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Examining Growth at the Intersection of IEP and (Long-Term) EL Status

Prepared by Narek Sahakyan and Glenn Poole
Wisconsin Center for Education Research, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Wisconsin Center for Education Research
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

We thank the WIDA Research Subcommittee for prioritizing and guiding this research inquiry. We are also grateful to Dr. H. Gary Cook and Dr. Daniella Molle for their edits, comments, and suggestions.

For more information on this topic, see WIDA Research Report No. 2018-1, October 2018, Exploring the Long-term English Learner Population Across 15 WIDA States.

WIDA Research

WIDA advances academic language development and academic achievement for children and youth who are linguistically diverse through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional learning for educators.

The overarching goal of research at WIDA is to promote educational equity and academic achievement for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

To achieve this goal, we work in partnership with districts, states, and national experts to conduct research focused on understanding and explaining the educational experiences and outcomes of language learners. Through our research, we also aim to inform the decision-making needs of educators and policymakers who serve these children and youth.

The WIDA research team is housed within the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER). Located at the highly ranked School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, WCER is one of the first and most productive education research centers in the world.

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Executive Summary

Students identified as English learners (ELs) receive language support services until they meet state-established criteria for reclassification as fully English proficient, which involves attaining high scores on annually administered standardized English language proficiency assessments. Those ELs who retain the label for an extended period, here defined as more than 5 years, are increasingly referred to as long-term ELs, or LTELs.[1] This study leverages population-level data from ACCESS for ELLs, an English language proficiency assessment administered in WIDA Consortium states. We examine long-term growth trajectories of ELs starting in elementary grades and describe systematic patterns underlying the process of many English learner students "getting stuck" in language support programs, while others progress more quickly toward English proficiency and reclassification. Motivated by findings of a 2018 WIDA report pointing to substantial overlap between ELs with Individualized Education Program (IEP) designations and those ELs who could be identified as LTELs, this study further focuses on these dual-identified students. Grouping ELs by *ever-IEP* (i.e., being assigned an IEP at any point in the longitudinal record) and *never-IEP* (i.e., never having an observed IEP assignment in the longitudinal record), we compare these two subgroups' English language development trajectories across time. Our findings show consistent trends of differential growth and reclassification rates for these two groups. Many ELs in the ever-IEP subgroup plateaued at medium proficiency levels, and ever-IEP ELs were on average about four times more likely to be identified as LTELs compared to never-IEP English learners.

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1 In ESSA section 3121(a)(6), local educational agencies (LEAs) are required to report the number and percent of ELs who have not attained English proficiency within 5 years. This could be seen as a statutory proxy for "time" to English proficiency, and it is the criterion adopted here.

Contents

Introduction

This report is the second part of the Long-term English Learner (LTEL) research inquiry initiated by the WIDA Research Subcommittee in 2018.[2] The first study, targeted at exploring the population of students who could be classified as LTELs across 15 WIDA Consortium states,[3] pointed to a large overlap between those students who could be captured by the LTEL label and those who received a disability status designation (via an Individualized Education Program (IEP) plan) throughout their time of taking ACCESS for ELLs[4] (ever-IEP ELs). Motivated by this finding, the primary focus of this report is on the subgroup of these dual-identified students.

Apart from a handful of studies, perhaps due to lack of large-scale assessment data across educational contexts, there are very few examples of quantitative inquiries examining the complex relationship between EL status and IEP identification. For example, Shin (2020) uses individual-level longitudinal data from one large urban district to examine LTEL students' characteristics and their linguistic and academic performance, finding that ELs with disabilities are more likely to become LTELs than other ELs. Similarly, Umansky et al. (2017) examine administrative data in a state and a large urban district and find that, whereas current EL students are overrepresented in special education at the secondary level, students who enter school as ELs are significantly underrepresented in special education overall and within most disability categories. They explain these trends by noting that reclassification patterns are likely driving the disproportionate accumulation of IEP students in secondary grades. Slama (2014) reports similar findings that ELs in special education are less likely than their peers to be reclassified as English proficient.

This report contributes to the literature by providing additional empirical evidence on the substantial overlap between IEP identification and eventual long-term EL status. More specifically, we examine long-term growth trajectories of elementary grade ELs, grouping students by ever-IEP and never-IEP status. We compare these two subgroups' cohort-averaged long-term language development trajectories, based on population-level test scores of early-grade ELs, tracking these cohorts' average performance (as measured in overall composite proficiency levels) from 2006 to 2019. We also measure and contrast the sample size of the "active" students in each of the cohorts,[5] reporting on systematically different reclassification rates for the two subgroups.

The findings presented in this report provide a valuable reference point for educators, administrators, and policymakers as they support the language development of English learners, and especially English learners with disabilities. While our results show that over half of English learner students designated to receive special education services get "stuck in EL status," many perhaps indefinitely, there are also many dual-identified students who reach high levels of language proficiency and are reclassified before being captured by the *long-term* label. It is just as important in future studies to explore the factors and conditions that facilitate and support the academic success of these dual-identified students.

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2 The WIDA Research Subcommittee consists of a group of State Education Agency representatives and WIDA researchers. The primary mission of the group is to prioritize, guide, and support conducting research on English Learners across the WIDA Consortium.

3 https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-Report-Long-Term-English-Learner-Population.pdf

4 ACCESS for ELLs is the large-scale English language proficiency assessment administered to kindergarten through 12th-grade students identified as Els in 40 U.S. states and territories.

5 Students who have a recorded ACCESS score are assumed to be "active" ELs.

Data

This study is made possible by a large-scale longitudinal dataset containing English language proficiency assessment scores (ACCESS for ELLs Paper and ACCESS for ELLs Online, hereafter known collectively as ACCESS unless otherwise indicated) of students in grades K–12 who were identified as ELs by state educational agencies that were part of the WIDA Consortium between 2006 and 2019. The longitudinal dataset allows for tracking ELs' performance in English language proficiency over time, starting from their first recorded to their last observed ACCESS test, which frequently represents exit from English language support services (i.e., reclassification). Students' performance on ACCESS is assessed in the four domains of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, based on which grade-specific overall composite proficiency levels (CPLs) ranging from 1.0 to 6.0 are derived.[6]

Our analytic sample includes all ELs who took their first ACCESS test in the four early elementary grades (K through 3) in the period 2006–2011, and tracks their subsequent ACCESS scores up to the 2018–19 academic year.[7] Thus, the data can be grouped into 24 different, independent, and non-overlapping cohorts that range from up to 9 years (for cohorts starting in 2011) to a maximum of 14 years (for cohorts starting in 2006).[8] Some students in each of these cohorts were identified in the ACCESS dataset as having an individual education plan (IEP) at the time they took ACCESS. Importantly, for the students with IEPs included in this study, disabilities did not preclude them from taking and completing all four domains of the ACCESS assessment.[9] Students in the dataset who took ACCESS from 2006 to 2016 received the paper version of the assessment. After 2016, while the paper test was available for specific situations, most students took ACCESS for ELLs 2.0, the online version of the test. The switch to online testing, followed by a standard setting in 2017 (which aligned ACCESS performance more closely to language expectations in the college and career readiness standards), impacted our growth analysis only minimally—and only for those students who remained in status many years after their initial identification as ELs and who would already be identified and counted as LTELs.[10]

In addition to data on students' test performance, the ACCESS longitudinal dataset records demographic information, including students' IEP status. However, an important distinction between the students' English proficiency and demographic data is that while the students' test scores are exact (i.e., evaluated by test vendors and based on students' performance on ACCESS), demographic data fields were filled out by test administrators locally (manually for the paper test) in schools across the WIDA Consortium. Partly due to this difference, in the IEP data field there were many instances of missing and potentially inconsistent data. This prompted a data imputation process, explained in Appendix B. In addition to the imputation process for the IEP field, our use of the ever- and never-IEP grouping addresses the possibility of inconsistencies due to potential data errors in students' IEP identification, by focusing on the complete history of the student, as recorded in the ACCESS dataset.[11]

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6 Most WIDA states currently use 4.5-5.0 overall CPL as criteria for recommending reclassification.

