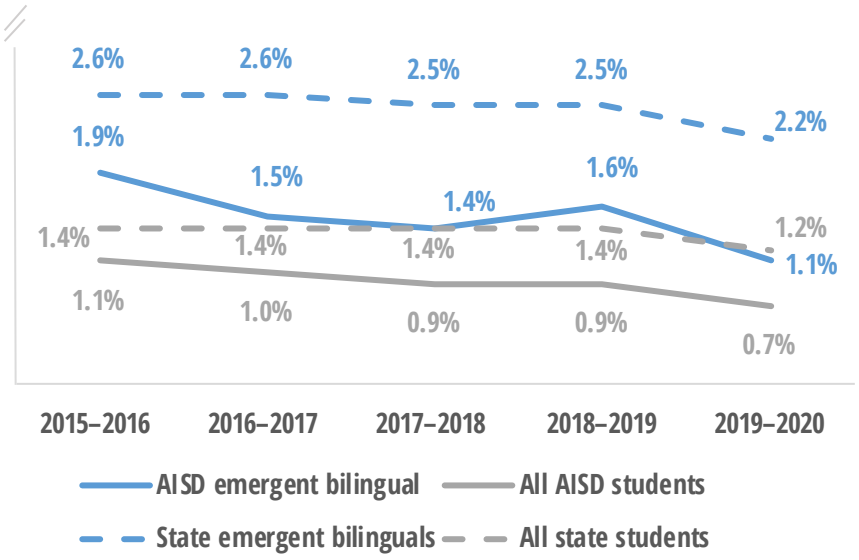
As for passing rates within emergent bilingual students in each program type, 26% of DL students who took the Spanish language and culture exam (n = 35) earned college credit, whereas 70% of ESL students who took the same exam (n = 69) earned college credit. For the Spanish Literature and Culture exam, none of the DL students who took the exam (n < 10) earned college credit, compared with 46% of ESL students who took the exam (n = 24). The lower passing rates for DL students could be related to grade level, as DL students took AP exams in younger grades (8–10) than did ESL students (grades 8-12). Note that if students in younger grades do not earn college credit, they have more chances to retake the exams in later grades.

Dropout and Graduation Rates

In comparison with statewide rates, AISD has lower rates of dropouts in 7th through 12th grade, especially for emergent bilingual students (Figure 12). Both the state's and AISD's dropout rates have been declining since 2016. AISD emergent bilingual students' dropout rates declined from 1.9% in 2015–2016 to 1.1% in 2019–2020. The disparity in dropout rates between emergent bilingual students and all students in AISD was far less than what was seen statewide between groups.

Figure 12.

Dropout rates of all AISD students have been declining since 2016.

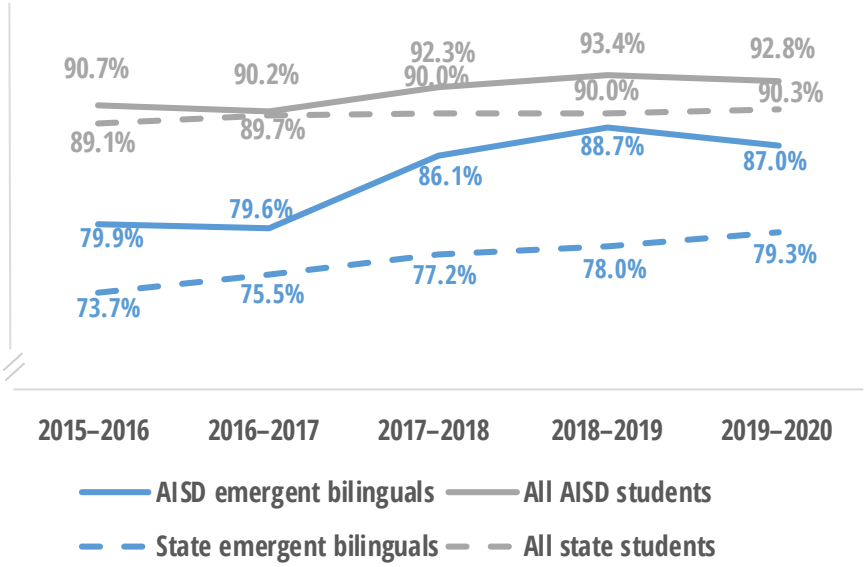


Source. AISD student records

Note. Dropout rates for 2020–2021 will not be finalized until Fall 2021, when enrollment data are finalized.

