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English Learners in Boston Public Schools: Enrollment and Educational Outcomes of Native Spanish Speakers

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The Mauricio Gastón Institute for
Latino Community Development
and Public Policy

English Learners in Boston Public Schools: Enrollment and Educational Outcomes of Native Spanish Speakers

Miren Uriarte, Nicole Lavan, Nicole Agusti, Faye Karp

April 2009



This Report is part of *English Learners in Boston Public Schools in the Aftermath of Policy Change: Enrollment and Educational Outcomes, AY2003-AY2006*, a project of the Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy in collaboration with the Center for Collaborative Education, Boston.

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Explanation of Terms

Models	
Sheltered English Immersion (SEI)	Model for teaching English Learners which relies on the use of simple English in the classroom to impart academic content, using students' native languages only to assist students in completing tasks or to answer a question.
Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE)	Model for teaching English Learners that relies on the student's own language as a bridge to the acquisition of English as a second language.
Study Populations	
English Learners (ELs)	Students who are enrolled in a program for English language development.
Limited English Proficiency Students (LEPs)	Students whose first language is a language other than English and who are unable to perform ordinary classroom work in English
Native English Speakers (NES)	Students whose first language learned or first language used by the parent/guardian with a child was English
Native Speakers of a Language Other than English (NSOL)	Students whose first language learned or first language used by the parent/guardian with a child was a language other than English
Outcomes: Engagement	
Median Attendance Rate	The attendance rate measures the percentage of school days in which students have been present at their schools. Attendance is a key factor in school achievement as well as an important factor used to measure students' engagement with school.
Out-of-School Suspension Rate	The out-of-school suspension rate is the ratio of out-of-school suspensions to the total enrollment during the year.
Grade Retention Rate	The proportion of students required to repeat the grade in which they were enrolled the previous year.
Annual Drop-Out Rate	The annual drop-out rate reports the percentage of students who dropped out of school in a specific year (MDOE, 2007b). The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education reports only on the high school drop-out rate, that is, school desertion taking place after the ninth grade.
Transfer Rate	The proportion of students who transfer out of the district in a given year.
Outcomes: Achievement	
MCAS Pass Rates in Math and ELA	Pass rates are the sum of the proportions of students scoring in the Advanced, Proficient, and Needs Improvement performance categories in MCAS exams on these subjects in a given grade in a given year.

Varied terms are used to refer to students whose verbal, reading, and/or writing skills in English are limited, who cannot do classroom work in English, and who are placed in language acquisition and support programs in American schools. Often the terms “English Learners” (“ELs”), “English Language Learners” (“ELLs”), and “students of limited English proficiency” (“LEPs”) are used interchangeably. In this report, we use the term “students of limited English proficiency,” or “LEPs,” to refer to those students whose first language is not English and who are unable to perform ordinary classroom work in English. This is the definition used by Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, (MDOE, 2004.) LEPs can be enrolled in General Education programs as well as in special language acquisition and support programs. We use “English Learners,” or “ELs,” to refer to those students who are enrolled in a program of English language acquisition or support. We do not use the term “English Language Learners” in this report but the term is interchangeable with “English Learners,” but not with “LEPs.”

Introduction

In November 2002, the voters of Massachusetts approved Referendum Question 2. This referendum spelled an end to Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) as the primary program available for children requiring language support in Massachusetts. In its place came a radically different policy called Sheltered English Immersion (SEI). Unlike TBE, which relies on the English learners' own language to facilitate the learning of academic subjects as they master English, SEI programs rely on the use of simple English in the classroom to impart academic content; teachers use students' native language only to assist them in completing tasks or to answer a question. This change represented a dramatic shift in the philosophy and practice of teaching English to populations of English Learners.

Five years after the start of the implementation of SEI in Massachusetts, there is still scant information about the impact of this change on language education. Models of implementation have varied across the state, with those districts that approach the process most flexibly exhibiting the most substantial gains or the least losses (DeJong, Gort, & Cobb, 2005; Rennie Center, 2007). But there has been no analysis of the outcomes for students under SEI at the state level or in the city of Boston, where the largest number of English Learners in Massachusetts live and attend school.

English Learners in Boston Public Schools in the Aftermath of Policy Change: Enrollment and Educational Outcomes, AY2003-AY2006 begins to address this gap. It presents information on the outcomes for English Learners (ELs) in Boston's public schools in the year before and in the three years following the implementation of Question 2. The Mauricio Gaston Institute conducted this study in collaboration with the Center for Collaborative Education and support from the Boston Public Schools. Utilizing four years (AY 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006) of BPS student-level data, we analyze changes in the identification of students with limited English proficiency (LEPs) in Boston Public Schools, their enrollment in programs for English Learners or in general education programs, their engagement in schooling, and their academic outcomes.

The implementation in Boston Public Schools of the changes demanded by the passage of the new law had a profound effect on the programs offered to students of limited English proficiency, as well as on the academic outcomes of these students. Our overall study finds that both the identification of LEPs and their enrollment in programs for English Learners declined significantly after the implementation of the program changes demanded by Question 2. Both identification and enrollment had increased somewhat by the end of the observation period, but neither had reached the levels of AY2003, the last year of Transitional Bilingual Education in Boston. The study also finds that drop-out rates have increased among students in EL programs. Under TBE, students in programs for ELs had lower drop-out rates than those in general education programs; that situation has been reversed under SEI. Finally, the study finds that the gap in achievement between students in EL programs and those in general education programs has increased over the four-year period.

Aside from providing an account of the performance of English Learners in Boston between academic years 2003 and 2006, this study has allowed for a unique look at the performance of groups of students defined by language. This specific report is one of five reports focusing on the enrollment and academic outcomes of the largest groups of native speakers of languages other than English: speakers of Spanish, Chinese dialects, Vietnamese, Haitian








Creole, and Cape Verdean Creole. For Chinese, Vietnamese, Haitian, and Cape Verdean students and families, this is one of the first looks at the performance of students from these groups in Boston schools. Usually reported as part of aggregates defined by race (e.g., “Asian” or “Black”), information specific to these ethnic groups is seldom reported separately. Although there is data available on the general population of Latino students in the Boston Public Schools, this report focuses solely on those who are native Spanish speakers, who account for 66.2% of all Latino students.¹

The purpose of focusing on the outcomes of specific language groups is to inform community organizations, parents, and students of the impact of this policy on the education of children from these groups. In fact, the commitment to inform parents and community leaders emerged from their role in making this research possible. The absence of information about the impact of Question 2 confused and angered immigrant parents and communities. Working through local education advocacy organizations, they demanded information and analysis on the status of English Learners. That demand, together with the schools’ own need and willingness to “know,” led to the collaboration that made possible this study of the outcomes of English Learners in the Boston Public Schools.

