

## ACADEMIC GROWTH FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

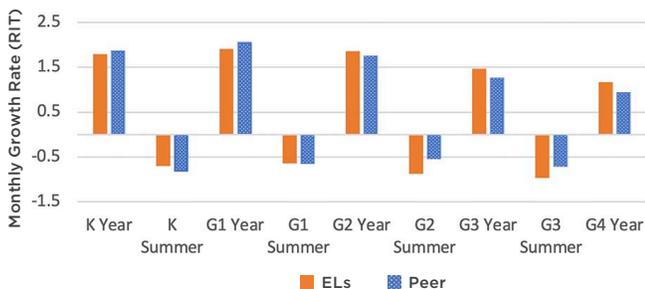
### Lessons from school-year learning gains and summer learning loss— Implications for COVID-19 recovery and beyond

English learners (ELs) make up approximately [10% of all students](#) in US public schools. The population of ELs [has grown by more than 1 million students](#) over the last 20 years, and there is great variation in the percentage of ELs within a state and the language(s) they speak. Historically, studies of student achievement for ELs have shown lower levels of achievement than their non-EL peers, often by substantial margins. Most such studies, however, use a snapshot of year-over-year data (most commonly state summative assessment results), without examining differences between academic year and summer growth. [Recent research](#) from NWEA® reveals a promising story: “students who continued to require EL support... grew more than [their peers] during the academic years but also lost more learning during the summers.” (Johnson, p. 10).<sup>1,2</sup> This study examined assessment data (academic growth during the school year as well as summer learning loss) from a cohort of over 56,000 students from 2014–2019, including students that were currently receiving English language services and students who did not receive services. This new research provides important insights that can inform schools, districts, and states on how they can support ELs through COVID recovery and beyond.<sup>3</sup>

## KEY FINDINGS

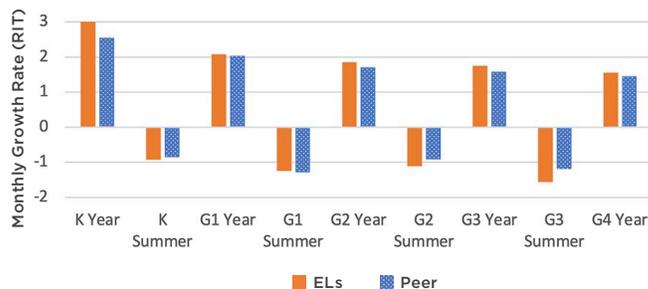
- ELs entered kindergarten with lower academic achievement than their peers in both reading and math.
- ELs grew at higher rates during the school year in reading and math compared to their peers, during some school years.
- ELs experienced larger academic losses during the summer than their peers in some years, contributing to continued disparities in achievement.

Monthly Growth and Learning Loss Rates By Grade for Reading



- ELs grew at similar or **higher rates compared to their peers in reading in second, third, and fourth grades.**
- ELs experienced **greater learning loss in reading** than their peers during the summers after second and third grades.

Monthly Growth and Learning Loss Rates By Grade for Math



- ELs grew at similar or **higher rates compared to their peers in math in all grades.**
- ELs experienced **greater learning loss in math** than their peers during the summer after kindergarten, second, and third grades.

<sup>1</sup> The analyses and data presented in this brief are highlights from work by NWEA researcher [Angela Johnson](#). The full research paper includes analyses for ever-ELs and dually identified ELs that received special education services. The research found that ever-ELs are “closing in on the national average in math and English reading achievement by the end of fourth grade.” To review the full results and for more detail on the data and analyses, please see the [research paper](#).