7 The study includes only those ELs that took all four domains of ACCESS, and therefore recorded valid overall Composite Proficiency Levels. Students who take Alternate Access are not included in this study.

8 A few students in our database, due to grade retention and irregular grade promotion, have over 12 years of ACCESS score histories.

9 Typically, depending on the type of special need, English Learners with a documented IEP are provided accommodations consistent with their disability during testing. There are currently 16 types of accommodations offered to ELs with disabilities on ACCESS. Those ELs with more severe disabilities who take Alternate ACCESS for ELLs (a decision made at the school level), or those who have not completed all four domains of ACCESS, are not included in the present study.

10 Moreover, our comparisons focus on the longitudinal growth of subgroups within the same cohorts, which further ameliorates any concerns about score comparability across time.

11 Additionally, we exclude from the dataset all those students who at any point skip more than one grade in one year, or who go backwards in grade level. Retained and skipped students make up a very small percentage (under 1%) of our total sample and are not addressed separately in our analysis.

Overall, our sample tracks 813,155 unique students' available test score histories over the 14-year period from 2006 to 2019. These students represent the population of all English learners in the WIDA Consortium that started taking ACCESS in either kindergarten (55%), first (18%), second (14%), or third (12%) grades in the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011. Because our data tracks active ELs, we have repeated observations across time; our total sample contains just over three million student-by-year records of ELs' test scores. Table 1 presents the distribution of the 813,155 students included in the study by starting year and grade/cohort.

Table 1: Number of tested English learner students by starting cohort and year. WIDA Consortium, 2006–2019

Starting Year/Grade	Kindergarten	First	Second	Third	Total
2006	55,671	47,112	38,520	35,236	176,539
2007	67,380	23,511	18,594	16,503	125,988
2008	66,519	14,506	9,388	8,080	98,493
2009	79,863	21,161	16,279	14,665	131,968
2010	85,902	16,455	11,807	9,433	123,597
2011	100,827	22,958	17,826	14,959	156,570
Total	**456,162**	**145,703**	**112,414**	**98,876**	**813,155**

Methods

The main goal of this study was to analyze and describe the extent to which EL growth trajectories, as measured by cohort-average overall composite proficiency scores, differ across time for ELs with and without IEPs. For a variety of reasons, ranging from state and district policies to the lack of special needs professionals in under-resourced schools, ELs are often first identified as needing an IEP long after their first year in school. In the data analyzed here, there are also many cases in which a student does not have an IEP designation despite having one in the previous year. Because we are interested in English language development (as measured by cohort-average ACCESS proficiency) over an extended period, and because in our data many students "fall in and out" of IEP status across time, we group students into two categories based on whether they were *ever* identified with an IEP designation (ever-IEP) throughout their recorded ACCESS test score history. This allows us to examine the trajectories of ELs who have received IEP-specified support regardless of when these supports were implemented, even if their disability is not diagnosed or identified until later in the child's education. Never-IEP students, on the other hand, are those English learners who never had an IEP identifier, as reported by their ACCESS records.

The relationship between language development and individualized education plans is complex and highly contextual.[12] Therefore, we do not attempt to specify an analytical model that might imply causal relationships between students' EL status and IEP designation. Instead, our approach relies on descriptive statistics and graphical analyses, focusing on annual proficiency gains on ACCESS for all ELs with and without IEPs. Due to the lack of large-scale empirical studies looking into the language development trajectories of ELs with learning disabilities (Burr et al., 2015), such descriptive analyses can provide useful evidence of underlying relationships without asserting that they are driven by a specific causal model (Loeb at al., 2017).

An additional complicating and often-overlooked factor in longitudinal analyses of language development is the ever-changing size and composition of the underlying samples. A substantial number of (typically higher ability) students reach reclassification-level proficiency and exit the sample every year, while another (potentially lower ability) subgroup drops out of language programs before achieving proficiency.[13] Moreover, in unrestricted cross-year comparisons of average proficiency, new students join the sample every year, thus introducing additional complexity. Therefore, for an apples-to-apples comparison it is important to keep track of the samples underlying average growth comparisons. To this end, for each of the never-and ever-IEP subgroups, we further group students by starting grade/cohort (kindergarten through third grade) and year (2006–2011) and report on each of the 24 subgroups' average overall composite proficiency, as well as the sample size of active English learners, within the same starting cohort. We track and compare these outcomes for never- and ever-IEP ELs across time, from 2006 to 2019, as students advance toward English proficiency and eventual exit from language support services (i.e., reclassification) or, less desirably, towards long-term EL status.[14]

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12 For example, in addition to implementing testing accommodations, the LEA, school personnel, and/or IEP team can have input in deciding whether a student is proficient in English, depending on the state's definition of English language proficiency. However, the U.S. Department of Education (2014) explains that IDEA contains no provision that would authorize an IEP team to remove the EL designation before the student has attained English language proficiency based on standardized or alternative assessments. (NASEM, 2017).

13 Students who are reclassified are more advanced in their language proficiency by construction, while those who drop out tend to be closer to the beginning end of the language proficiency continuum.

14 Because we cannot observe student reclassification directly in our data, we focus only on the population of active ELs for whom we have records, prompting a secondary analysis to confirm that there is no substantially differential attrition (dropping out of EL program and no longer taking ACCESS in the same state) from the two subgroups. The attrition analysis is presented in Appendix C.

Findings

Table 2 presents the numbers and proportions of LTEL students for never- and ever-IEP subgroups in each of the 24 starting grade/cohorts (K, first, second, and third) and years (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011).