Enrollment and Educational Outcomes of Native Spanish Speakers

This particular report focuses on English Learners whose native language is Spanish. In AY2003, the year of the passage of Question 2, native Spanish speakers in the Boston Public Schools were a majority, both of students with limited English proficiency (56.7%) and students in programs for English Learners (60.8%). The impact of the changes imposed by Question 2 on this language group was profound. Because native Spanish speakers made up 20.3% of all students in BPS, the changes in this group also affected the overall outcomes for the district during this period.

In this report we highlight the identification of limited English proficiency among native speakers of Spanish and their enrollment in programs for English Learners (ELs) and find that both suffered substantial declines. Throughout the report, we compare native Spanish speakers in EL and general education programs. We analyze the changes in key engagement and outcome variables, including attendance, suspensions, and drop-out rates, and we find that native Spanish speakers, particularly those in programs for ELs, experienced a very significant increase in their drop-out rate. In examining MCAS results in the 4th, 8th, and 10th grades, we find some improvements in outcomes; but when we compare native Spanish speakers in programs for ELs with their counterparts in the general education program and with English speakers in general programs, we find a widening gap.

COLOR KEY	
	All BPS
	NES
	NSOL
	EP
	LEP
	In General Ed
	In EL Programs

1. Native Spanish Speaking Students in the Boston Public Schools

Enrollment in Boston Public Schools declined by 7.2% during the period covered by this report. The decrease in native Spanish speaking students was much smaller, with the result that their proportion of the total enrollment climbed from 20.3% to 21.7%. Native Spanish speakers comprise the largest cohort of native speakers of a language other than English in BPS. Native Spanish speakers were the largest cohort, both of students of limited English proficiency (LEP) and of students in programs for English Learners (ELs), throughout the period of observation. By 2006, they accounted for 55.9% of all BPS students designated as having limited English proficiency in BPS and for 57.2% of all students enrolled in programs for ELs.

Native Spanish speakers also accounted for the bulk of those children in BPS who defined themselves as “Latino” in terms of race/ethnicity in 2006: 63.9% of all Latino students in the general education program and 92.4% of those enrolled in programs for ELs were native Spanish speakers. In 2006, there were 12,575 native Spanish speakers enrolled in Boston Public Schools. Of these, 5,588 (or 44.4%) were designated as students of limited English proficiency and 40.3% were enrolled in a program for English Learners in BPS (Table 1).

TABLE 1. ENROLLMENT OF NATIVE SPANISH SPEAKERS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
All BPS	63,777	61,652	59,608	59,211
Total Enrollment of Native Spanish Speakers	12,974	12,696	12,490	12,575
Native Spanish Speakers as a Percentage of Total BPS Enrollment	20.3%	20.6%	20.9%	21.7%

Note: Total enrollments in this table do not match the BPS official enrollments because of exclusions. See Appendix 1.

TABLE 2. SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF NATIVE SPANISH SPEAKERS. AY2006

Selected Characteristics	All BPS	Students in Programs for ELs	Native Spanish Speakers	Native Spanish Speakers in Programs for ELs	Native Spanish Speakers in General Education
Enrollment	59,211	8,847	12,575 ¹	5,068	6,984
LEP Designation	16.4%	100%	44.4%	100%	0%
Gender: % male	51.2%	53.4%	51.1%	53.0%	49.5%
Poverty Status: % receiving free or reduced price lunch	74.9%	84.8%	86.4%	87.7%	85.4%

Note: (1) Includes 523 native speakers who opted out of programs for ELs.

TABLE 3. ENROLLMENT BY GRADE LEVEL. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2006

	Elementary	Middle	High
All BPS	43.1%	22.9%	34.0%
Students in Programs for ELs	58.5%	13.6%	27.9%
Native Spanish Speakers	41.8%	24.3%	33.9%

Demographically, native Spanish speakers as a group showed both similarities and differences with the overall BPS population (Table 2). They were similar in terms of gender distribution, with just over 51% of both groups being males. In contrast, they were a much higher proportion of students receiving free or reduced lunch, a proxy for poverty status since income at this level is a criterion for acceptance into this school program.² Within the group of native Spanish speakers, those attending programs for English Learners show both a larger proportion of male students (as was the case among all enrolled in programs for ELs) and a higher proportion of poor students than the group of Spanish speakers attending general programs. Finally, native Spanish speakers mirror the grade distribution of the overall BPS population, with slight differences: they show smaller proportions of students in elementary and high schools and a slightly higher proportion in middle schools (Table 3).

2. The Identification of Limited English Proficiency Students

One of the findings of this study of English Learners in Boston is that there was an overall decline in the numbers of students identified as of limited English proficiency after the implementation of the changes required by Question 2. The total number of BPS students designated as LEPs moved from a high of 14,737 students in AY2003 to a low of 8,458 in the subsequent two years, then underwent a modest recovery to 9,989 students in AY2006. The percentage of total BPS enrollment that these students represented also declined, from a high of 23.1% to a low of 14.1% by AY2005 and a recovery 16.4% in AY2006 (Figure 1).

This pattern repeats itself more clearly among native Spanish speakers, 64.4% of whom (8,350 students) were identified as LEPs in AY2003. Both numbers and percentages tumbled in the next two years, reaching 4,980 in AY2005 when only 39.9% of the native Spanish speakers were identified as LEPs. As happened in the previous example, there was a small recovery in AY2006.