Figure 13.

Graduation rates have been increasing since 2016, especially for AISD emergent bilingual students.



Source. AISD student records

Note. Graduation rates for 2020–2021 will not be finalized until Fall 2021, when enrollment data are finalized.

While emergent bilingual students' graduation rates have increased by 7.4 percentage points since the 2016–2017 school year (Figure 13), their graduation rates declined by 1.7 percentage points in between 2018–2019 and 2019–2020. This decline was not seen for statewide emergent bilingual students. The disparity in graduation rates between emergent bilingual students and all students in AISD was far less than what was seen statewide between groups.

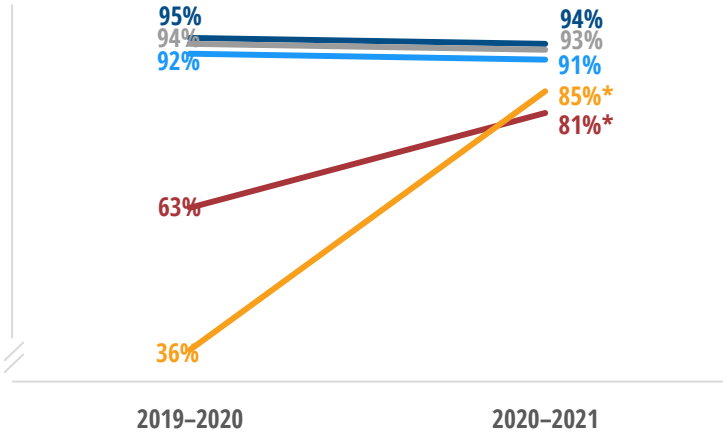
College Readiness

College readiness refers to the knowledge and skills a high school graduate needs to achieve successful college and career outcomes. Students and educators use multiple assessments to assess college readiness. These assessments include the ACT, SAT, and Texas Success Initiative (TSI) exams. Although test participation was optional, district staff identified students who had not taken a college readiness test or did not meet college readiness standards on a test, and provided necessary academic and/or procedural supports throughout the school year. If students meet college readiness benchmarks on these assessments, they are likely to succeed in the credit-bearing courses needed for a college degree or program certificate, without the need for remedial coursework.

Out of all 12th-grade students enrolled in 2021 at the fall snapshot, 91% of emergent bilingual students, 93% of never emergent bilingual students, and 94% of monitored students took one or more college readiness exam (Figure 14). This is slightly below trends from last year (1% less for each student group). However, newcomer students and those who declined BE/ESL services took college readiness tests at significantly higher rates ($p < .05$) than they did last year.

Figure 14.

Emergent bilingual students took college entrance exams at a similar rate to monitored students and never emergent bilingual students. Newcomer students and students who declined services took the exams at a higher rate this year.



Source. AISD college readiness records, 2021

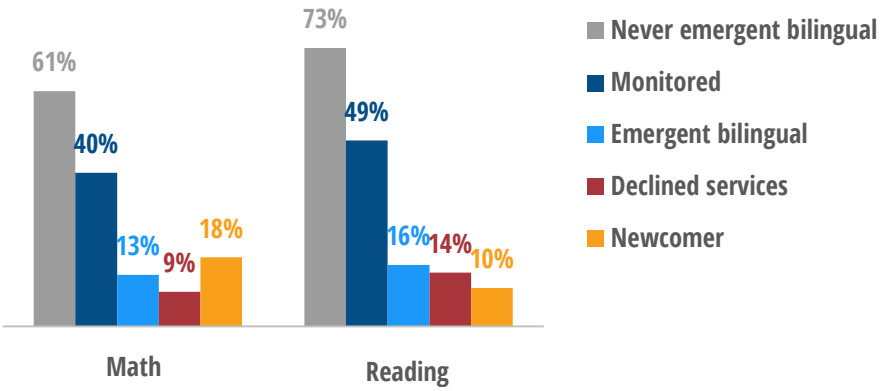
Note. Student counts: 681 emergent bilingual, 356 monitored, 4,012 never emergent bilingual, 59 newcomer, and 43 declined services.