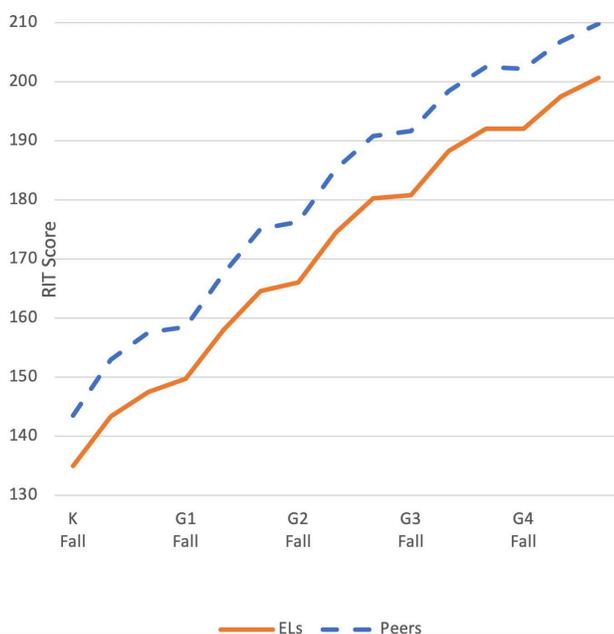
<sup>2</sup> For purposes of this policy brief, NWEA Policy and Advocacy is focusing on the research findings for “always-ELs” (ELs as noted in this resource) in the paper and “never-ELs” (peers). Always-ELs (ELs) were the group of students that were identified as current English learners in every term they were tested during the span of the study—meaning, for example, some students may have only participated in one year of the study while some students may have participated in all five years of the study as an EL. Never-ELs (peers) are the group of students that were never identified as English learners during the five years of the study.

<sup>3</sup> The monthly growth and learning loss charts illustrate the estimated monthly growth rates. The rates were estimated using scores from MAP® Growth™ assessments, using RIT points. RIT points or a RIT score represent the level at which a student is ready to learn and can be used to compare academic growth across students and time—within an academic year and over multiple years. Learn more about RIT scores [here](#).

## Disparities In Achievement Continue Over Time

Although ELs sometimes grew at higher rates during the school year, ELs entered kindergarten behind their peers and at times experienced greater summer learning loss than their peers. As a result, the disparities in achievement between ELs and their peers continued through the spring of fourth grade.

Reading Growth Trends for ELs Compared to Peers



## Recommendations for Supporting ELs During Covid-19 Recovery

As we finish another year of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, [marginalized students continue to be disproportionately impacted](#). Over the past two years, ELs likely experienced at higher rates than their peers a [lack of access to in-person or virtual instruction and services](#). As we begin to look towards recovery, policymakers and education leaders must focus on how they can advance learning for marginalized students, including [students with disabilities](#) and ELs.



NWEA is a national, nonprofit, research-based organization working to disrupt educational inequities and close opportunity gaps that disproportionately affect students of color and students from low-income families. This resource was developed by [NWEA's Policy and Advocacy team](#) with support from [NWEA Research](#) and UnidosUS. Through NWEA's research, advocacy, technical assistance, and partnerships, NWEA's Policy and Advocacy team works to expand excellence and equity in education from preschool through post-secondary.

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While this new research reveals that ELs can grow academically at similar rates to their peers, the learning conditions for ELs during the pandemic have been far from ideal and were likely unable to foster growth at pre-pandemic rates. With this historical data demonstrating ELs start kindergarten behind their peers and lose more learning than their peers during out-of-school time, states and districts should make supporting ELs a top recovery priority for the years to come.

With an influx in federal dollars flowing to districts and states through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, there is an [opportunity to provide ELs with evidence-based supports and services](#) needed to further learning for ELs and close the long-standing achievement disparities. Based on the results of this study, educators, school and district leaders, and other policymakers should:

- [Provide early support or interventions to ELs](#) and their families before entering kindergarten.
- [Offer extended learning opportunities to ELs](#) through community partnerships to provide summer learning services and after-school programs.

[UnidosUS](#), in partnership with [The Education Trust](#) and [Next100](#), has developed a set of recommendations for how states and districts can use federal funds to advance learning for ELs. These three groups encourage policymakers to focus on four areas:

- Meaningfully engage linguistically diverse families and communities
- Accelerating student learning with targeted supports for english learners
- Providing students with social, emotional, physical health, and mental health supports
- Building infrastructure to support english learners in the long term

The full recommendations are available on UnidosUS' [website](#).