FIGURE 1. IDENTIFICATION OF LEP STUDENTS. PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL BPS AND OF NATIVE SPANISH SPEAKERS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

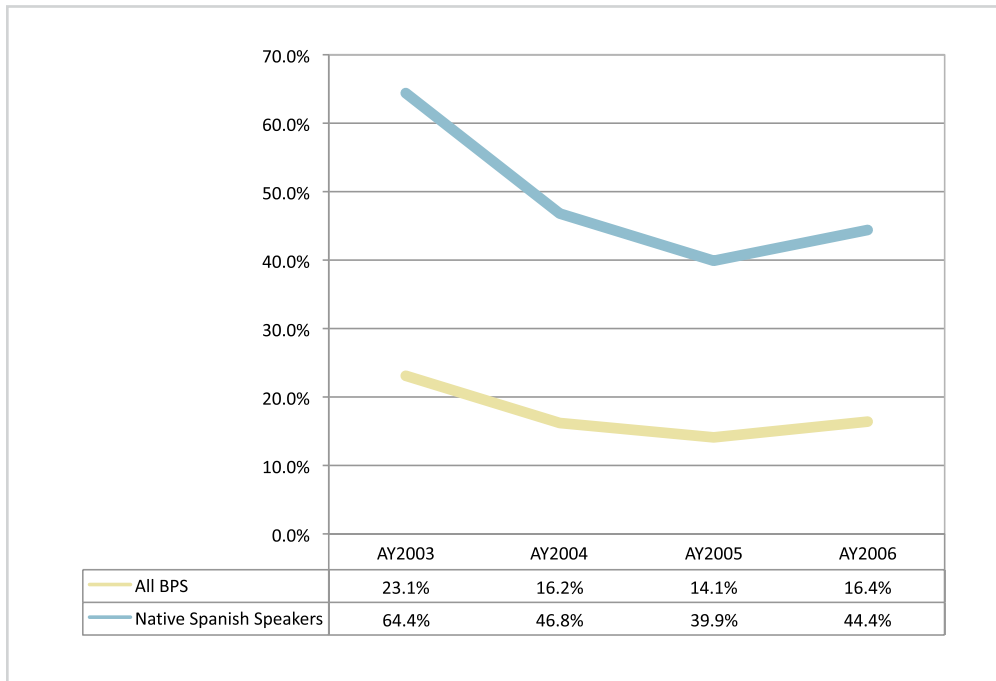


TABLE 4. RATE OF CHANGE IN THE DESIGNATION OF LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2003–2004	AY2003–2005	AY2003–2006
BPS Students Designated as LEP	-31.8%	-42.6%	-32.2%
Native Spanish Speakers Designated as LEP	-28.8%	-40.4%	-33.1%

In order to better describe the decline in identification of students of limited English proficiency through time, we calculated the rate of change in identification between AY2003 and each successive year. Table 4 shows the rates of change in identification, both of all LEPs and of native Spanish speaking LEPs. The identification of LEPs in the general BPS population decreased by 31.8% in the first year after the implementation of Question 2; by 2005, BPS showed 42.6% fewer students of limited English proficiency than in the baseline year. Even after a small recovery in AY2006, the whole period still showed a decrease of 33.2% from the baseline of AY2003. Among native Spanish speakers, the decrease in identification in AY2004 and 2005 was slightly less than that experienced by the overall district, but the recovery for this group of students was not as strong, so that the net decrease from the baseline year was 33.1%. It is important to note that during this same period the number of native Spanish speakers in BPS decreased by only 3.1%.

3. Program Participation by Native Spanish Speakers

This section presents findings on the participation of native Spanish speakers in programs for English Learners and in special education programs. The data indicate that across time, participation in programs for ELs decreased, although it recuperated partially in the last year of observation. Meanwhile, the participation in special education, especially in substantially separate programs, increased.

3A. Participation in Programs for English Learners. Throughout the period under study, native Spanish speakers comprised the largest cohort of students enrolled in programs for English Learners; about 60% of all the students in EL programs were from this group.³ Analysis conducted for this study shows that in spite of the apparent stability of this proportion over time, there were declines in the percentage of native Spanish speakers and native Spanish speaking LEPs who were referred to and enrolled in these programs.

In AY2003, almost ten thousand BPS students (9,912, or 15.2% of the total enrollment) participated in programs for English Learners in BPS (Figure 2). This number was reduced by almost 40% (to 6,013) in the first year after the implementation of SEI, dropping lower in AY2005 and increasing to almost its original size in AY2006. Native Spanish speakers and native Spanish speaking LEPs also experienced a strong decline in enrollments in programs for ELs in the two years following the implementation of program changes due to Question 2. By AY2006 all had experienced some recovery. In the case of the native Spanish speaking LEPs, the proportion enrolled in programs for ELs in AY2006 surpassed the pre-Question 2 values and stood at 90.6%.

FIGURE 2. ENROLLMENT IN PROGRAMS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS. SELECTED SUB-POPULATIONS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

