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

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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 Speakers of Vietnamese**

*Mandira Kala, Peter Kiang, Nicole Lavan, and 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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# English Learners in Boston Public Schools: Enrollment and Educational Outcomes of Native Speakers of Vietnamese

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## Explanation of Terms

Models	
<b>Sheltered English Immersion (SEI)</b>	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.
<b>Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE)</b>	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	
<b>English Learners (ELs)</b>	Students who are enrolled in a program for English language development.
<b>Limited English Proficiency Students (LEPs)</b>	Students whose first language is a language other than English and who are unable to perform ordinary classroom work in English
<b>Native English Speakers (NES)</b>	Students whose first language learned or first language used by the parent/guardian with a child was English
<b>Native Speakers of a Language Other than English (NSOL)</b>	Students whose first language learned or first language used by the parent/guardian with a child was a language other than English
Outcomes: Engagement	
<b>Median Attendance Rate</b>	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.
<b>Out-of-School Suspension Rate</b>	The out-of-school suspension rate is the ratio of out-of-school suspensions to the total enrollment during the year.
<b>Grade Retention Rate</b>	The proportion of students required to repeat the grade in which they were enrolled the previous year.
<b>Annual Drop-Out Rate</b>	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.
<b>Transfer Rate</b>	The proportion of students who transfer out of the district in a given year.
Outcomes: Achievement	
<b>MCAS Pass Rates in Math and ELA</b>	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

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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. Our presentation is limited to the data available data which does not allow us to determine the outcomes of all students from these groups but only of those students within these groups who are designated native speakers of their particular language. It also precludes the presentation of the standardized testing (MCAS) outcomes of students from these groups who attend programs for English Learners.

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 Speakers of Vietnamese

The following report addresses Vietnamese community leaders and organizations that specifically serve Vietnamese children and families in Boston. More broadly, it addresses educational policy makers, practitioners, and civic leaders who are concerned with the impact of changes demanded by passage of Referendum Question 2 on native Vietnamese speakers and other non-English native language speakers in the Boston Public Schools. The report focuses on students whose native language was reported as Vietnamese during the four-year period from AY2003 through AY2006.

In AY2003 – the year when Question 2 was passed by voters statewide, but before programmatic changes were implemented – there were 1,834 native Vietnamese speakers enrolled in BPS. They comprised the district’s fourth largest non-English language group in BPS. In this report, we provide demographic background information about enrollments of native Vietnamese speakers in general education as well as in EL programs and in special education programs during the four years of available data. We trace the identification of limited English proficiency among native speakers of Vietnamese and analyze their enrollment in programs for English Learners. We compare engagement indicators for native Vietnamese speakers in EL and general education programs, including attendance, suspensions, and high school drop-out rates. Finally, we examine MCAS pass rates for Math and English Language Arts in the 4th, 8th, and 10th grade for native Vietnamese speakers in general programs during this period.

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

## 1. Native Vietnamese Speakers in the Boston Public Schools

Among Boston students, native Vietnamese speakers are part of an overall trend of declining enrollments: the number of native Vietnamese speakers declined from 1,834 in AY2003 to 1,478 in AY2006 (Table 1)<sup>1</sup>. Their proportion within BPS enrollments overall also declined, from 2.9% in AY2003 to 2.5% in AY2006.

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

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
<b>All BPS</b>	63,777	61,652	59,608	59,211
<b>Total Enrollment of Native Vietnamese Speakers</b>	1,834	1,665	1,573	1,478
<b>Native Vietnamese Speakers as a Percentage of Total BPS Enrollment</b>	2.9%	2.7%	2.6%	2.5%

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 VIETNAMESE SPEAKERS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2006

Selected Characteristics	All BPS	Students in Programs for ELs	Native Vietnamese Speakers	Native Vietnamese Speakers in Programs for ELs	Native Vietnamese Speakers in General Education
Enrollment	59,211	8,847	1,478 <sup>1</sup>	338	1,638
LEP Designation	16.4%	100%	29.8%	100%	0%
Gender: % male	51.2%	53.4%	49.5%	56.9%	46.6%
Poverty Status: % receiving free or reduced price lunch	74.9%	84.8%	84.8%	82.3%	86.3%

Note: (1) Includes 102 native speakers who opted out of programs for ELs.