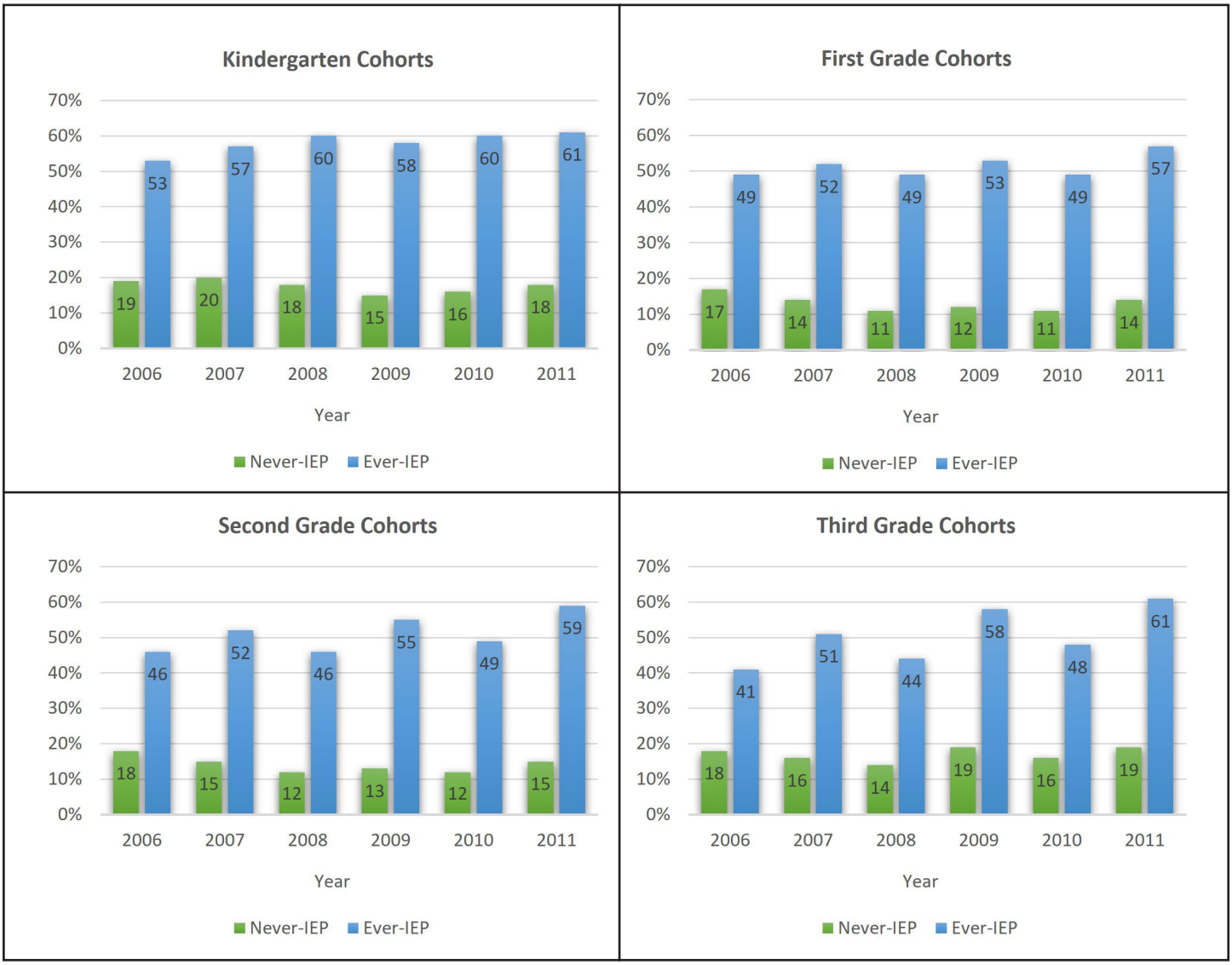
Table 2: Numbers and proportions of LTEL students by IEP status

Starting Grade/Cohort	Year	#ELs	Never-IEP			Ever-IEP		
			#	%	% LTEL	#	%	% LTEL
Kindergarten	2006	55,671	47,666	86%	19%	8,005	14%	53%
	2007	67,380	56,993	85%	20%	10,387	15%	57%
	2008	66,519	57,200	86%	18%	9,319	14%	60%
	2009	79,863	68,235	85%	15%	11,628	15%	58%
	2010	85,902	72,858	85%	16%	13,044	15%	60%
	2011	100,827	84,951	84%	18%	15,876	16%	61%
Total Kindergarten Cohorts	**2006–11**	**456,162**	**387,903**	**85%**	**18%**	**68,259**	**15%**	**59%**
First	2006	47,112	39,827	85%	17%	7,285	15%	49%
	2007	23,511	19,806	84%	14%	3,705	16%	52%
	2008	14,506	12,548	87%	11%	1,958	13%	49%
	2009	21,161	18,024	85%	12%	3,137	15%	53%
	2010	16,455	14,197	86%	11%	2,258	14%	49%
	2011	22,958	19,236	84%	14%	3,722	16%	57%
Total First Grade Cohorts	**2006–11**	**145,703**	**123,638**	**85%**	**14%**	**22,065**	**15%**	**51%**
Second	2006	38,520	32,425	84%	18%	6,095	16%	46%
	2007	18,594	15,622	84%	15%	2,972	16%	52%
	2008	9,388	8,223	88%	12%	1,165	12%	46%
	2009	16,279	13,895	85%	13%	2,384	15%	55%
	2010	11,807	10,331	87%	12%	1,476	13%	49%
	2011	17,826	15,073	85%	15%	2,753	15%	59%
Total Second Grade Cohorts	**2006–11**	**112,414**	**95,569**	**86%**	**15%**	**16,845**	**14%**	**51%**
Third	2006	35,236	29,675	84%	18%	5,561	16%	41%
	2007	16,503	13,803	84%	16%	2,700	16%	51%
	2008	8,080	7,109	88%	14%	971	12%	44%
	2009	14,665	12,362	84%	19%	2,303	16%	58%
	2010	9,433	8,224	87%	16%	1,209	13%	48%
	2011	14,959	12,534	84%	19%	2,425	16%	61%
Total Third Grade Cohorts	**2006–11**	**98,876**	**83,707**	**85%**	**18%**	**15,169**	**15%**	**49%**
Total Sample (K–3)	**2006–11**	**813,155**	**690,817**	**85%**	**14%**	**122,338**	**15%**	**55%**

Note: In Table 2 the columns represent the Starting Grade/Cohort; the Year the new cohorts started as ELs in the given Starting Grade/Cohort; the total Number of ELLs in each of the Grade/Cohort & Year combination; broken down by Never- and Ever-IEP status, with the number and percentage of Never- and Ever-IEP students; and percentage of LTEL students (in red) in each of these subgroups.

Figure 1 compares the (eventual) LTEL rates of each of the 24 cohorts by starting year and grade/cohort for the never-IEP and ever-IEP subgroups.

Figure 1: Rates of LTEL students by start year and grade/cohort



Note: In Figure 1 the green (left) and blue (right) bars indicate the percentage of LTEL students for each of the starting grade/cohorts and years, for never-IEP and ever-IEP students, respectively.