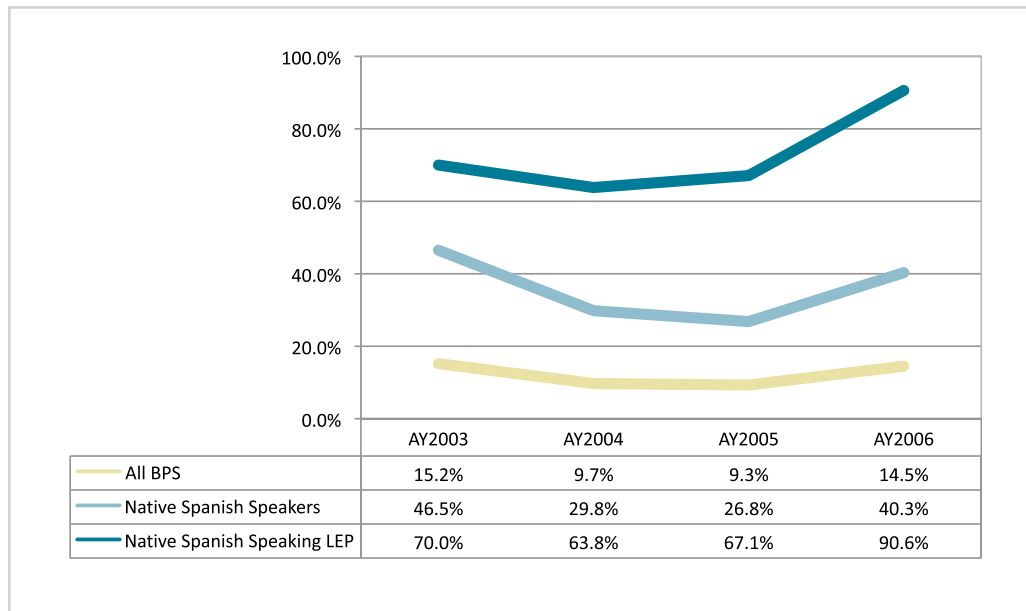


TABLE 5. RATE OF CHANGE IN ENROLLMENTS IN PROGRAMS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS. SELECTED SUB-POPULATIONS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2003–2004	AY2003–2005	AY2003–2006
Students in Programs for ELs	-39.3%	-43.9%	-10.7%
Native Spanish Speakers in Programs for ELs	-37.1%	-44.5%	-15.9%
Native Spanish Speaking LEPs in Programs for ELs	-35.25	-42.8%	-13.4%

This pattern is similar to the one observed in the identification of LEPs: a swift decline in the first two years after the implementation of SEI with a slight recovery in the last year of observation. In this case, the difference between the starting and the ending rate of participation was smaller. Table 5 shows the percentage change over time for the participation in EL programs for BPS students overall and for native Spanish speakers. At the end of the period, after experiencing the fourth-year recovery, there was a decline of 10.7% in the proportion of BPS students in programs for ELs in comparison to AY2003. There was a greater decline of 15.9% in the proportion of native Spanish speakers enrolled in these programs in comparison to those enrolled in AY2003 (Table 5).

3B. Participation in Special Education Programs. For BPS students overall, the period from AY2003 to AY2006 was relatively stable in terms of enrollments in Special Education (SPED) programs. However, there was a decrease in those enrolled in mainstream programs and a higher enrollment in substantially separate programs in that period (Table 6). The same was true among native Spanish speakers in general education programs, where there was a slight decline in their presence in mainstream SPED programs. But for students in programs for ELs – both the overall EL student population and those who are native Spanish speakers – the patterns were very different. For all BPS students in programs for ELs, this period showed a rise from 6.6% to 9.2% of enrollments in mainstream SPED programs and an even sharper

rise – from 4.8% to 10.9% – in the enrollments in substantially separate programs. A strikingly similar pattern and spread showed in the analysis of SPED participation among native Spanish speakers in programs for ELs between AY2003 and 2006.

TABLE 6. STUDENTS ENROLLED IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS. SELECTED SUB-POPULATIONS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
All BPS				
Full or Partial Inclusion	10.5%	9.8%	10.4%	10.4%
Substantially Separate	7.9%	8.6%	8.7%	8.8%
Students in Programs for ELs				
Full or Partial Inclusion	6.6%	5.8%	6.2%	9.2%
Substantially Separate	4.8%	6.7%	6.8%	10.9%
Native Spanish Speakers in General Education Programs				
Full or Partial Inclusion	11.7%	11.0%	11.1%	9.7%
Substantially Separate	5.2%	8.2%	8.4%	5.4%
Native Spanish Speakers in Programs for ELs				
Full or Partial Inclusion	8.4%	7.3%	7.7%	10.8%
Substantially Separate	6.4%	8.6%	8.9%	12.7%

4. Engagement of Native Spanish Speakers in Schooling

Maintaining students’ attachment to schools and schooling is one of the key challenges of educators, parents, and communities. We explore in this section four key indicators of attachment: attendance, out-of-school suspensions, grade retention, and the annual drop-out rate. These variables are key risk factors of dropping out, one of the main challenges facing BPS. Higher drop-out rates and younger dropouts are two of the key findings of this study of the effects of the implementation of Question 2 on student outcomes.

4A. Attendance. The attendance rate measures the percentage of school days in which students have been present at their schools. Attendance is a key factor in school achievement as well as an important factor used to measure students’ engagement with school.

The attendance rate of BPS students was unchanged during the period under study: across the four years, the attendance rate for BPS students was 95%. Students in programs for ELs showed a decline in the rate of attendance across the period – from 96.2% to 95.6%. Still, the rates for EL students were slightly higher than those of the general BPS population (Table 7).

Among native Spanish speakers, the attendance rate was lower than those of the BPS and EL program populations. This is particularly the case among native Spanish speakers in the general education program. During the study period, attendance rates declined for both groups of native Spanish speakers, though the decline was slightly higher for those in programs for ELs.

TABLE 7. MEDIAN ATTENDANCE RATE. SELECTED SUB-POPULATIONS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
All BPS	95.2%	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%
Students in Programs for ELs	96.2%	96.1%	95.8%	95.6%
Native Spanish Speakers				
In Programs for ELs	95.6%	95.0%	95.0%	94.4%
In General Education Programs	94.4%	94.4%	93.9%	93.3%

4B. Out-of-School Suspensions. There are two types of suspensions reported by the school district: in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions. An in-school suspension constitutes the removal of a student from his/her class and placement in a separate environment within the school. In an out-of-school suspension, the student is removed from the school for the time of the suspension and is unable to participate in any school activity.⁴ In this section, we report on the out-of-school suspension rate, which represents the ratio of suspensions to the total enrollment during the year.⁵ Out-of-school suspension is a strong disciplinary action that separates the student from the school. Research points to increased risk of low academic achievement, of dropping out of school, and of involvement in the juvenile justice system (Ali & Dufresne, 2008).

The rate of out-of-school suspensions for BPS students overall declined during the period of observation. That was true as well for students in the programs for ELs, including the native Spanish speakers (Table 8). Among native Spanish speakers, the out-of-school suspension rates of those students in general education programs showed more change, rising from 6.4% to 7.2% in the period under study. By the end of the period, native Spanish speakers in general education programs had an out-of-school suspension rate that was double the rate for students in programs for ELs.