*Indicates differences between years were statistically significant.

Figure 15 shows college readiness for the 2021 graduation-year cohort. A graduation cohort is defined as students who began 9th grade in a particular school year and were expected to graduate 4 years later. Emergent bilingual students had similar rates of math and reading readiness; monitored and never emergent bilingual students were 9 percentage points and 12 percentage points more reading than math ready, respectively. By the time students achieved English proficiency and were being monitored, they were about three times more likely to be considered college ready than were emergent bilingual students, newcomers, and those whose parents declined language services. All differences were significant.

Figure 15.

Monitored students were three times more likely to meet college readiness standards than were emergent bilingual students, but one and a half times less college ready than never emergent bilingual students, for both math and reading.



Source. AISD college readiness records, 2021

Note. Student counts: 498 emergent bilingual, 342 monitored, 3,798 never emergent bilingual, 50 newcomer, and 35 who declined services. Emergent bilingual students did not include newcomers or those who declined services, and never emergent bilingual students did not include monitored students.

In comparison with the 2020 graduation cohort, college readiness rates were lower overall for the 2021 graduation cohort. The most notable decreases occurred for monitored and emergent bilingual students, who scored about 20 and 13 percentage points less college ready than did students in the year prior, respectively. Furthermore, never emergent bilingual students scored about 6 percentage points less college ready than did never emergent bilingual students in the year prior. Differences were significant.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In 2020–2021, academic testing was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared with the 2019–2020 school year, fewer students took TELPAS or STAAR, and slightly fewer took college readiness exams this year. However, slightly more emergent bilingual students took EOC this year, following schools' recommendations to take the exams at the immediate conclusion of the course to have the best chance of success. In general, students' performance on standardized tests declined this year, compared with prior years, reflecting the dramatic interruption in learning seen across the country due to the pandemic. However, it is difficult to make conclusions based on this years' academic performance data since these data are not representative of all enrolled students.

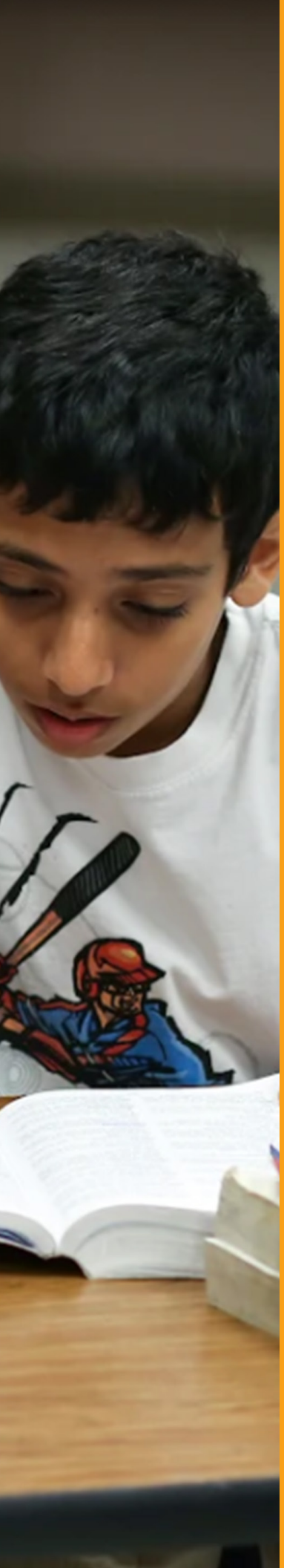
Elementary emergent bilingual students scored lower on TELPAS but higher on STAAR, compared with those at the secondary level. These patterns are likely related to gradual language acquisition of emergent bilingual students as they matriculate through school (for TELPAS) and the added rigor of school curriculum with increased grade levels (for STAAR).