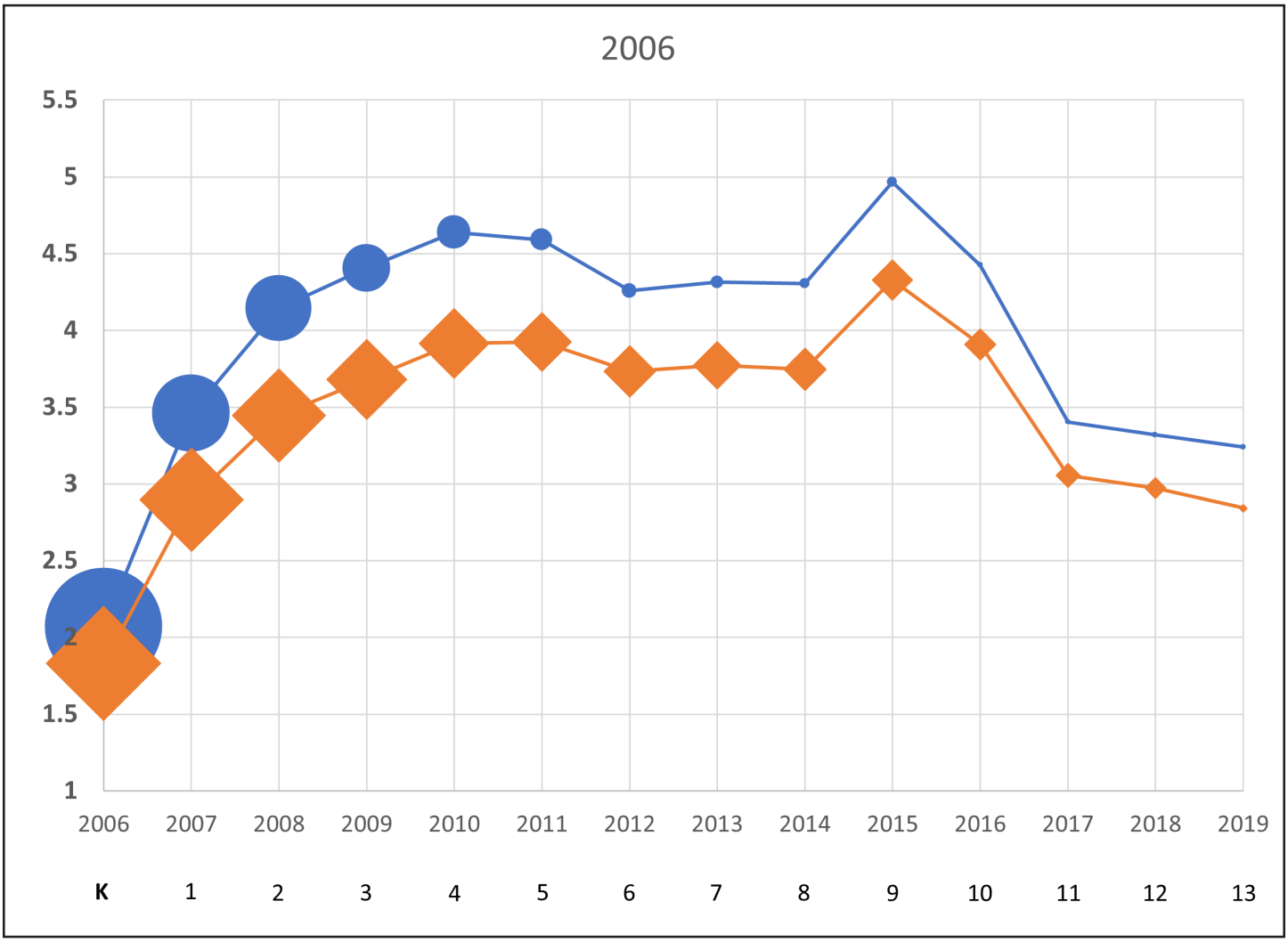
Table 2 and Figure 1 show for cohorts starting in the same grade LTEL rates were relatively stable for ever-IEP students and even more so for the never-IEP students. Looking closer at the within-cohort variability in LTEL rates, for the ever-IEP subgroup in kindergarten cohorts the LTEL rate ranged from 53–61%. The LTEL rate ranged from 49–57% for ever-IEP students in first-grade cohorts, 46–59% for second-grade cohorts, and 41–61% for third-grade cohorts. The average LTEL rate for ever-IEP students was highest for cohorts entering at the earliest grade level, averaging 59% for kindergarten cohorts and dropping to about 50% for the first-, second-, and third-grade cohorts, as ELs who started earlier needed more time to reach higher levels of English proficiency.[15] The relatively stable LTEL rates we observed across both

15 The slightly higher variability in LTEL rates in higher starting grade-cohorts is due to relatively smaller sample sizes.

grades and year cohorts present a consistent picture of differential growth within each of the two subgroups across time.

To further examine our findings on differential LTEL rates, we provide additional graphical analyses displaying the average cohort performance and active sample size for each of the 24 cohorts in Appendix A. For example, Figure 2 below presents the average growth trajectory and the active sample of the cohort of 55,671 students that started as ELs in 2006 as kindergarteners.

Figure 2: The average growth trajectories of never- and ever-IEP ELs: kindergarten, 2006



In Figure 2, the size of the blue circles (for never-IEP ELs) and orange diamonds (for ever-IEP ELs) represent the relative proportions of the sample that are still active within each subgroup category, compared to the size of the same subgroup in the cohort's first year tested.[16] The blue-gray shading indicates the time period in which still-active ELs would be identified as "Long-term" ELs. This period begins 5 years after the first ACCESS administration. The y-axis reports cohorts' average proficiency level across time in overall composite proficiency level scores which range from 1.0 to 6.0.[17] Similarly, Figures A1-A4 in Appendix A present the 24 cohort-average growth trajectories (and relative

16 Note that the magnitude of bubble sizes in these figures is not comparable across subgroups—there are many more (about five times more) never-IEP students in the population.

17 English Learners who attain high overall composite proficiency levels (ranging from 4.5 to 5.0 in most WIDA states) on ACCESS are considered for reclassification according to respective state criteria, often coupled with other academic measures as established by educators and policymakers.

samples sizes) of the population of "active" never-IEP and ever-IEP ELs in each of the four elementary grades (K–3) in six adjacent academic years (2006–2011).

The average growth trajectories for the kindergarten, first, second, and third starting grade/cohorts depicted in Figures 2 and A1-A4 (and summarized in Table 2) present consistent trends of differential growth and (implied) reclassification rates for students who were (ever) identified as having an IEP. Despite growing at relatively high rates in the first three years in program, ever-IEP English learners started at lower overall composite proficiency levels and exhibited slower growth rates compared to their never-IEP peers.[18] Moreover, for many of the cohorts, gaps between the two subgroups' growth trajectories and average composite proficiency levels started increasing after the first 3 years in the program—and never closed. For most ever-IEP students in all 24 cohorts, the overall composite proficiency levels did not rise substantially above 4.0.

This pattern also held for the older grade cohorts, where proficiency gains for ever-IEP students, despite starting at relatively higher initial overall composite proficiency levels, plateaued at around 4.0. While it was true that many ever-IEP students were able to reach a reclassification level proficiency, in Figures 2–6 the relative size of the orange diamonds (ever-IEP group) decreased substantially slower compared to that of the blue circles (never-IEP group). Moreover, the diamonds remained sizeable beyond five years in the program, indicating that it was much less likely for ever-IEP students to reach reclassification. As presented in Table 2, the percentage of students that could be classified as long-term ELs (based on remaining "active" beyond 5 years) was 14% for the never-IEP group (which was 85% of the sample), while the LTEL rate was about quadruple of that, estimated at 55% for the ever-IEP group (15% of the sample). Generalizing over the tremendous heterogeneity that exists in the population of English learner students, our findings imply that ever-IEP students are on average about four times more likely to become long-term English learners than their never-IEP peers.