TABLE 8. OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION RATE. SELECTED SUB-POPULATIONS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
All BPS	7.6%	7.1%	6.7%	6.6%
Students in Programs for ELs	3.7%	3.5%	3.4%	3.4%
Native Spanish Speakers				
In Programs for ELs	4.0%	3.7%	3.5%	3.6%
In General Education Programs	6.4%	7.2%	6.9%	7.2%

4C. Grade Retention. This section reports on the proportion of students retained in grade for an extra school year. Retention in grade usually takes place in the early years, but in some school systems students across all grades are exposed to this practice. Increasingly, there is evidence that students retained (or “kept back”) in grade have a higher risk of dropping out of school and of depressed educational outcomes (Kelly, 1999).

The rate of grade retention for BPS students increased slightly during the four years under study (Table 9). This rate, though relatively stable, was more than three times that of the state as whole, where grade retention through these years averaged 2.6% students in the general education program and for those in programs for ELs, increased during this (MDOE, 2006). Grade retention among students in programs for ELs was even higher, and it increased

notably over the period: from 8.6% percent retained in 2004 (same grade as in 2003) to 13.1% in 2006 (same grade as in 2005). Among native Spanish speakers, the rate of retention, both for period. Rates for students in EL programs were lower than for those in general programs in the baseline year, but the reverse was true in the latter two years.

TABLE 9. GRADE RETENTION. SELECTED SUB-POPULATIONS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
All BPS	8.4%	8.6%	8.9%
Students in Programs for ELs	8.6%	10.2%	13.1%
Native Spanish Speakers			
In Programs for ELs	8.0%	10.0%	12.2%
In General Education Programs	8.2%	9.7%	9.3%

4D. Annual Drop-Out Rates. Districts report on their enrollment several times a year, allowing the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to keep track of students who abandon school. A student may “drop out” because he or she entered the Job Corps, the military, employment, or a non-degree-granting educational program, or because the student was incarcerated; in some cases the school district may be unaware of the student’s plans, or even the location of the student (MDESE, 2008).

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education reports drop-out data in two ways: the annual drop-out rate and the four-year (or cohort) drop-out rate. The annual drop-out rate reports the percentage of students who dropped out of school in a specific year (MDESE, 2007b). The four-year or cohort drop-out rate reports the percentage of students in a cohort who dropped out of school at any time between Grades 9 and 12 during a specific four-year period; this rate shows the accumulated effect of students dropping out over four years (MDESE, 2007a,b). Although the cohort drop-out rate gives a more complete view of the drop-out problem in schools, in this report we focus on the annual drop-out rate for each of the years under observation because the expanse of time of the data set does not allow for the four-year analysis. (The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education reports only on the high school drop-out rate, that is, school desertion taking place after the 9th grade.)

Some of the most salient findings of this study of English Learners in Boston concern the impact of the programmatic changes on the drop-out rate of students in programs for ELs, and especially on the grades in which this school desertion takes place. Table 10 presents the dimensions of the increase in the high school and middle school drop-out rates across the four years of observation and across all BPS sub-groups included in this report. Focusing first on the high school drop-out rates, we observe that the overall rate declined in the year of the initiation of changes mandated by Question 2 (AY2004), then rose again. By AY2006, all groups experienced higher drop-out rates than in the baseline year of AY2003. In the case of students in programs for English Learners, these increases were substantial: the rate for students in programs for ELs nearly doubled in the four-year period. The comparison of the high school drop-out rates of native Spanish speakers in general education programs and programs for ELs shows a rise in the rate for both, but a much stronger increase among students in EL programs. These students experienced the highest drop-out rate (14%) of any sub-group during the study period. It is also noteworthy that in the baseline year, the rates

for students in EL programs were lower than those in general education (both the overall population and Spanish speakers). This was reversed in the years following the implementation of SEI and has been sustained ever since.

In addition to the increase in the high school drop-out rate, this period was also marked by the increased incidence of dropping out among younger students. Table 10 also presents the drop-out rates for different groups of students in middle school. Among all BPS students in middle school, the annual drop-out rate rose sharply in AY2005, declining by the end of the period. Still, the dropout rate for BPS middle schoolers more than doubled in the period. Among students in programs for ELs, the rise in the drop-out rate was much sharper: it more than tripled in the period, from a negligible 0.8% in AY2003 to 2.6% in AY2006. For native Spanish speakers in middle school EL programs the rate nearly tripled and for native Spanish speakers in middle school general education programs it quadrupled.

TABLE 10. ANNUAL HIGH SCHOOL AND MIDDLE SCHOOL DROP-OUT RATES. SELECTED SUB-POPULATIONS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
High School				
All BPS	7.7%	5.3%	8.2%	10.9%
Students in General Education Programs	8.4%	5.2%	8.1%	10.7%
Students in Programs for ELs	6.3%	6.1%	9.1%	12.0%
Native Spanish Speakers				
In Programs for ELs	7.3%	4.4%	10.3%	14.0%
In General Education Programs	9.5%	5.2%	8.4%	11.4%
Middle School				
All BPS	1.1%	0.4%	4.0%	2.6%
Students in General Education Programs	1.1%	0.4%	4.0%	2.6%
Students in Programs for ELs	0.8%	0.3%	2.7%	2.6%
Native Spanish Speakers				
In Programs for ELs	1.2%	0.5%	3.5%	3.4%
In General Education Programs	0.7%	0.6%	4.4%	2.8%

5. MCAS Outcomes of Native Spanish Speakers in General Education and in Programs for English Learners

As part of the Massachusetts Educational Reform Act of 1993, the state instituted the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System to provide measures of achievement of Massachusetts public school students. These measures of accountability, later folded into the state’s response to the federal requirements of No Child Left Behind, were deployed fully in 2001. Tenth graders taking the MCAS test that year were required to pass in both Math and English Language Arts in order to graduate from high school in June 2003. The process of educational reform in Massachusetts, with MCAS as its linchpin, has led to concerns among educators about the amount of testing required and about the way this testing is impacting the quality and breadth of teaching in the classroom. There are also concerns about the effect of this high-stakes culture on the drop-out rate, which has increased in Massachusetts in recent years (MDESE, 2006). It has also led to overall increases in achievement, which have placed Massachusetts at the top of the scores in the National Assessment of Educational

Progress for more than a decade, as well as to sharp increases in the gaps in achievement based on class, race, and language ability (NAEP, n.d.). The full deployment of the MCAS, along with its impact on teaching, learning, achievement, and school desertion in Massachusetts, pre-dated the program changes demanded by Question 2.

