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# Supporting English Language Learners in the Era of Direct Enrollment

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# Supporting English Language Learners in the Era of Direct Enrollment

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In the spring of 2021, the Community College System in which the author works was in the middle of a planned three-year pilot of math and English self-placement ("Direct Enrollment") procedures. Concerns about the significant English language learner (ELL) population at one institution led to the development of a corequisite support course designed to support English language learners as they enrolled in first-semester composition. This course is considered a "gateway" course, with success rates hovering around 60% for traditional students, dropping to under 35% for students age 25 and older. As the planned pilot of Direct Enrollment was underway, faculty and administrators at the College were concerned about how placement and enrollment changes would impact the success of ELLs. In this article, the author outlines the problems faced by two-year institutions with large ELL populations and presents data on success rates in transfer-level English, including the impacts of English Direct Enrollment and the ELL corequisite support course pilot. The author then provides recommendations for how the community college system can support ELLs in accessing the support they need to succeed.

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In the spring of 2021, the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) was in the middle of a planned three-year pilot of math and English direct enrollment procedures. At one large multi-campus college in the system ("the College"), concerns about the significant English language learner (ELL) population led to the proposal and eventual development of a corequisite support course designed to support English language learners as they enrolled in first-semester composition. The College's English as a second language (ESL) program is well-known across the country (Institute of International Education, 2017); for decades, it has served students by providing academic English language instruction with high success rates. As the College prepared to implement English direct enrollment, including revised placement procedures and new developmental English courses, ESL and English faculty involved in the pilot were concerned about impacts on the success of English language learners (ELLs). Multilingual learners come to community colleges from diverse linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. For these students, the speed of language acquisition and balance of skills vary greatly. When students from these diverse academic and professional backgrounds end up in ESL classes together, instructors are

challenged to address the diverse needs and skill sets (Bergey et al., 2018). Because of these placement and instructional challenges and the exigency of implementing English direct enrollment (EDE), several initiatives to support faculty and students were developed and piloted. This article describes the implementation and impacts of these programs and advocates for meeting the needs of ELLs through appropriate placement, high-quality instruction and academic support, and robust data collection.

## ELLs in the Community College

Students enrolled in English as a second language coursework come from diverse academic and personal backgrounds. Many second language learners have strong academic backgrounds in their native languages, but they still need English language support to be successful in American higher education. Other students come to community college with little or no literacy in their native language. ELLs in higher education are comprised of three broad and somewhat overlapping categories: international students, immigrant students, and generation 1.5 students (Hayward, 2020), within which there are many sub-populations (Roberge et al., 2009).

International students, or students who have graduated from a foreign high school and who come to the U.S. to pursue higher education, are best served with English instruction that emphasizes cultural acclimatization to the system of education in the United States and focuses on preparing them for entry into their academic discipline (Bergey et al., 2018). While arriving from different home countries, international students tend to have similar prior academic experience and English language preparation. In contrast, individuals who immigrate to the United States as adults arrive with a wide range of professional and academic experiences and are likely to be the most diverse in background, age, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status of ELLs. Many have completed higher education in their home countries (41% have a bachelor's degree or higher), but

nearly a quarter (23%) have not finished high school (Pew Research Center, 2015). Immigrant students are more likely to be older and focused on improving job opportunities while supporting a family and report that family responsibilities and "weak math and English skills" are "obstacle[s] to their academic success" (Soria & Stebleton, 2013, p. 12).

Students born outside the United States, or born inside the U.S. to immigrant parents, make up 24% of the community college population (Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2015) and 27% of the total postscondary enrollment in Virginia (Batalova & Feldblum, 2020). Generation 1.5 is generally used to refer to students "who arrive in the U.S. at an early age, obtain much or all of their education in U.S. K12 settings, and arrive in college with various patterns of language and literacy that don't fit the traditional, 'institutionally constructed' profiles" of developmental or ESL students (Roberge et al., 2009. p. vii). Because Generation 1.5 students enter school in the U.S. at a young age, and benefit from immersion into the social environment of K12 schools, they can often be stronger in oral communication than written communication skills (Llosa & Bunch, 2011). Frequently, students who immigrate at a young age sound like fluent English speakers in everyday conversation while still developing proficiency in academic reading and writing skills. This oral fluency can be misleading to faculty and staff who interact with Generation 1.5 students as they begin the enrollment process. Despite having graduated from an American high school, they may still need targeted English language development (Bergey et al., 2018) to successfully transition to college-level coursework.