Discussion and Caveats

Our approach of grouping students by never- and ever-IEP status and examining independent cohorts by starting year and grade allows for a more complete and accurate understanding of differences in aggregate, long-term language development trends between these subgroups. However, it is important to consider additional factors that may affect both the average growth trajectories and the relative sample sizes underlying the comparisons. First and foremost, for many EL students, the transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high school are not as smooth as longitudinal average cohort growth measures might make it appear. Our results indicate that the middle school years are very challenging for many ELs, especially those who are dual-identified as ELs and students with disabilities. This is evidenced by the decline in average growth rates and the fact that the size of the "active" cohort (orange diamonds) does not get substantially smaller over time. Additionally, for some of the cohorts (e.g., Figure 2) we can observe a "high school bump" when students start grade 9, pointing toward possible discontinuities in English learners' growth trajectories as they progress through grades and schools. Therefore, in longitudinal analyses of English learner growth, it is important to keep track of when these periods occur for various cohorts of students, as the timing of these transitional periods may differentially and disproportionally affect which students get classified as LTELs.

Second, while our approach of grouping cohorts by starting year and grade addresses the problematic issue of new students joining the cohorts across time and potentially skewing our findings, it is important to keep in mind that the states that comprise the WIDA Consortium also changed across time. As more states joined the consortium,

18 Other research has also found similar "lower is faster, higher is slower" relationship between initial English proficiency level and growth (Cook et al., 2011; Linquanti et al., 2008).

their respective EL populations were introduced into the analytic sample. In other words, cohorts that started in later years potentially included a more heterogeneous population of English learners compared to cohorts that started earlier, at least from the perspective of geography and, potentially, differing state-specific policies that could affect students' growth trajectories. The length of time that a state was a WIDA Consortium member could also affect students' performance on ACCESS, as students, teachers and educators, can grow more familiar over time with both the assessment and the standards it measures. Despite this potentially increasing heterogeneity, the average growth trajectories depicted in Figure 2 and Figures A-1 through A-4 are strikingly consistent over time and give additional credence to the results summarized in Table 2.

Third, it is important to consider potential "ceiling" effects that can distort the growth trajectory analysis, especially for the never-IEP subgroup. Because most English learner students get reclassified when they reach the 4.5-6.0 overall composite proficiency range, we cannot observe the "true" growth for the students who are more advanced. However, since there are proportionally more advanced-level students in the never-IEP subgroup, the growth trajectories shown in the figures, if slightly inaccurate, would only underestimate the growth for these students, thus drawing an even starker contrast with the trajectories of their ever-IEP peers.

Fourth, while grouping students into never- and ever-EL subgroups provides for a convenient way to compare growth trajectories of multiple cohorts over an extended period, it neglects the dynamic nature of IEP identification. Many ELs take their first ACCESS test already identified with an IEP, while others get identified with an IEP several years after their first ACCESS test. While these variations will not affect our results with respect to the ever- and never-IEP grouping, we further explore the variability in the timing of IEP identification in Figures D-1 and D-2 in Appendix D. Our results show that on average, about 60% of ever-IEP students were identified with an IEP at the time of their first ACCESS test, and that 85% of students in the ever-IEP group were identified with an IEP within the first 3 years.

Finally, lack of data on important variables such as students' socioeconomic status, academic outcomes in other areas (content area performance, school attendance, GPA, etc.), or the type of language support program they are enrolled in also introduces uncertainty and complicates large-scale inferential studies across contexts. Perhaps most important, for the purposes of the current analysis, we do not have data on students' disability type nor reliable records of the actual accommodations offered during ACCESS testing. These are important variables that could help further explore the tremendous heterogeneity of supports this subgroup of dual-identified students needs and is federally mandated to receive. AAdditional evidence on the timing of receiving a disability identification and the specific types of disabilities diagnosed could help schools provide better-targeted and more properly timed supports for these students to help them excel academically.