Demographically, native Vietnamese speakers overall in BPS have a relatively even gender distribution that is 49.5% male and 50.5% female; however, their enrollment in EL or general education programs differs significantly. In AY2006, for example, native Vietnamese speakers enrolled in EL programs were 56.9% male and only 43.1% female, while native Vietnamese speakers enrolled in general programs were 53.4% female and only 46.6% male (Table 2). Nearly one out of three native Vietnamese speakers (29.8%) were designated as students with limited English proficiency (LEP); this was close to double the percentage of students with limited English proficiency in the overall BPS population (16.4%) (Table 2). Among native Vietnamese speakers, more than four out of five students were receiving free or reduced lunch, a proxy for poverty status since income at this level is a criterion for acceptance into this school program<sup>2</sup>. This is an even higher percentage of poverty than the rate for BPS students overall (74.9%). Finally, similar to the pattern of BPS student enrollment overall, the percentage of native Vietnamese speakers is highest in elementary school (38.8%), followed by high school (35.2%) and middle school (26%) (Table 3).

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 Vietnamese Speakers	38.8%	26.0%	35.2%

## 2. The Identification of Limited English Proficiency among Native Vietnamese Speakers

One of the key findings from our larger study of English Learners in Boston is that there was an overall decline in the numbers of students for all language groups who were designated as having limited English proficiency (LEP) after the implementation of changes mandated by Question 2. The total number of BPS students designated as LEPs decreased from a high of 14,737 students in AY2003 – the baseline year prior to changes mandated by Question 2 – to a low of 8,458 in the subsequent two years. This number then increased modestly to reach 9,989 students in AY2006, still far below the level prior to Question 2 implementation.

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

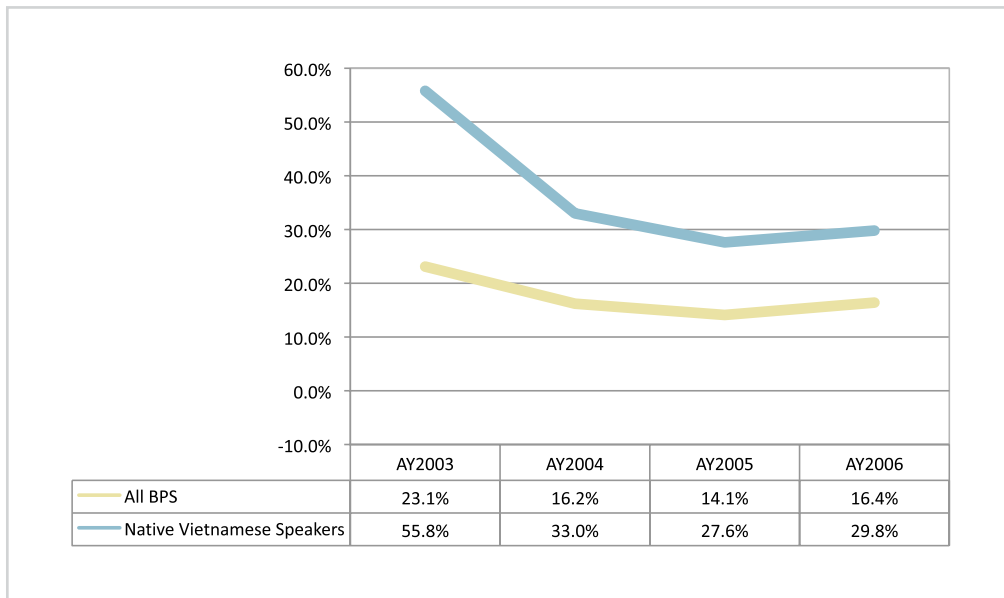


TABLE 4. RATE OF CHANGE IN THE DESIGNATION OF LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2003–2004	AY2003–2005	AY2003–2006
<b>BPS Students Designated as LEP</b>	-31.8%	-42.6%	-32.2%
<b>Native Vietnamese Speakers Designated as LEP</b>	-46.3%	-57.6%	-56.9%

The percentage share of BPS enrollment that these students represent also declined from a high of 23.1% in AY2003 to a low of 14.1% in AY2005, followed by a slight increase to 16.4% by AY2006 (Figure 1). For native Vietnamese speakers, this pattern is even sharper: 55.8% of native Vietnamese speakers were identified with limited English proficiency in AY2003. This percentage declined to 27.6% by AY2005 and increased only slightly to 29.8% by AY2006.