Below we present the MCAS outcomes for Boston’s 4th, 8th, and 10th graders, for students in EL programs, and for native Spanish speakers in general education and in programs for ELs during the period of observation. We do not present results in AY2005 for students in EL programs because the small number of test-takers in that year makes the results unreliable.

5A. Fourth Grade MCAS Pass Rates in ELA and Math. Fourth grade MCAS pass rates in ELA for BPS students remained relatively stable through the period, rising in AY2004 and declining to close to the baseline value by AY2006. The same was true of the pass rate for BPS students in programs for ELs. By contrast, pass rates in MCAS Math improved for both groups, rising over 10 percentage points among BPS students and over 5 percentage points among students in EL programs.

The comparison of pass rates for native Spanish speakers in the general program and in programs for ELs shows that native Spanish speakers in general programs performed substantially better across all years, including the baseline, in both ELA and Math. Observing pass rates across time, native Spanish speakers in general education substantially improved their scores in both Math and in ELA from AY2003 to AY2006. Among native Spanish speakers in programs for ELs, there was a slight improvement in Math and a slight decline in ELA scores across time (Table 11).

TABLE 11. 4TH GRADE MCAS PASS RATES IN ELA AND MATH. SELECTED SUB-POPULATIONS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005 ¹	AY2006
ELA				
All BPS	73.3%	77.5%	74.1%	73.2%
Students in General Education Programs	77.5%	79.3%	76.3%	77.8%
Students in Programs for ELs	56.8%	57.1%	NA	56.9%
Native Spanish Speakers				
In Programs for ELs	54.9%	55.7%	NA	52.1%
In General Education Programs	82.0%	79.0%	73.7%	86.6%
Math				
All BPS	63.2%	70.1%	68.5%	73.7%
Students in General Education Programs	65.0%	71.3%	70.0%	76.6%
Students in Programs for ELs	57.3%	57.6%	NA	63.0%
Native Spanish Speakers				
In Programs for ELs	53.0%	50.8%	NA	55.8%
In General Education Programs	67.4%	73.5%	70.5%	86.6%

Note: (1) In AY2005, MCAS tests results for language groups are not reliable because a small number of LEP students took the test. Fewer test-takers together with reporting restrictions make this data unreliable.

5B. Eighth Grade MCAS Pass Rates in Math. MCAS Math pass rates improved for BPS 8th graders and remained about the same for students in EL programs. Throughout the period, pass rates for EL students were substantially lower than for the all BPS 8th grade students. As was the case among 4th graders, the comparison of rates for native Spanish speakers in the general program and in programs for ELs shows that native Spanish speakers in general programs performed substantially better across all years, including the baseline, in 8th grade Math. The observation of pass rates across time shows that native Spanish speakers in general education improved their scores in Math from AY2003 to AY2006; among native Spanish speakers in programs for ELs, there was a sharp decline in Math scores during this same period (Table 12).

TABLE 12. 8TH GRADE MCAS PASS RATES IN MATH. SELECTED SUB-POPULATIONS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2003	AY2004	AY20051	AY2006
All BPS	48.1%	54.0%	51.6%	53.4%
Students in General Education Programs	50.9%	55.1%	53.2%	55.8%
Students in Programs for ELs	33.1%	31.7%	NA	33.4%
Native Spanish Speakers				
In Programs for ELs	27.4%	23.8%	NA	16.5%
In General Education Programs	48.7%	50.8%	46.7%	54.5%

Note: (1) In AY2005, MCAS tests results for language groups are not reliable because a small number of LEP students took the test. Fewer test-takers together with reporting restrictions make this data unreliable.

5C. Tenth Grade MCAS Pass Rates in ELA and Math. MCAS ELA pass rates improved significantly among BPS students, rising from 66.8% in AY2003 to 77.4% in AY2006. This was not the case among students in EL programs, among whom scores declined sharply in the first year of the implementation of new programs, rising again in the last year but remaining below the baseline values. Both patterns are replicated in the results for native Spanish speakers: those in general education programs show a sharp improvement but those in EL programs suffer a sharp decline in the second year and show a weak improvement over baseline values in the fourth year.

TABLE 13. 10TH GRADE MCAS PASS RATES IN ELA AND MATH, SELECTED SUB-POPULATIONS, BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005 ¹	AY2006
ELA				
All BPS	66.8%	65.9%	67.8%	77.4%
Students in General Education Programs	72.7%	72.3%	73.3%	85.2%
Students in Programs for ELs	45.1%	26.2%	34.8%	43.2%
Native Spanish Speakers				
In Programs for ELs	39.0%	24.5%	NA	40.9%
In General Education Programs	70.2%	66.2%	66.8%	85.3%
Math				
All BPS	65.5%	68.7%	61.0%	67.8%
Students in General Education Programs	63.5%	69.5%	62.6%	71.7%
Students in Programs for ELs	69.2%	63.3%	46.8%	45.5%
Native Spanish Speakers				
In Programs for ELs	57.1%	58.0%	NA	39.4%
In General Education Programs	67.1%	63.1%	59.9%	71.2%

Note: (1) In AY2005, MCAS tests results for language groups are not reliable because a small number of LEP students took the test. Fewer test-takers together with reporting restrictions make the results unreliable.

In comparison to the ELA scores, improvements in Math are much more subdued, both for all BPS students and for native Spanish speakers in general education programs. Among ELs, the decline in MCAS pass rates is substantial: a decline of about 24 percentage points in the Math pass rate among the overall EL population and a decline of about 18 percentage points among native Spanish speakers in EL programs.

5D. Gaps in MCAS Pass Rates. In this last section of the report we assess the gaps in MCAS pass rates between native Spanish speakers in programs for ELs and two other groups: native Spanish speakers in general education programs and English speakers in general education programs. The latter comparison is the most frequent comparison group used to measure the “gap” in achievement of English Learners. In this analysis, the comparison for FY2005 is excluded because of the unreliability of the MCAS test result data among English Learners for that year.