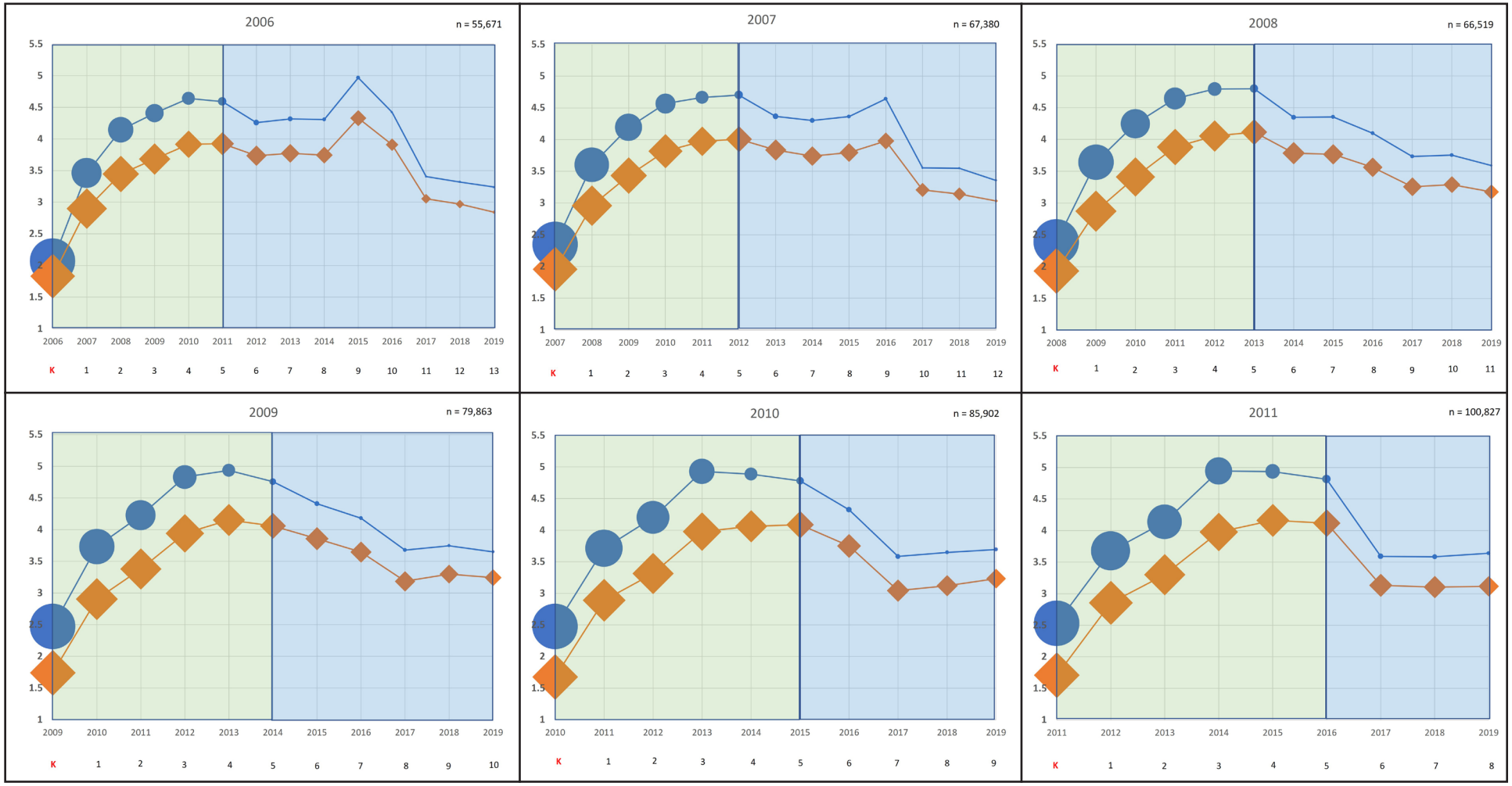
Conclusions

The comprehensive, consistent, and detailed language development patterns emerging from the examination of growth trajectories of the over 810,000 students who started their academic journeys as English learners in elementary grades in schools across the WIDA Consortium provide a valuable reference point for educators, administrators, and policymakers alike. Our results reveal consistent patterns of differential growth and, by inference, reclassification rates for these two groups in all years and cohorts examined. Many ELs in the ever-IEP subgroup plateaued at moderate proficiency levels: students who were ever-IEP ELs were about four times more likely to be identified as LTELs as compared to students who were never-IEP English learners. Finally, while our results show that about half of English learner students designated to receive special education services appear to get "stuck in EL status," many perhaps indefinitely, there are many dual-identified students who reach reclassification-level proficiency and are deemed to no longer need language support services. It is just as important to explore the factors and conditions that support the academic success of these dual-identified students.

Our analysis contributes to a nascent body of literature on the long-term language growth of English learners with and without IEPs. We hope that this report can support additional explorations of the language development trajectories of students with and without IEPs by schools and districts and that these investigations can inform educators' efforts to support the language learning of dually identified English learners.

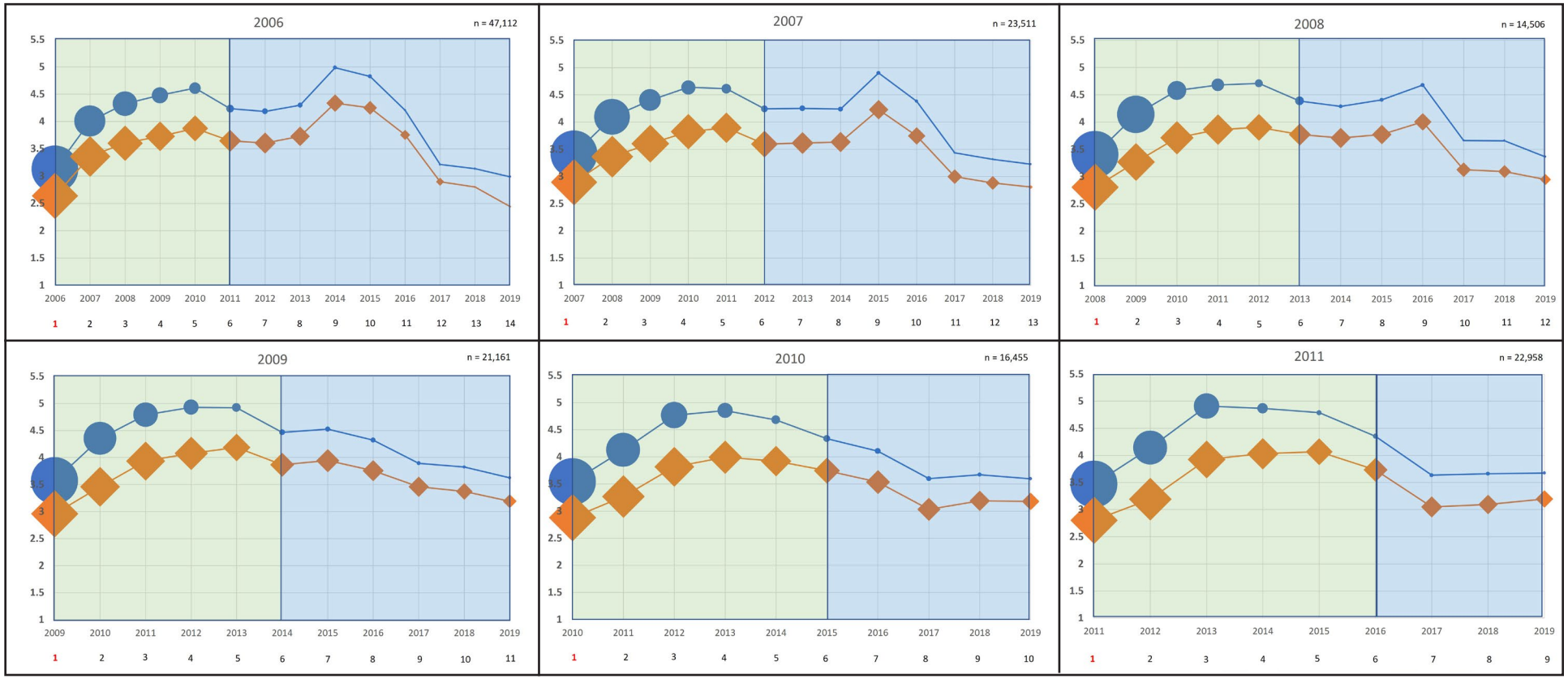
Appendix A: Growth Trajectories of Active Never- and Ever-IEP English Learners

Figure A-1: Average growth trajectories for active never-IEP (≈85%) and ever-IEP (≈15%) ELs: 2006–2011 kindergarten cohorts