Multilingual learners come to community colleges from diverse linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. They are both "*learners of English*" and "*users of English*" (Roberge et al., 2009, p. 5; emphasis in the original) at the same time. For these students, the speed of language acquisition and balance of skills vary greatly. When students from these diverse academic and professional backgrounds end up in ESL or college English classes together, instructors are

challenged to address the diverse needs and skill sets (Bergey et al., 2018), and institutions face the challenge of providing appropriate support for and equitable access to successful completion of a degree or credential.

## Accurate Placement Supports Success

ELLs need a minimum proficiency level to succeed in content courses (Kuo & Bostian, 1999). Accurate placement is crucial for second language acquisition: students must be challenged to work toward tasks and skills at or just above their level of proficiency (i.e., theory of i+1; Krashen, 1985; Krashen & Terrell, 2000) to make progress. Placement at a level that is too easy slows language acquisition, while placement at a level too difficult for the learner increases course repeats and attrition (Ferris & Lombardi, 2020). Being able to accurately assess one's oral and written communication skills to the degree necessary for guided or informed self-placement is a challenge for second language learners (Krausert, 1991; Strong-Krause, 2000). For students coming to community college after graduating high school, their prior English/ESL experiences may have included either a premature or delayed exit from English language services, either of which "can greatly complicate" their perception of and attitude towards the placement process they encounter at the higher education level (Roberge et al., 2009, p. 13). As they leave high school and enter college, particularly if they take some time off before continuing with their education, students may "shift to English dominance and yet still retain features in their speech and writing that are learner-like or ESL-like" (p. 19). As ELLs transition to postsecondary education, the supports they may have experienced in high school may be different to what is available in college; the course expectations are different as well. While self-placement offers benefits to students, learners' lack of knowledge of what will be expected of them in their college courses presents a challenge to implementation of self-placement procedures.

Faculty at the College have long been concerned about ELLs of all backgrounds wishing to accelerate their progress by skipping levels of ESL or enrolling in multiple credit-bearing courses while still enrolled in ESL courses. The concerns focus on the potential impacts to the individual student attempting a courseload too challenging for their language ability but also on impacts to their peers. As Ferris and Lombardi (2020) explained, allowing students electing to skip levels as they self-place "might pose considerable risks not only for that individual student but also for overall programmatic coherence" (n.p.). Anecdotally, faculty at the College identified clear patterns of students believing themselves to be more prepared for transfer-level English than their subsequent performance in English or ESL classes would support. Recent high school graduates in particular seem to over-estimate their reading and writing abilities and under-estimate the level of and quantity of work expected from them in transfer-level English after taking ELL-specific sections of high school English. These concerns are echoed in recent research on self-placement (e.g., Calhoon-Dillahunt & Margoni, 2022; Che, 2022; Melito et al., 2022). Success data on students who may have been enrolled in ELL programs in high school and who enrolled directly in transfer-level English have traditionally not been available; more robust data collection is addressed in the recommendations section. Without these data to inform the discussions of ELL success, it is hard to evaluate the accuracy of faculty perceptions of students' language ability.

Placement via multiple measures "can help ensure that English language learners are appropriately placed into courses that match their level of skill and knowledge as well as facilitate their achievement of educational goals" (Rassen et al., 2021, p. 5). A placement model that includes student questionnaires, course information and expectations, student analysis of model reading and writing samples, student reaction to "can-do" statements, and robust academic advising has seen initial success in placing H.S. graduates, ELL and non-ELL, in California (White & Newell, 2022). Given the fact that "little research has been conducted on ESL placement practices" (Raufman et al.,

2019, p. 14), and given the challenges of providing accurate advising at the scale that would be needed to support incoming students at the College, the EDE implementation team, and the English and EL faculty in general, had serious concerns that a self-placement process without guidance or direction would, as the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) position statement on writing assessment asserted, "become merely a right to fail" (CCCC, 2014). If implementing self-placement, the most current best practices are to adopt a model that includes "students' academic history, educational goals, and English language experience" (White & Newell, 2022, p. 11), engages students in proactively thinking about their preparedness for transfer-level English, and provides robust advising on these topics. These best practices are supported by the programs the College focused on during the pilot and which are described in this article.