Relative to never emergent bilingual students, emergent bilingual students were less likely to enroll in AP courses and underperformed on the majority of academic tests administered in the 2020–2021 school year. In addition, relative to emergent bilingual students across the state, AISD emergent bilingual students underperformed on TELPAS, STAAR, and EOC. Note that AISD had a higher percentage of students opting for remote instruction compared to those across the state, which may have been reflected by lower participation in state-required, in-person tests. Some exceptions in discrepancies between AISD and state emergent bilingual academic performance were: for TELPAS, 11th- and 12th-grade emergent bilingual students scored similarly to emergent bilingual students across the state, and for STAAR reading, 5th-grade emergent bilingual students scored similarly to emergent bilingual students across the state. Before drawing conclusions about emergent bilingual students' academic performance from these findings, four caveats are important to note:

1. When matching the socioeconomic status and ethnicity of a cohort of emergent bilingual students with those of non-emergent bilingual students from the same campuses, STAAR reading and math performance was similar across both groups for 3rd- through 8th-grade students. Fourth-grade emergent bilingual students even outperformed 4th-grade non-emergent bilingual students on STAAR math.

2. Former emergent bilingual (i.e., monitored) students' passing rates on STAAR, EOC, and Spanish AP exams as well as AP course enrollment either surpassed or were equivalent to those of non-emergent bilingual students across all grade levels.

3. After excluding newcomer students from TELPAS analyses, middle and high school



DL students had higher English proficiency than did ESL students. Newcomers had been in the United States for less than 3 years and thus were usually less English proficient than other emergent bilingual students. Elementary school is likely unaffected by newcomer status with respect to how BE/ESL Programs relate to English proficiency, since all students are still learning to read, write, and speak.

4. Over the last 5 years, emergent bilingual students' dropout rates declined, and this year, emergent bilingual students in AISD dropped out of school at half the rate of those across the state. In addition, AISD emergent bilingual students' graduation rates increased by 7.4 percentage points over the past 3 years.

Thus, while large performance gaps may be apparent between emergent bilingual students and non-emergent bilingual students on many academic exams, these findings may be misleading without examination of other factors, such as students' socioeconomic status, ethnicity, newcomer status, and subsequent performance after exiting BE/ESL Programs.

Academic performance of emergent bilingual students can also be examined by BE/ESL Program type to determine the extent to which each language program is preparing students for academic success. In general, BE students (DL and T/LE) tended to score lower than ESL students on standardized tests at the elementary level, but performance evened out across BE/ESL Programs in middle and high school. A nationwide study of English proficiency in educational programs also found a slower rate of English proficiency for students in BE Programs than for students served by other programs, but overall, more BE Program students than other students achieved English proficiency and had high academic achievement (Umansky & Reardon, 2014). In statewide STAAR results, students in BE Programs typically outperform those in ESL. It is unclear why this was not apparent in AISD's STAAR results this year, but it may be related to issues linked to teaching during the pandemic such as the pandemic's impact on program implementation (e.g., see Archuleta & Lucas, 2021). It is recommended that the Multilingual Department, along with the Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE), take steps to measure DL program implementation, such as classroom observations and identifying between-campus discrepancies in implementation fidelity. This will help to better understand academic performance differences for each BE/ESL Program type and acknowledge campuses' performance outcomes with respect to their quality of program implementation.

Note DL students are required to take at least one AP course, which provides the opportunity to earn college credit. This year, despite lower passing rates on AP exams for DL than for ESL high school students, DL students tended to take AP exams at lower grade levels than did ESL students enrolled in the same courses. Thus, DL students had more opportunities to take AP courses and to retake AP exams, compared with T/LE and ESL students.

When possible, students' dropout, graduation, and college readiness outcomes should be examined by long-term BE/ESL Program affiliation. By doing so, the long-term benefits of each BE/ESL Program may be seen. Postsecondary outcomes of emergent bilingual and monitored students relative to those of non-emergent bilingual students would further inform the impact of students' KG through 12th-grade experiences as emergent bilingual students at AISD.

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Appendix A

Table A1.

Number of Monitored, Emergent Bilingual, and Non-Emergent Bilingual Students Who Took at Least One EOC exam, Spring 2021

	Algebra I	Biology	English I	English II	U.S. history
Emergent bilingual	1,472	1,515	1,691	1,344	811
Monitored	382	428	443	609	452
Non-emergent bilingual	3,790	3,865	4,169	3,760	3,439

Source. AISD EOC records, Spring 2021

Note. Monitored students are those who exited emergent bilingual status. Analyses include test version S (for general, which includes accommodations).

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