### 3. Program Participation by Native Vietnamese Speakers

This section presents findings on the participation of native Vietnamese speakers in programs for English Learners and special education programs. The data indicate that across time, participation in EL programs mainly decreased during the first two years following changes mandated by Question 2, and with only slight recovery during the third year. At the same time, enrollment of native Vietnamese speakers in special education increased, particularly within substantially separate settings.

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

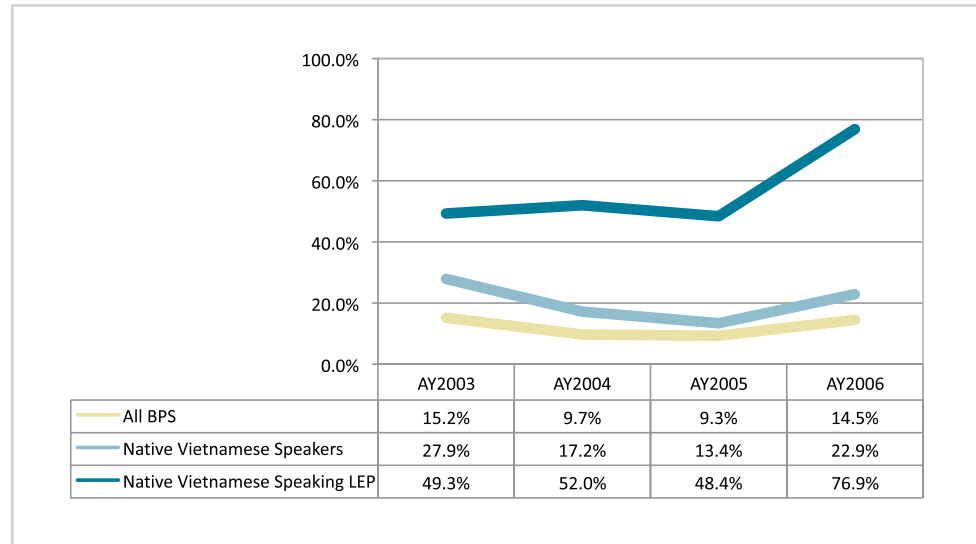


TABLE 5. RATE OF CHANGE IN ENROLLMENTS IN PROGRAMS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS. BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AY2003–2006

	AY2003–2004	AY2003–2005	AY2003–2006
<b>Students in Programs for ELs</b>	-39.3%	-43.9%	-10.7%
<b>Native Vietnamese Speakers in Programs for ELs</b>	-44.0%	-58.9%	-33.7%
<b>Native Vietnamese Speaking LEPs in Programs for ELs</b>	-43.4%	-58.4%	-32.9%

**3A. Participation in Programs for English Learners.** The general pattern following implementation of changes mandated by Question 2 was a decline in student participation in programs for ELs during AY2004 and AY2005, followed by an increase in AY2006 that was not large enough to surpass the percentage of student participation in EL programs in AY2003 prior to Question 2 implementation. For native Vietnamese speakers, while their enrollments were declining overall,<sup>3</sup> the proportion of students in EL programs decreased from 27.9% in AY2003 to 22.9% in AY2006. However, for native Vietnamese speakers designated as having limited English proficiency, there was a sharp increase in enrollment, from 49.3% in AY2003 to 76.9% in AY2006.

**3B. Participation in Special Education Programs.** For BPS students overall, the period between AY2003 and AY2006 was relatively stable in terms of enrollments in special education (SPED) programs. There were slight changes in the enrollments in mainstream SPED programs (a decrease) and in enrollments in substantially separate programs (an increase) during that period (Table 6). For BPS students in EL programs, the pattern was strikingly different: enrollments in mainstream SPED programs increased from 6.6% in AY2003 to 9.2% in AY2006, and enrollments in substantially separate programs rose even more sharply, from 4.8% in AY2003 to 10.9% in AY2006 (Table 6).