Gaps in MCAS pass rates between native Spanish speakers in the two programs generally hovered between 20 and 40 points across grades in both Math and ELA and increased during the years of observation. The largest gaps appear on 8th grade Math and 10th grade ELA tests. But the most significant increase in the gap in these four years took place among 10th grade Math test-takers; in this case, the gap tripled from 10 points to 31.8 points in the four years.

The gaps in pass rates between native Spanish speakers in EL programs and English speakers in general programs were similarly polarized. They too show a tendency to increase across years, except that the 4th grade ELA gap narrowed in the period. As was the case in the previous comparison, the largest increase in the gap took place among 10th grade Math test-takers. In this case the gap increased from 5.3 points in AY2003 to 29.9 points in AY2006. Measuring the gap in pass rates for 4th, 8th, and 10th grade MCAS test-takers reveals that native Spanish speakers in programs for ELs fared substantially worse than their Spanish- and English-speaking counterparts in general education programs.

FIGURE 3. GAP IN PASS RATES IN ELA AND MATH BETWEEN NATIVE SPANISH SPEAKERS IN EL AND IN GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

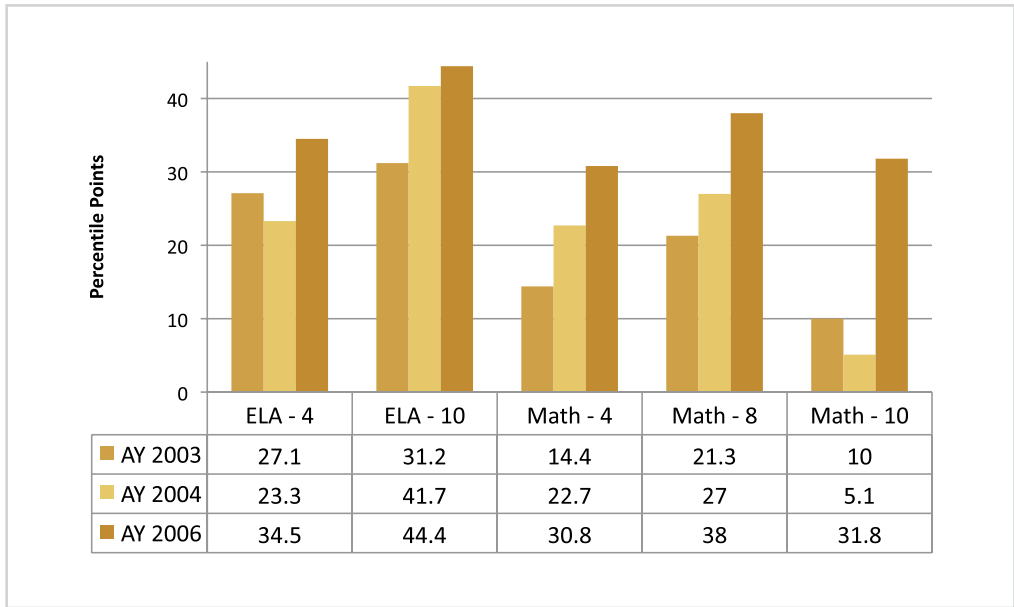
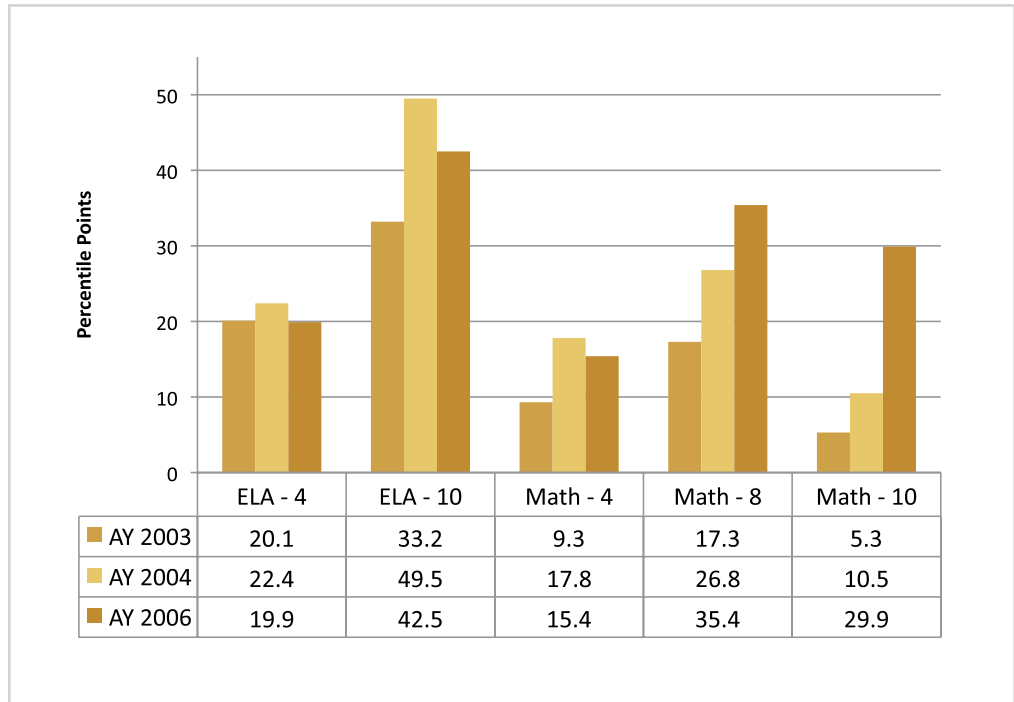


FIGURE 4. GAP IN PASS RATES IN ELA AND MATH BETWEEN NATIVE SPANISH SPEAKERS IN EL PROGRAMS AND ENGLISH SPEAKERS IN GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006



6. Summary

The shift from Transitional Bilingual Education to Sheltered English Immersion in Boston does not appear to have benefited native Spanish speaking students in programs for English Learners. Among native Spanish speakers, the most salient effect of the changes in policy and programs following Question 2 can be seen in the worsening of the engagement indicators. The impact on the high school drop-out rate was higher for native Spanish speakers in programs for English Learners than for either their counterparts in general education programs or the students in programs for ELs from most other language groups. They have also experienced decreased MCAS pass rates, and a wider gap in achievement in relation to both native Spanish speakers and English speakers in general education programs. Below we summarize the main findings:

In terms of enrollments:

- In AY2004, as BPS began to implement the program changes demanded by Question 2, there was a sharp decline in the number of native Spanish speaking LEPs identified.
- There was also a sharp decline in the number of native Spanish speakers enrolled in EL programs.
- By AY2006, the third year of implementing the policy change, there were increases in both identification and placement, but in neither case did these reach the level found in AY2003.
- During the period between AY2003 and AY2006, there was a rise in enrollment in SPED across all groups but particularly among students in programs for English Learners. The rate of placement in substantially separate programs doubled among Spanish speaking ELs. The increase in the rate of placement was also evident among students from the five main language groups.