## Accelerated ESL Course Progression

A key component to the redesign of developmental course sequences across the country is accelerating students into transfer-level coursework by compressing or eliminating altogether credits spent in pre-transfer courses (i.e., developmental English or math courses). There is not enough research on accelerating ESL programs or implementing ESL corequisite courses (Avni & Finn, 2021; Raufman et al., 2019; St. Amour, 2019), and accelerating students into content courses may cost ESL students success in the long term (Bunch et al., 2011). The field of second language acquisition (SLA) studies has long supported the idea that the language skills needed for success in academic settings develop over time (Cummins, 1981). While communicating in social situations (i.e., Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, BICS) where specialized language is not required can be achieved within two or so years of full-time immersion in the target language, the skills for academic learning (i.e., Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, CALP) take five to seven years to develop and require direct instruction (Hakuta et al., 2000). Despite this body of research,

proponents of a corequisite model of English language instruction believe that ELLs will benefit from a faster progression through English language-focused courses and into discipline-focused courses. The corequisite model "accelerates the process" of "attaining academic language proficiency," (Avni & Finn, 2021, p. 3) based on the belief that fluency in academic language skills is not a prerequisite to participation in disciplinary courses; in a corequisite model, language learning and disciplinary content learning should happen "in parallel . . . as an integrated component of course material" (Avni & Finn, 2021, p. 3). There is as yet not enough evidence to support the use of corequisite support courses instead of a sequence of leveled ESL courses to support linguistic and academic development in English, but researchers looking at developmental education placement practices in community colleges more broadly suggest that these practices "may provide pertinent lessons on how systems for determining ESL placements could have negative consequences for many students, including delayed progression or stopping out" (Raufman et al., 2019, p.24)

Research on developmental English redesign, and particularly impacts on English language learner populations, is in early stages in Texas (Daugherty et al., 2018), California (Hayward, 2020; Rassen et al., 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2019), and Tennessee (Ran & Lin, 2019)) shows that programs serving ELLs have been mainly exempt from redesign efforts. In Tennessee, students for whom English is not their first language take locally created English placement tests or the ACCUPLACER test. In California, where directed self-placement has recently been implemented, standardized placement tests (i.e., Accuplacer; Regional Educational Laboratories, 2011) are still allowed for placement into ESL courses (Perez & Stanskas, 2018), although some California institutions are starting to use multiple measures to place ESL as well as non-ESL students (White & Newell, 2022). In Texas, ELLs are exempt from the maximum credit rules that limit the number of developmental credits a student can take (Daugherty et al., 2018). Clearly, even in states at the forefront of

developmental coursework redesign, ELLs are viewed as having legitimate and different needs than their native English-speaking peers.

## High-Quality Instruction to Meet Non-Traditional Learners' Needs

Research throughout the past 40 years has shown that faculty in higher education impact students' educational outcomes (Condon et al., 2016; Gyurko et al., 2016) by providing high-quality academic support and contributing to students' sense of belonging and academic confidence (Strayhorn, 2010; Terenzini et al., 1996; Walton & Cohen, 2011; Williams & Ferrari, 2015). For traditionally underserved students, who are more likely than peers to enroll at a community college, high-quality instruction goes beyond access to course content. Caring, involved instructors contribute to building relationships that are necessary for longer-term success. For students still acquiring English, this combination of access and support is particularly powerful, potentially impacting their short- and longer-term success and persistence.