The percentage of general education native Vietnamese speakers who were enrolled in mainstream SPED programs decreased from 4.4% in AY2003 to 3.1% in AY2006, while those

in substantially separate SPED programs initially increased from 1.7% in AY2003 to 3.3% in AY2005, and then fell to only 1.0% in AY2006. These trends for native Vietnamese speakers were contrary to the trends for BPS students overall (Table 6). For native Vietnamese speakers in EL programs, however, enrollments in both types of SPED programs increased during the same period. Specifically, the percentage of native Vietnamese speaking EL students enrolled in mainstream SPED programs nearly doubled from 5.7% in AY2003 to 10.3% in AY2006, while the percentage of those enrolled in substantially separate SPED programs expanded by nearly ten times from 1.2% in AY2003 to 11.5% in AY2006.

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

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
<b>All BPS</b>				
<b>Full or Partial Inclusion</b>	10.5%	9.8%	10.4%	10.4%
<b>Substantially Separate</b>	7.9%	8.6%	8.7%	8.8%
<b>Students in EL Programs</b>				
<b>Full or Partial Inclusion</b>	6.6%	5.8%	6.2%	9.2%
<b>Substantially Separate</b>	4.8%	6.7%	6.8%	10.9%
<b>Native Vietnamese Speakers in General Education Programs</b>				
<b>Full or Partial Inclusion</b>	4.4%	4.3%	4.3%	3.1%
<b>Substantially Separate</b>	1.7%	3.6%	3.3%	1.0%
<b>Native Vietnamese Speakers in Programs for ELs</b>				
<b>Full or Partial Inclusion</b>	5.7%	5.2%	6.2%	10.3%
<b>Substantially Separate</b>	1.2%	2.1%	2.4%	11.5%

#### 4. The Engagement of Native Vietnamese Speakers in Schooling

Maintaining students’ attachment to schools and schooling is one of the key challenges of educators, parents, and communities. In this section we explore key indicators of attachment: attendance, out-of-school suspensions, grade retention, and the annual drop-out rate. A lack of consistent attendance and high levels of retention or suspensions are key risk factors for dropping out – a critical challenge that faces BPS. Therefore, the increase in drop-out rates and the emergence of younger dropouts among EL students overall following implementation of Question 2 are important findings from this study.

**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 schools.

The attendance rate of 95% for BPS students overall remained constant across the four years from AY2003 to AY2006 (Table 7). BPS students in EL programs showed a decline in attendance rates during this period, from 96.2% in AY2003 to 95.6% in AY2006, but their attendance rate remained higher than the BPS overall rate (Table 7). For native Vietnamese speakers, the attendance rate throughout the period was marginally higher among students in general education programs than for those enrolled in EL programs, and both groups had higher rates of attendance than BPS students overall. The attendance rate among native

Vietnamese speakers in general education programs remained nearly constant at over 97% over the four-year period, while the attendance rate for native Vietnamese speakers in EL programs declined slightly from 97.8% in AY2003 to 96.7% in AY2006 (Table 7).

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

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
<b>All BPS</b>	95.2%	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%
<b>Students in Programs for ELs</b>	96.2%	96.1%	95.8%	95.6%
<b>Native Vietnamese Speakers</b>				
<b>In Programs for ELs</b>	97.8%	97.2%	96.6%	96.7%
<b>In General Education Programs</b>	97.8%	97.8%	97.2%	97.2%

**4B. Out-of-School Suspensions.** There are two types of suspensions reported by school district: in-school and out-of-school. An in-school suspension constitutes the removal of a student from his/her class and placement in a separate setting within the school such as a detention room for a specific length of time for disciplinary reasons. In an out-of-school suspension, the student is removed from the school for the period of the suspension (typically one to three days), and is also unable to participate in any after-school-sponsored activity such as a sports team or student club.<sup>4</sup> In this section, we report the out-of-school suspension rate, which represents the ratio of suspensions to the total enrollment during the year.<sup>5</sup> Out-of-school suspension is a strong disciplinary action that separates the student from the school. Some research associates suspension with increased risk of low academic achievement, of dropping out of school, and of involvement with the juvenile justice system (Ali & Dufresne, 2008).