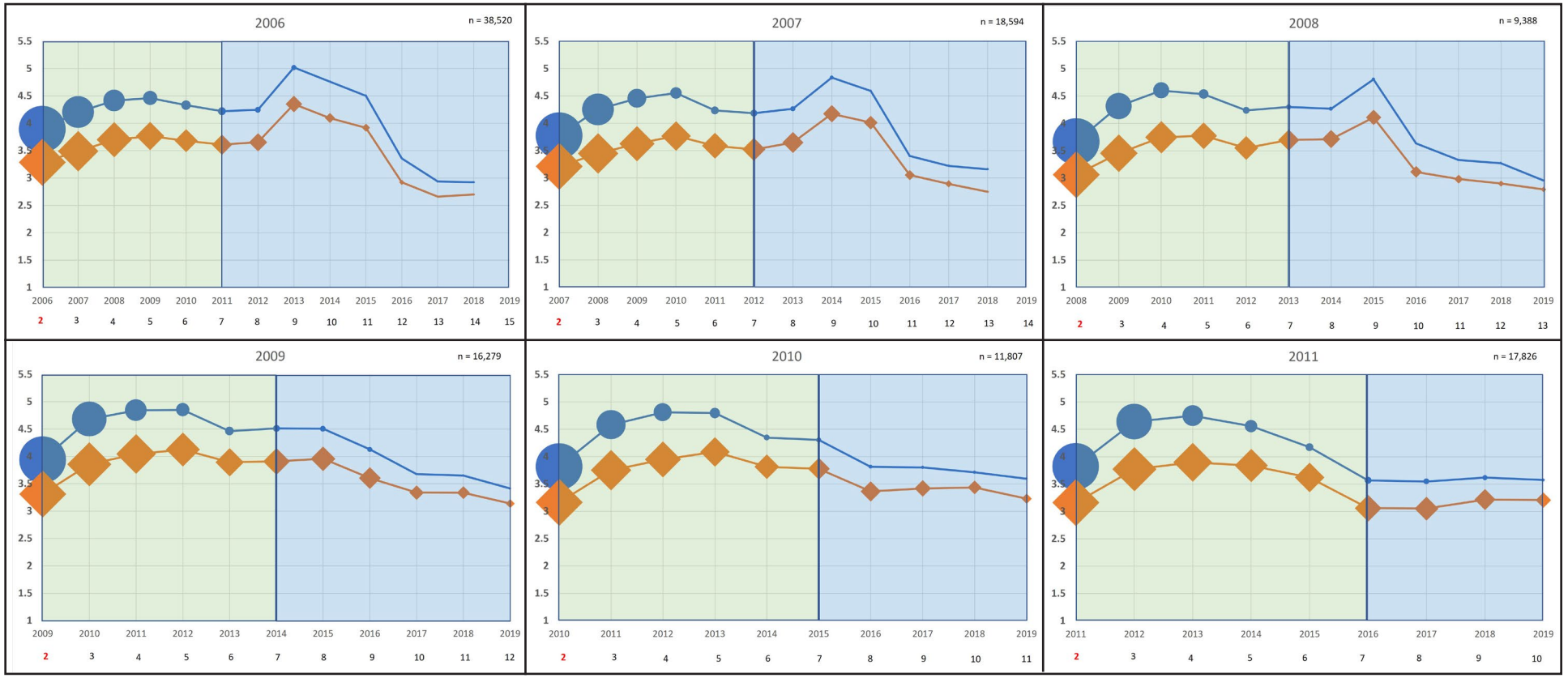
Note: The sizes of the blue circles (never-IEP ELs) and orange diamonds (ever-IEP ELs) measure the relative proportions of the sample that are still active within each subgroup category, compared to the size of the subgroup in the cohort's first year tested (100%). The x-axis show the starting grade/cohort and year, and the y-axis measures the active cohorts' average proficiency in overall composite proficiency levels.

Figure A-2: Average growth trajectories for never-IEP (≈85%) and ever-IEP (≈15%) ELs: 2006-2011 first grade cohorts



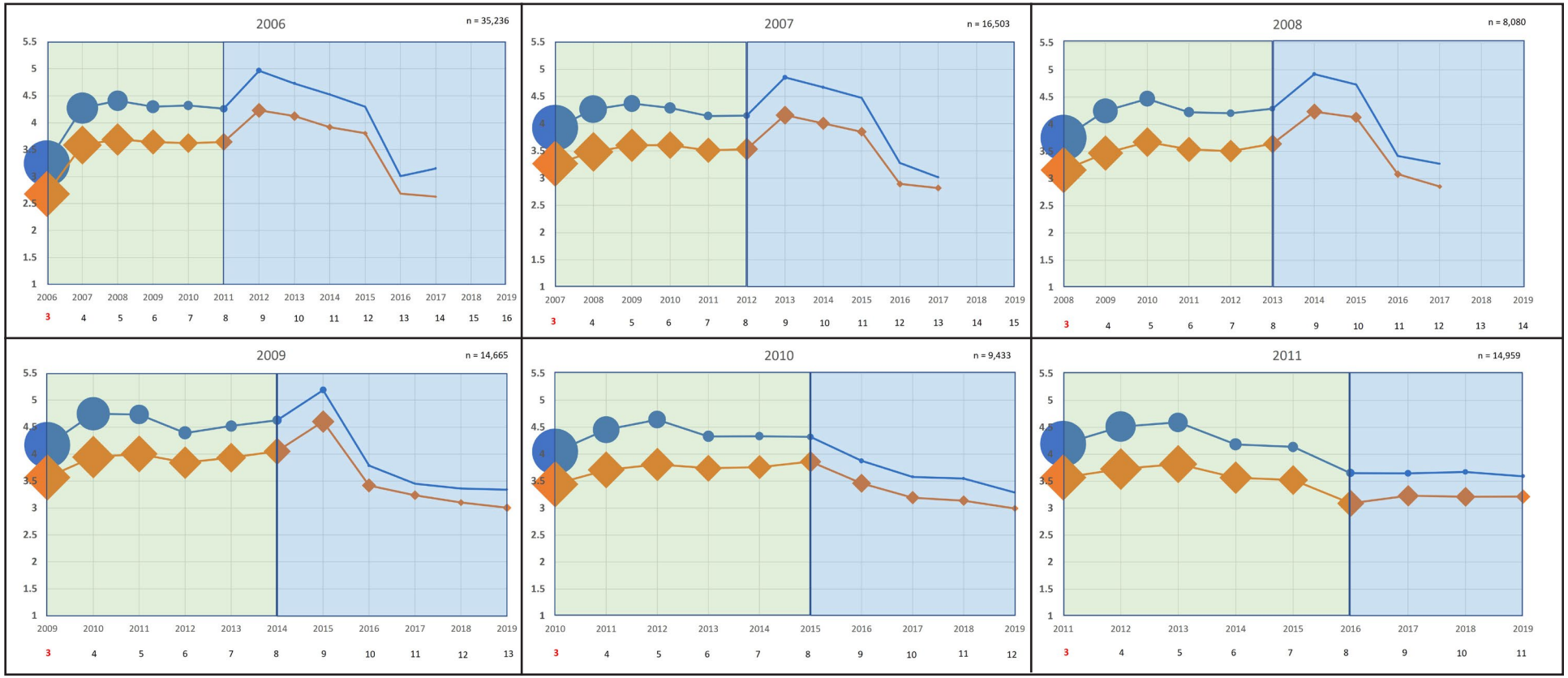
Note: The sizes of the blue circles (never-IEP ELs) and orange diamonds (ever-IEP ELs) measure the relative proportions of the sample that are still active within each subgroup category, compared to the size of the subgroup in the cohort's first year tested (100%). The x-axis show the starting grade/cohort and year, and the y-axis measures the active cohorts' average proficiency in overall composite proficiency levels.

Figure A-3: Average growth trajectories for never-IEP (≈85%) and ever-IEP (≈15%) ELs: 2006-2011 second grade cohorts



Note: The sizes of the blue circles (never-IEP ELs) and orange diamonds (ever-IEP ELs) measure the relative proportions of the sample that are still active within each subgroup category, compared to the size of the subgroup in the cohort's first year tested (100%). The x-axis show the starting grade/cohort and year, and the y-axis measures the active cohorts' average proficiency in overall composite proficiency levels.