Finding teachers who are highly qualified to work with ELLs and able to differentiate instruction is key to meeting ELLs' diverse needs CCCC, 2020). Because of the diversity of students in adult ESL programs, it is challenging for instructors to provide instruction appropriate for all students (Mathews-Aydinli & Van Horne, 2006). In the two-year setting, teaching ESL is different than teaching developmental English for native English speakers (Rodriguez et al., 2019). Because developmental English is designed with native English speakers in mind, ELLs in these courses may be inappropriately penalized for language errors that are a natural part of the language acquisition process (Ellis, 1994; Krashen, 1982) or may not receive appropriate language support necessary to ensure their success in college (Benson et al., 1992; Rodriguez et al., 2019). Adult language learners require explicit instruction to help them apply what they already know about language to the new one they are acquiring (DeKeyser, 2017). Community college English faculty do not typically have

preparation in second language acquisition (SLA) or teaching second language learners. Considering that two-thirds of all composition classes at the community college level are taught by adjunct faculty (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014), in institutions where, nationwide, over 70% of all instructional appointments are contingent (American Association of University Professors, 2018) the challenge of finding faculty with educational preparation and experience meeting the needs of diverse, multilingual learners is consequential.

## Corequisite Support Course Model

There is growing support across the nation's community colleges for corequisite rather than remedial or developmental models of delivering basic English and math instruction. A growing body of research (e.g., Martorell & McFarlin, 2011; Scott-Clayton et al., 2012; Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2014; Xu, 2016) shows that for many students, especially traditionally underserved students, corequisite support is effective. Some studies have shown dramatic gains in the number of students completing a transfer-level course under the corequisite model (Mejia et al., 2020). However, most successful programs are ones where students receive additional academic support (i.e., embedded tutor support, supplemental instructional support) while enrolled in a transfer-level course in math or English. Despite this growing body of research, there is as yet no evidence that these gains continue beyond that first course, with Ran and Lin's (2019) analysis seeing no longer-term benefits in persistence, transfer, or graduation for students in corequisite models versus students who enrolled in prerequisite developmental courses or placed into college-level work without additional support.

Offering an ELL-specific corequisite support course is based on the premise that fluency in academic language skills is not a prerequisite to participation in disciplinary courses. Proponents argue that language learning and disciplinary content learning should happen "in parallel" with

language development "as an integrated component of course material" (Avni & Finn, 2021, p. 3). There is very little evidence to support the use of corequisite support courses instead of a sequence of leveled ESL courses to support linguistic and academic development in English. There are a few community colleges or systems offering ELLs immediate entry to college-level English composition along with a corequisite support course (see Avni & Finn, 2021; and Henson & Hern, 2018, for two examples), and there is limited empirical research on student outcomes in this model (Kanno, 2018; Kanno & Harklau, 2012), although more recent analyses of ELLs who are high school graduates entering the California state system show promise for direct enrollment into transfer-level English (Hayward, 2020). Within the limited literature, two components of corequisite support show promise. The paired cohort model pairs an ESL course with a content course, frequently English composition but also history or library research, and, have shown success (Bunch & Kibler, 2015), and integrated courses, where the ESL support course has the same reading and writing assignments as the paired discipline course, have also shown benefits for ELLs (Rodriguez et al., 2019). One example of paired support courses with general education courses is that of Avni and Finn's (2021) pilot of an ELL-focused support course paired with a general education course. The authors found that instructors' "academic and professional backgrounds shaped the ways in which they balanced the demands of the two courses and combined their objectives" (p. 7), and that instructors focused on the disciplinary content "over an extensive focus on language and literacy development," describing the language instruction as "infused" in the course content. Faculty "worried that students did not have enough opportunities to learn and practice English language mechanics, grammar, and sentence structure, which they felt were critical for the students' success in future college courses" (Avni & Finn, 2021, p. 12). As the English direct enrollment (EDE) implementation team began to plan a new ELL-focused corequisite support course, we considered these and other concerns, discussed in the next section.