The rates of out-of-school suspensions for BPS students overall and for students in EL programs declined during the period of observation. In contrast, out-of-school suspension rates increased for native Vietnamese speakers enrolled in EL programs as well as general education programs (Table 8). However, the out-of-school suspension rates for native Vietnamese speakers are still consistently lower than those for either the total BPS student population or for BPS students overall in EL programs. For example, while the overall out-of-school suspension rate for BPS students in EL programs decreased to 3.4% in AY2006, the out-of-school suspension rate for native Vietnamese speakers in EL programs was 2.4% in AY2006 (Table 8).

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

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
<b>All BPS</b>	7.6%	7.1%	6.7%	6.6%
<b>Students in Programs for ELs</b>	3.7%	3.5%	3.4%	3.4%
<b>Native Vietnamese Speakers</b>				
<b>In Programs for ELs</b>	0.8%	3.1%	2.9%	2.4%
<b>In General Education Programs</b>	2.0%	2.7%	2.8%	2.5%

**4C. Grade Retention.** This section reports on the proportion of students retained in the same grade for an additional school year. Retention in grade, though not common, is more typically used for students in elementary grades. Increasingly, however, there is evidence that students are being retained (or “kept back”) in older grades as well, and that those students typically have a higher risk of dropping out of school and of achieving lower educational outcomes (Kelly, 1999).

This section reports on the proportion of students retained in the same grade for an additional school year. The rate of grade retention for BPS students increased slightly during the four years of study (Table 9). In AY2006, this rate of 8.9% was more than three times than that of 2.6% for the state of Massachusetts as a whole (MDOE, 2006). Grade retention rates among students in EL programs were higher across all the years – increasing from 8.6% in AY2004 (students enrolled in the same grade as in 2003) to 13.1% in AY2006 (students enrolled in the same grade as in 2005).

The rate of grade retention for native Vietnamese speakers in EL programs increased sharply from 5.7% in AY2004 to 8.5% in AY2006, but it remained well below the overall rate for BPS students in EL programs. Meanwhile, the grade retention rate for native Vietnamese speakers in general education programs increased only slightly, from 3.8% in AY2004 to 4.8% in AY2006 (Table 9).

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 Vietnamese Speakers			
In Programs for ELs	5.7%	8.6%	8.5%
In General Education Programs	3.8%	4.5%	4.8%

**4D. Annual High School 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.)

Among the most salient findings of this study of English Learners in Boston is the impact of post-Question 2 changes on the drop-out rate of students in EL programs and on the grades in which school desertion is taking place. With the data available, we are able to trace an increase in the drop-out rate across the four years of study and for high school students across the various native language groups.

Table 10 presents the annual high school drop-out rate for several BPS sub-groups. Though a decrease in the drop-out rate occurred in the first year after the implementation of program changes mandated by Question 2, all groups except native Vietnamese speakers in general education programs experienced increases in high school drop-out rates. A sharp rise in high school drop-out rates occurred for BPS students overall in EL programs where the rates doubled over four years from 6.3% in AY2003 to 12.0% in AY2006 (Table 10). Although native Vietnamese speakers in EL programs had a lower baseline high school drop-out rate compared to the BPS students in EL programs overall, the drop-out rate for native Vietnamese speakers in EL programs more than doubled during the same period: from 4.0% in AY2003 to 10.3% in AY2006 (Table 10). Native Vietnamese speakers enrolled in EL programs in the baseline year (AY2003) initially showed drop-out rates below those of native Vietnamese speakers in general education programs and those of the overall BPS population. However, from the first year of Question 2 implementation through AY2006, native Vietnamese speakers in programs for ELs had dramatically higher drop-out rates as compared to native Vietnamese speakers in general education.

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

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
<b>All BPS</b>	7.7%	5.3%	8.2%	10.9%
<b>Students in General Education Programs</b>	8.4%	5.2%	8.1%	10.7%
<b>Students in Programs for ELs</b>	6.3%	6.1%	9.1%	12.0%
<b>Native Vietnamese Speakers</b>				
<b>In Programs for ELs</b>	4.0%	6.7%	11.3%	10.3%
<b>In General Education Programs</b>	6.9%	2.5%	4.6%	5.3%

## 5. MCAS Outcomes for Native Vietnamese Speakers in General Education

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 MCAS outcomes for Boston’s 4th, 8th, and 10th graders, for all students in EL programs, and for native Vietnamese speakers in general education. The MCAS results for language subgroups (other than Spanish speakers) in EL programs are not reportable or reliable because of the small number of those test-takers during the time period of our data.