In terms of the engagement of students in schooling:

- Native Spanish speakers in general education programs
 - o experienced a decline in attendance and increases in suspensions and grade retention.
 - o The deterioration of these indicators shows in an increase from 9.5% to 11.4% in the high school drop-out rate for these students.
 - o Middle school drop-out rates quadrupled for this group in the four years of observation
- Native Spanish speakers in programs for English Learners
 - o experienced a decline in attendance and an increase in grade retention.
 - o experienced a decline in suspensions.
 - o The high school drop-out rate nearly doubled, from 7.3% to 14.0%.
 - o Middle school drop-out rates tripled for this group in the four years of observation

Among native Spanish speakers, the most salient effect of the changes in policy and programs following Question 2 can be seen in the worsening of the engagement indicators. The impact on the high school drop-out rate was higher for native Spanish speakers in programs for English Learners than for either their counterparts in general education programs or the students in programs for ELs from most other language groups.

In terms of the academic achievement of native Spanish speakers the findings are the following:

- Among 4th grade test-takers
 - o MCAS pass rates in ELA improved slightly for native Spanish speakers in general education but not for those in programs for ELs.
 - o MCAS pass rates in Math improved for both groups; the gain was significantly larger for those in general education programs.
- Among 8th grade test-takers
 - o MCAS pass rates in Math declined for native Spanish speakers in EL programs but improved for those in general education
- Among 10th grade test-takers
 - o Among Spanish speakers in EL programs, MCAS pass rates in ELA declined sharply in AY2004 but recovered to slightly above the baseline rate by AY2006. For MCAS pass rates in Math, the opposite occurred. The pass rates increased in AY2004, but declined substantially below the baseline value by AY2006. For native Spanish speakers in general education programs, MCAS pass rates in both ELA and Math exceeded baseline values by 2006.

Notes

¹ In 2006, 30.7% of all Latino students in BPS were designated as of limited English proficiency and 27.6% were enrolled in programs for English Learners.

² The dataset provided “receiving free or reduced lunch” rather than “eligible for free or reduced lunch.” The former underestimates the level of poverty in the group since many poor students who are eligible by status may not actually receive the service.

³ 61% in AY2003, 63% in AY2004, 60% in AY2005, and 57% in AY2006.

⁴ For full definitions of in-school and out-of-school suspension, refer to MDESE (2008).

⁵ The suspension rate as discussed here counts each suspension as a discrete event, counting separately each suspension even in cases when they happen to the same student.

Appendix: Data and Methods

The information presented in the language group reports comes from a four-year, student-level administrative dataset provided by the Boston Public Schools (BPS). It includes demographic and enrollment information from the Student Information Management System (SIMS) on each BPS student enrolled in AYs 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006. Using a unique identifier for each student, results from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests have been merged with the SIMS, allowing for the analysis of outcomes. Although the dataset includes students' outcomes on Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA), these data were not merged because it was not present in a consistent enough form across years to provide appropriate analyses.

For the analysis, students were grouped in two categories: (a) students enrolled in programs for ELs and (b) students in general education. The analysis uses June data and excludes students who were enrolled in the district for only one day and who attended zero days; these students are included in the dropout analysis. Students attending schools serving special populations – the Carter Center, Community Academy, Expulsion Alternative Program, Horace Mann, McKinley Schools, Middle School Academy, and Young Adult Center – were also excluded. For the analysis presented in the language group reports, the students who “opted out” of programs for ELs are not included in general education programs but are part of the total analysis of BPS students. In most tables for the language group reports, we compare the outcomes of EL students from these groups with all students in general education, all students in EL programs, and native speakers of the specific language in general education. (Students who are native speakers of a language other than English but who are in general programs include former students of programs for ELs as well as students who may be native speakers of a language other than English but who were never enrolled in a program for ELs.) In the case of MCAS outcomes, the comparison with ELs from all language groups except Spanish-speakers is not possible because the number of test-takers reported is too small.

Throughout, we examine the differences between these groups along enrollment, engagement, and academic outcome variables, including attendance rate, out-of-school suspension rate, grade retention rate, annual drop-out rate, and MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) and Math pass rates. The definitions of the outcome indicators examined are as follows:

- **Attendance rate:** Median percentage of days that students in each program type attended school in a given year.
- **Out-of-School suspension rate:** the ratio of suspensions to the total enrollment during the school year. The suspension rate as discussed here counts each suspension as a discrete event, counting separately each suspension even in cases when they happen to the same student.
- **Grade retention rate:** The proportion of students in a given school year who were not promoted to the next grade.
- **Annual drop-out rate:** The proportion of students in a given school year who dropped out.
- **MCAS ELA and Math pass rates:** The sum of the proportions of students scoring in the Advanced, Proficient, and Needs Improvement performance categories on the English Language Arts and the Math MCAS exams in a given grade in a given year.

Basic statistical analyses were conducted to examine the significance of the differences we observed between groups and within the same group over time.

In addition to analyzing the dataset received from BPS, researchers collected documentary data pertinent to the process of implementing the changes required by the passage of Question 2. They also interviewed personnel of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (one) and the Boston Public Schools (nine) to assess the reasons for the changes observed in the quantitative data. Interviews were conducted during the summer of 2008 and focused on the identification and assessment of LEPs, the enrollment in programs for ELs, the guidance received by the district and the schools regarding the implementation of SEI, and teacher training. Interviews were handled in a manner appropriate to this type of data.

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