## Development and Delivery of an ELL Corequisite Support Course

Before fall 2020, based on trends in the state and the nation, the ESL faculty at the College had discussed the possibility of piloting an ESL corequisite course to support the linguistic needs of ELLs in a transfer-level English composition course (ENG 111). Given the move to multiples measures and informed self-placement, as well as changes in placement procedures necessitated by COVID-19 (i.e., closure of campus testing centers), the English direct enrollment (EDE) implementation team and the ESL discipline group in spring 2021 moved forward with developing the course description and goals for a corequisite support course for English language learners (ELLs), with a pilot course designation of ESL 95. The pilot course description stated that the 3-credit ESL 95 support course: "Provides academic English language support for successful completion of ENG 111. Students will identify and apply academic skills including critical reading, writing, thinking, and introductory research with second language acquisition support." The goal of the course was "to aid students who have met requirements to enroll in ENG 111 but who may need further academic English language support." The target audience for the paired ENG 111 and ESL 95 support course was students who, prior to fall 2021, would have enrolled in ENG 111 with a general English support course (prior to fall 2021, ENF 3) and who were English language learners at some point in their academic career. Without the option of enrolling in ENG 111 with ESL 95, these students would be required to enroll in ENG 111 with EDE 11 or in ENG 111 alone, depending on their placement. With the option of enrolling in ENG 111 with ESL 95, students would not be required to take EDE 11.

### Delivery Models in the Pilot

In fall 2021, the new support course for ELLs (ESL 95) was offered in two different paired models. Some sections of a paired ENG 111 and ESL 95 course were taught by one instructor co-

credentialed in English and ESL. Other sections were taught by two instructors, an English faculty member assigned to ENG 111 and an ESL faculty member assigned to ESL 95. In this model, the two faculty members worked together to teach and assess the course assignments and assessments. Offering two models allowed the College to adapt to the differences between campuses to meet local needs, including flexibility of scheduling and staffing limitations. With both models, students placed into the ENG 111/ESL 95 paired courses in a variety of ways. Some students had progressed through ESL coursework at the College and were advised by their instructors to choose ENG 111/ESL 95 as an alternative to enrolling in ENG 111/EDE 11. Other students who were new to the College heard about the ESL 95 option from peers or from an advisor, or by reviewing the materials published on the College webpages about English placement and English course options. Still others elected to take the optional ESL placement exam, an online evaluation of a student's reading and writing ability created by ESL faculty to replace the Accuplacer placement test used prior to March 2020. All students placed via the ESL placement received personalized advising from an ESL faculty member to help them understand the different course options.

## Outcomes

Although we only have one semester of data on the pilot of English direct enrollment and the ESL 95 corequisite support course, it is helpful to examine the preliminary student success data from fall 2021 to data collected before the direct enrollment changes. Prior to fall 2021, students had several paths to transfer-level English. New students took either the Virginia Placement Test-English (VPT) or the ACCULPLACER test, depending on how they answered questions about their home language. Students who were native speakers of English took the VPT, and would be placed into either transfer-level English (ENG 111), transfer-level English with a support course (ENG 111 with English Fundamentals 3), or one of two pre-transfer level English Fundamentals courses (ENF

1, 8 credits, or ENF 2, 4 credits). Students who took the ACCUPLACER would be placed into either transfer-level English (ENG 111), transfer-level English with a support course (ENG 111 with English Fundamentals 3), or into the College ESL program, which offered 4 levels of reading, writing, and oral communications courses.

Student Success Data: Pre-Implementation

Students enrolled in the ESL program at the College have long been highly successful in their post-ESL coursework (*ESL Discipline Review*, 2019). Longitudinal student success data shows that students who have taken ESL courses succeed in ENG 111 at much higher rates (average 92% ABC rate, fall 2017 through fall 2019) than other student populations, as seen in Table 1.

***Table 1:*** *ENG 111 Success Rate by Placement, Fall 2017-2020*

| | Fall 2017 | | Fall 2018 | | Fall 2019 | | Fall 2020 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Placement | ABC | *n* | ABC | *n* | ABC | *n* | ABC | *n* |
| ESL placement | 95.1% | 142 | 92% | 113 | 89% | 146 | 87.5% | 427 |
| Development ENG placement | 61.5% | 1099 | 57% | 1132 | 66.1% | 1179 | 62.7% | 754 |
| College-level ENG placement | 64.7% | 4056 | 66.6% | 5371 | 77.6% | 3975 | 74.1% | 2424 |
| No placement on record | 74.4% | 1721 | 75.7% | 461 | 81.3% | 187 | 55% | 1866 |

Similarly, students who have taken ESL courses succeed in other "gatekeeper" courses (e.g., BIO 101, BUS 100, CST 100 & 110, SDV 100 & 101) at very high rates (average 91% ABC rate, fall 2017 through fall 2019), as seen in Table 2.