**5A. Fourth Grade MCAS Pass Rates in ELA and Math.**

Among all BPS students, fourth grade MCAS pass rates in ELA remained relatively stable through the period, rising slightly in the middle years and declining to close to the baseline value by AY2006. Pass rates among students in general education programs followed a similar trend. By contrast, pass rates in MCAS Math improved for both groups, rising over 10 percentage points among BPS students and students in general education programs. ELA pass rates for all native Vietnamese speakers increased in the years following the implementation of Question 2 but dropped below the baseline value in AY2006 to 82.8% (Table 11). Fourth grade MCAS pass rates in Math also increased for native Vietnamese speakers.

The 4th grade pass rates for native Vietnamese speakers specifically in the general education programs show small improvements in ELA and Math during the years following the implementation of Question 2. From AY2003 to AY2006, 4th grade MCAS pass rates increased from 94.6% to 95.8% in ELA and from 92.4% to 95.8% in Math. Fourth grade MCAS pass rates were highest among native Vietnamese speakers in general education programs, with the overall native Vietnamese speaking population also experiencing pass rates that exceeded the general BPS population.

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

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
<b>ELA</b>				
All BPS	73.3%	77.5%	74.1%	73.2%
Students in General Education Programs	77.5%	79.3%	76.3%	77.8%
Native Vietnamese Speakers	85.6%	87.0%	87.6%	82.8%
In General Education Programs	94.6%	88.5%	89.9%	95.8%
<b>Math</b>				
All BPS	63.2%	70.1%	68.5%	73.7%
Students in General Education Programs	65.0%	71.3%	70.0%	76.6%
Native Vietnamese Speakers	89.7%	91.7%	92.7%	90.2%
In General Education Programs	92.4%	92.6%	94.6%	95.8%

**5B. Eighth Grade MCAS Pass Rates in Math.** MCAS Math pass rates improved slightly for BPS 8th graders and BPS students in general education programs. For native Vietnamese speakers in 8th grade in general education, their MCAS Math pass rates increased substantially from 79.5% in AY2003 to 93.5% in AY2006, though with a dip in AY2005 (Table 12). MCAS Math pass rates for all native Vietnamese speaking 8th graders, as well as those in general education programs, were about 40 percentage points higher than those for BPS students overall in AY2006.



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

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
<b>All BPS</b>	48.1%	54.0%	51.6%	53.4%
<b>Students in General Education Programs</b>	50.9%	55.1%	53.2%	55.8%
<b>Native Vietnamese Speakers</b>	80.4%	83.6%	79.2%	93.3%
<b>In General Education Programs</b>	79.5%	81.4%	79.6%	93.5%

**5C. Tenth Grade MCAS Pass Rates in ELA and Math.** MCAS ELA pass rates improved significantly among BPS students overall, rising from 66.8% in AY2003 to 77.4% in AY2006. Similarly, the pass rates improved among BPS students in general education programs, with a pass rate of 85.2% in AY2006. In comparison to the ELA scores, improvements in Math were much more subdued for BPS students overall and for those in general education programs (Table 13).

For 10th grade native Vietnamese speakers, ELA pass rates declined initially after the implementation of Question 2, from 74.6% in AY2003 to 72.8% in AY2004; but they recovered by AY2005 and showed significant improvement by AY2006 with a pass rate of 92.2%. MCAS Math pass rates for 10th grade native Vietnamese speakers increased from 89.7% in AY2003 to 94.1% in AY2006.

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

	AY2003	AY2004	AY2005	AY2006
<b>ELA</b>				
<b>All BPS</b>	66.8%	65.9%	67.8%	77.4%
<b>Students in General Education Programs</b>	72.7%	72.3%	73.3%	85.2%
<b>Native Vietnamese Speakers</b>	74.6%	72.8%	83.8%	92.2%
<b>In General Education Programs</b>	85.2%	82.5%	85.2%	96.7%
<b>Math</b>				
<b>All BPS</b>	65.5%	68.7%	61.0%	67.8%
<b>Students in General Education Programs</b>	63.5%	69.5%	62.6%	71.7%
<b>Native Vietnamese Speakers</b>	89.7%	94.2%	89.6%	94.1%
<b>In General Education Programs</b>	80.0%	94.7%	91.1%	95.1%

Results for 10th grade native Vietnamese speakers specifically in general education programs show similar patterns of improvement in both MCAS ELA and MCAS Math pass rates over the same four-year period and represent the highest pass rates in AY2006 of the groups studied. The 10th grade pass rate of native Vietnamese speakers was nearly 15 percentage points higher for MCAS ELA and almost 27 percentage points higher for MCAS Math than those for BPS students overall.

## 6. Summary

The shift from Transitional Bilingual Education to Sheltered English Immersion in Boston appears to have had a mixed effect on the outcomes of native Vietnamese speaking students. For those in programs for English Learners the drop-out rate increased. On the other hand, native Vietnamese speakers generally experienced an increase in MCAS pass rates. ELA and Math pass rates for all native Vietnamese speakers and those in general education programs, across all grade levels, tended to increase and were always well above the pass rates for the total BPS student population and BPS students in programs for English Learners. Below we summarize the main findings:

### **In terms of enrollments:**

- In AY2004, as BPS began implementing the program changes demanded by Question 2, there was a sharp decline in the number of native Vietnamese speaking LEPs identified.
- There was also a sharp decline in the number of native Vietnamese speakers enrolled in EL programs, although the participation in EL programs of native Vietnamese speaking LEPs dramatically increased.
- By AY2006, the third year after the implementation of the policy change, there were increases in both identification and placement, but in neither case did these reach the level found in AY2003.
- The percentage of native Vietnamese speaking EL students enrolled in mainstream SPED programs nearly doubled from AY2003 to AY2006, while the percentage of those enrolled in substantially separate SPED programs increased by nearly a factor of ten during this time period. The total BPS population of students in programs for ELs also showed large increases in SPED enrollment.

### **In terms of engagement in schooling:**

- Native Vietnamese speakers in general education programs
  - maintained a relatively high and stable attendance rate over the four-year period but saw increases in out-of-school suspensions and grade retention.
  - The deterioration of these indicators shows in an increase from 4.0% to 10.3% in the high school drop-out rate for these students.
- Native Vietnamese speakers in programs for English Learners
  - experienced a small decline in attendance and larger increases in out-of-school suspensions and grade retention.
  - a decrease in the high school drop-out rate from 6.9% to 5.3%.

The worsening of the drop-out rate among native Vietnamese speakers in programs for ELs is the most salient effect of the changes in policy and programs following Question 2.

**In terms of academic achievement:**

- Among 4th grade test-takers
  - o MCAS pass rates in ELA initially improved for native Vietnamese speakers but fell below the baseline level in the final year of the study. ELA pass rates for native Vietnamese speakers in general education declined in post-Question 2 years but recovered in the final year to surpass the baseline pass rate.
  - o MCAS pass rates in Math improved for both groups.
- Among 8th grade test-takers
  - o MCAS pass rates increased substantially for native Vietnamese speakers and those in general education programs.
- Among 10th grade test-takers
  - o Among all native Vietnamese speakers and those in general education programs, MCAS pass rates in ELA and Math increased over the four years, with dips in AY2004 for ELA and in AY2005 for Math.

ELA and Math pass rates for all native Vietnamese speakers and those in general education programs, across all grade levels, tended to increase and were always well above the pass rates for the total BPS student population and BPS students in programs for English Learners.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Due to limitations with the data, we are not able to report on how many, if any, Vietnamese American students are enrolled in BPS who are coded as native English speakers rather than native Vietnamese speakers. Vietnamese students and students of Vietnamese background are usually aggregated into a general “Asian” racial category which includes other Asian ethnic groups and thus their exact numbers are difficult to determine.
- <sup>2</sup> 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 and students from non-English literate families who are eligible by status may not actually receive the service.
- <sup>3</sup> 1,834 students in AY2003, 1,665 in AY2004, 1,573 in AY2005, and 1,478 in AY2006.
- <sup>4</sup> For full definitions of in-school and out-of-school suspension, refer to MDESE (2008).
- <sup>5</sup> 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

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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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