***Table 2****: Course Success Rates, Fall 2017-2019 of ESL-placed students*

| | Fall 2017 | | Fall 2018 | | Fall 2019 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Course | ABC | *n* | ABC | *n* | ABC | *n* |
| BIO 101 | 90.9% | 11 | 100% | 6 | 85.7% | 14 |
| BUS 100 | 92.6% | 27 | 100% | 21 | 92.3% | 26 |
| CST 100 | 100% | 9 | 90.5% | 21 | 90.6% | 32 |
| CST 110 | 86.3% | 73 | 74% | 50 | 93% | 71 |
| SDV 100 | 86.6% | 290 | 89.8% | 246 | 89.6% | 268 |
| SDV 101 | 86.7% | 30 | 84.6% | 13 | 96.6% | 29 |

These success rates confirm the findings of the ESL discipline review (completed spring 2019), showing the significant benefit ELLs receive from taking ESL courses at the College. Table 3 presents a longer-term view (fall 2007 through fall 2015) of students who have passed ENG 111 with a D or higher. Passing rates, earning a D or higher in ENG 111, for students coming out of the College's ESL program range from 93.1% to 96.8%; this is consistently 10-15 percentage points higher than the passing rate for students who did not start in the ESL program.

***Table 3***: *ENG 111 Pass Rates, ESL vs. non-ESL Enrolled Students*

| | ABCD Pass Rate | |
|---|---|---|
| | Former ESL Students | Non-ESL Students |
| Fall 2007 | 95.1% | 80.8% |
| Fall 2008 | 94.4% | 83.4% |
| Fall 2009 | 93.7% | 84.2% |
| Fall 2010 | 93.1% | 83.8% |
| Fall 2011 | 96.8% | 80.3% |
| Fall 2012 | 94.2% | 85.3% |
| Fall 2013 | 96.4% | 75% |
| Fall 2014 | 96% | 86.5% |
| Fall 2015 | 96.2% | 74.6% |
| Overall | 95% | 82% |

From the data presented in this section, it is clear that, before implementation of EDE reforms to placement and course sequence, ELLs leaving the College's ESL program had mastered academic English communication skills at a level that allowed them to succeed academically at the college level (*Northern ESL Discipline Review*, 2019; *Gateway English*, 2022).

Student Success Data: Post-Implementation

Preliminary student outcomes data comparing fall 2021 to fall 2019 ABC success rates show that students in ENG 111 with the ESL support course were more successful than students enrolled in ENG 111 with the developmental English support course (EDE 11), and they were much more successful than students who enrolled in ENG 111 with no support course. Table 4 shows the percentage of students who passed ENG 111 with an A, B, or C in fall 2019 versus fall 2020 and presents the total number of students enrolled in each course combination during those two semesters. In fall 2019, 65% of students (n = 644) enrolled in one of the two developmental English courses (ENF 1, 8 credits; ENF 2, 4 credits) passed with a C or higher; in fall 2021, 54% of students (n = 171) enrolled in EDE 10 (3 credits) did. Students enrolled in one or more ESL courses in 2019 (n = 3,681[1]) passed[2] at a rate of 88%, while in fall 2021 (n = 1,594) 80% passed. Students enrolled in ENG 111 with the corequisite developmental English support course (ENF 3, 2 credits) in 2019 (n = 2,315) passed at 70%, and in 2021 the pass rate for students enrolled in ENG 111 with the English corequisite (EDE 11, 3 credits) dropped to 53% (n = 1,555). Students enrolled in ENG 111 with the corequisite ESL support course (ESL 95) in 2021, the first semester this course combination was offered (*n* = 203), passed at 88%.

[1] Students enrolled in ESL courses may take more than one course as a time; therefore, this represents total enrollment, not headcount.

[2] "Passing" in ESL is earning an S (satisfactory), which requires earning at least a 75% in the course. Thus, passing in ESL is equivalent to a C+ or higher

***Table 4:*** *Fall 2019-Fall 2021 Student Outcome Data*

| | Fall 2019 | | Fall 2021 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % ABC | *n* | % ABC | *n* |
| Composition with English Support Course* | 70% | 2,352 | 53% | 1,347 |
| Composition with ESL Support Course** | --- | --- | 88% | 203 |
| Composition with NO Support Course | 70% | 5,873 | 61% | 7,191 |
| Developmental English*** | 65% | 644 | 54% | 171 |
| ESL (Levels 2-5) | 88% | 3,681 | 80% | 1,555 |
| Dual Enrollment Composition | 91% | 4,965 | 92% | 5,676 |

** Fall 2019: ENG 111 with ENF 3; Fall 2021: ENG 111 with EDE 11*
*** Fall 2019: not offered; Fall 2021: ENG 111 with ESL 95*
**** Fall 2019: ENF 1 and 2; Fall 2021: EDE 10*

From these data, we can see that the success of students who enrolled in the ESL corequisite support course in fall 2021 was equivalent, with 88% earning a passing score (i.e., S for Satisfactory), as students in other levels of ESL in fall 2019. We can also see that more students enrolled directly into ENG 111 without any corequisite support course than had before the pandemic: 5,873 in fall 2019 versus 7,191 in fall 2021. Many fewer students enrolled in ENG 111 with the EDE 11 corequisite support course (1,005 fewer students in 2021 than in 2019). Likewise, the number of students enrolling in pre-ENG 111 developmental English courses was much lower in 2021 ($n$ = 171) than in 2019 ($n$ = 644). Overall, far more students enrolled directly into ENG 111 and many fewer students enrolled in English developmental or ESL courses. These English and ESL enrollment numbers provide important context for the recommendations in the next section.

## Recommendations

These recommendations focus on providing equitable *access* to transfer-level English and equitable *opportunities for success* in this course and the rest of their academic program, aims supported by the VCCS strategic plan, *Opportunity 2027*, whose overarching goal is that "Virginia's Community Colleges will achieve equity in access, learning outcomes, and success for students from every race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic group" (VCCS, 2021). A combination of placement and diagnostic assessments, expert instructors with class sizes that allow for the individualized attention students need, appropriate support services, and robust data collection and reporting will help to ensure the continued achievement of the VCCS ELL population.

### Placement and diagnostic assessments

Accurate placement of ELLs is, above all else, an equity issue. Pre-pandemic, the ESL program at the College relied on "multiple, adaptive, and ongoing assessments" to best capture where a student needed support in developing their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills (Bergey et al., 2018, p.9). An initial placement assessment followed by a diagnostic assessment within the first week of class allowed faculty with expertise and experience to help students enroll in the courses they need to succeed while moving forward quickly through their program of study. While this system was upended somewhat by pandemic-related changes to the availability of on-campus testing, the ESL faculty at the College were able to develop and pilot a new placement currently being used to advise students on which courses will provide them with the appropriate balance of challenge and support. First-week diagnostics allow students to demonstrate changes in proficiency since placement (Hille & Cho, 2020) and help students understand what will be asked of them in their current course. Students for whom the diagnostic indicates they are already performing well above the level expected are offered the opportunity to move into a higher-level class. Those for

whom the diagnostic points to significant areas of concern in their performance can be advised to consider moving into a more appropriate course where they are more likely to be successful.

Staffing and class size

Another key recommendation for supporting access to opportunities for ELLs is providing high-quality instruction in an environment that supports student growth. Part of this is ensuring that all ELLs have access to instructors with experience and expertise in delivering targeted linguistic and academic support. Because the corequisite support course for ELLs is intended to help with academic English language acquisition as they are co-enrolled in ENG 111, the professor must be credentialed to teach ESL. Two equally successful models were piloted: (1) a single instructor model, where an ESL faculty member co-credentialed to teach English taught both ENG 111 and the ESL support course; (2) a co-teaching model, where an English faculty member taught ENG 111 and an ESL faculty member taught the ESL support course. Both models provide ELLs with high-quality instruction designed to meet their specific needs.

Another piece of supporting student growth is offering appropriate class sizes to allow ESL and English instructors to do the intensive work of providing the frequent and detailed feedback that we know benefits students who are acquiring academic English. Repeated calls for small class sizes have long been part of advocacy efforts at the national level. The Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) calls for English instructors to have no more than 100 students per semester (Klausman et al., 2020), while the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) position statement on the Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing recommends a class size of 20 students in English composition and 15 students in developmental English classes (CCCC, 2015). Faculty support is key to successfully implementing a corequisite model, as seen in past English and math corequisite program implementation within the VCCS (Emblom-Callahan et

al., 2019) and across the country (Daugherty et al., 2018). Smaller class sizes, in line with reasonable workload expectations of faculty working with community college students in writing-intensive disciplines, provide instructors with the time needed to attend to the diverse needs of students in their courses.

### Support services

A third key recommendation concerns access to institutional support services. While research has long demonstrated the importance of supplemental support services to community college students in particular (Karp et al., 2008), ELLs have even more need of support in understanding the requirements—spoken and unspoken—of being a successful student. Counselors knowledgeable about ELLs' unique needs (Bunch et al., 2011; Kanno, 2018) can help students understand placement results and how their course selection influences their program planning and eventual success. Research also states it should be the colleges' responsibility to inform and guide students in ways that are accessible from student perspectives (Bunch & Panayotova, 2008), something that community colleges have long failed to do successfully (Karp et al., 2008). Although many institutions have been challenged by pandemic-related staff shortages in critical student support functions (e.g., advising and counseling, writing center/tutoring center, disability services), it is vital that the VCCS re-double efforts to support consistent access to these important support services.

### Robust data collection

If our goal is to understand how students perform in their English courses and how their longer-term success is impacted by changes in enrollment procedures, thorough data collection must be part of the process. Given the limitations, however, in how student data is collected and

organized, we are very limited in what data trends we can follow. We do not currently have any way of collecting data on home language, for example, or whether a student took high school courses designated for ELLs. This problem is not unique to our College or system; the performance of ELLs in higher education is an under-studied area (Harrison & Shi, 2016). Institutions collect demographic data routinely but must make a better effort to collect data about language background and proficiency that would paint a fuller picture of whether and how multilingual students' needs are being met (Bergey et al., 2018). Finally, efforts must be made to examine the educational outcomes for students who complete ESL coursework, developmental English coursework, and those who begin at transfer-level English with no corequisite support course (Hayworth, 2020). Exploring outcomes for students who might have entered ESL or taken transfer English with an ESL-specific support course but who instead elect to enroll directly into transfer English with no support will help the VCCS to better understand who our multilingual students are, and how their success and persistence is impacted by the English pathway they follow. Following the three-year pilot, the VCCS must continue to evaluate how the direct enrollment policy and procedure changes impact students as well as faculty and staff.

## Conclusion

The success of multilingual students is vital for the VCCS to address. Population trends across the state predict growing numbers of students needing English language support as they transition into higher education, given the growth in the number of K12 students in Virginia who are still acquiring English proficiency (Department of Education, n.d.). Appropriate placement in courses that provide challenge and support is vital to the success of ELLs in community colleges. The impact guided self-placement might have on ELLs and multilingual writers more broadly is still being investigated, with many early self-placement pilots excluding multilingual writers from participating in self-placement

(Snyder et al., 2022). A further complication in looking to other institutions as models is that at many schools ELLs are lumped into "developmental English" due to insufficient numbers (Calhoon-Dillahunt & Margoni, 2022). With changes to direct enrollment replacing a standardized placement process for ELLs with informed self-placement and multiple measures placement, it is more vital than ever to consider whether we are providing not just *equitable access* to transfer-level coursework but *equitable opportunities to be successful* in that coursework.

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