Figure A-4: Average growth trajectories for never-IEP (≈85%) and ever-IEP (≈15%) ELs: 2006-2011 third grade cohorts



Note: The sizes of the blue circles (never-IEP ELs) and orange diamonds (ever-IEP ELs) measure the relative proportions of the sample that are still active within each subgroup category, compared to the size of the subgroup in the cohort's first year tested (100%). The x-axis show the starting grade/cohort and year, and the y-axis measures the active cohorts' average proficiency in overall composite proficiency levels.

Appendix B: IEP Missing Data Imputation for ever-IEP ELs

The demographic fields of ACCESS test booklets are filled out by test administrators locally (and manually, for the paper test) in schools across the WIDA Consortium. The quality of this demographic data varies by year and state. In the IEP data field, we found many instances of missing data, which prompted the imputation process described below.

We first excluded all observations from states where IEP status is not reliably reported—states where the reported IEP rate is unreasonably low (under 2%) or where there are dramatic shifts in the number or percentage of IEP students reported year to year. For four of the remaining 28 states, we excluded the first year of data, as reporting rates were low enough to raise concerns about sampling bias. For one additional state, we dropped its most recent year of data (2019) for similar reasons.

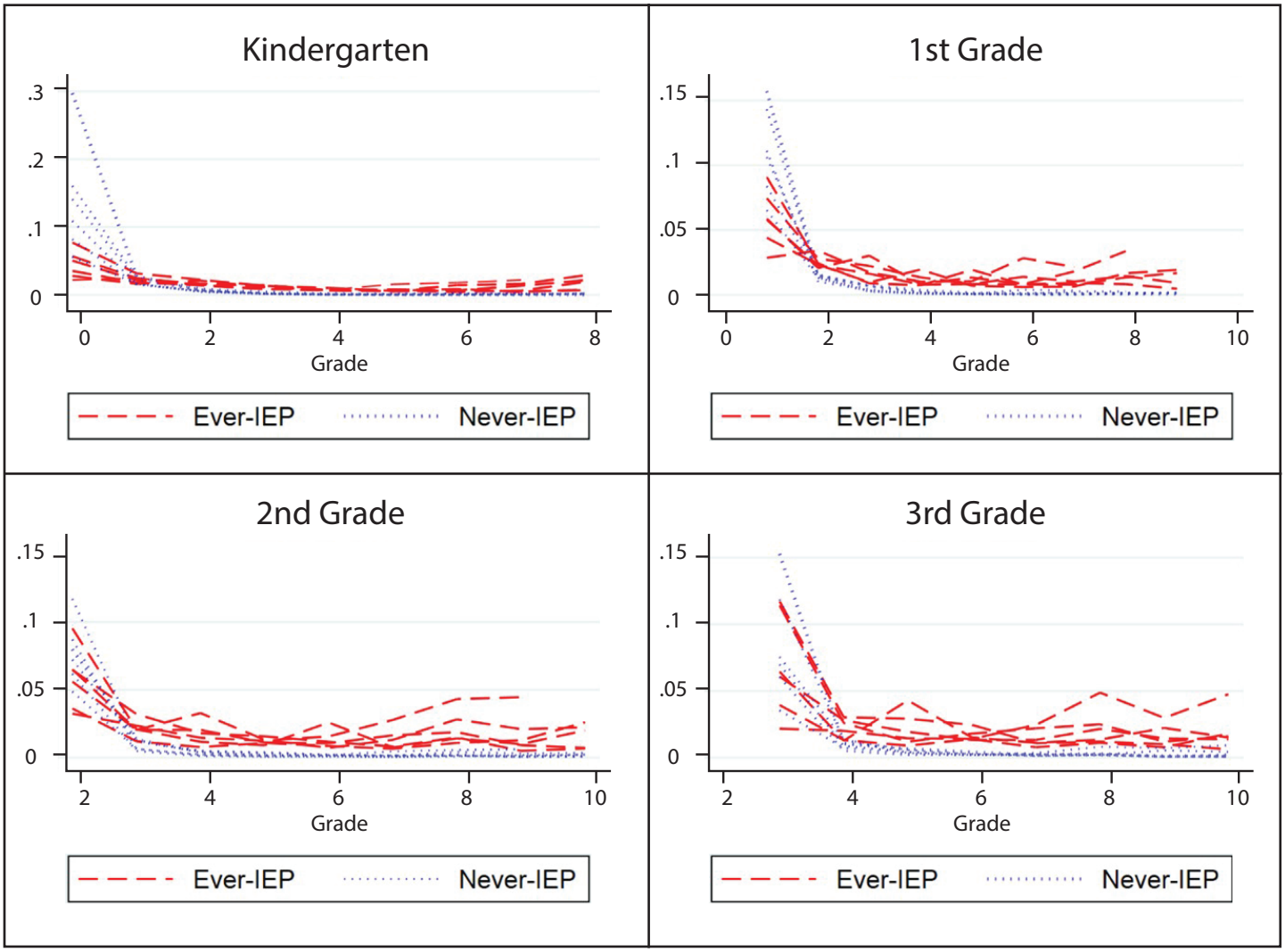
We then identified and dropped all observations from students whose grade level progress is erratic (e.g., students who skipped more than one grade, or who moved from grade 4 in 2010 to grade 3 in 2011). Next, we restricted the sample to cohorts entering grades K–3. For these students, we implemented a "sandwich rule" to impute missing information on IEP status: for any given year, any missing IEP status is replaced by the prior year's status, provided that the subsequent year's status is the same or missing. For example, if a student had an IEP in 2010, but their IEP status is missing in 2011, we identify them as an IEP student in 2011 unless the state reported them as not having had an IEP in 2012.

Additionally, for four specific state-year combinations where the IEP rate is unreasonably low for one year, we assumed that IEP status was underreported, and updated the sandwich rule to correct for possible under-identification in that specific state in that specific year. The imputation is the same as the sandwich rule applied throughout, except we did update cases of non-identification where the student had an IEP in a previous year—again, as long as the state did not report the student as non-IEP in the subsequent year as well. For example, if a student in state X had an IEP in 2009, we identified that student as IEP in 2010 (a year when state X underreported IEP status), unless they also were non-IEP in 2011. In all other cases, missing IEP status is assumed to be non-IEP. As a result of the imputation process, 46,176 values were imputed. This represents 0.05% of total observations.

Appendix C: Attrition Rates

Figure C-1 below shows the cohort-average attrition rate for the ever-IEP (red dashes) and never-IEP (blue dots) subgroups. The graphs show that while the attrition rate is higher in the earlier grades for the never-IEP group, suggesting higher mobility, it is largely offset by a lower rate in later grades. This lends additional support to the validity of our findings with respect to the implications about differential reclassification rates, as the attrition rates are low, and not significantly different across the two subgroups (ever-IEP and never-IEP).

Figure C-1: Cohort attrition rates by ever- and never-IEP status



Note: In Figure C-1 the red dashed and blue dotted lines represent the rates at which ELs in the ever- and never-IEP groups attritted (dropped from the sample). The x-axis shows the grade (0=kindergarten), and the y-axis measures the relative proportion of the sample.

Appendix D: Timing of IEP Identification

Figure D-1: IEP Identification by number of years in EL program

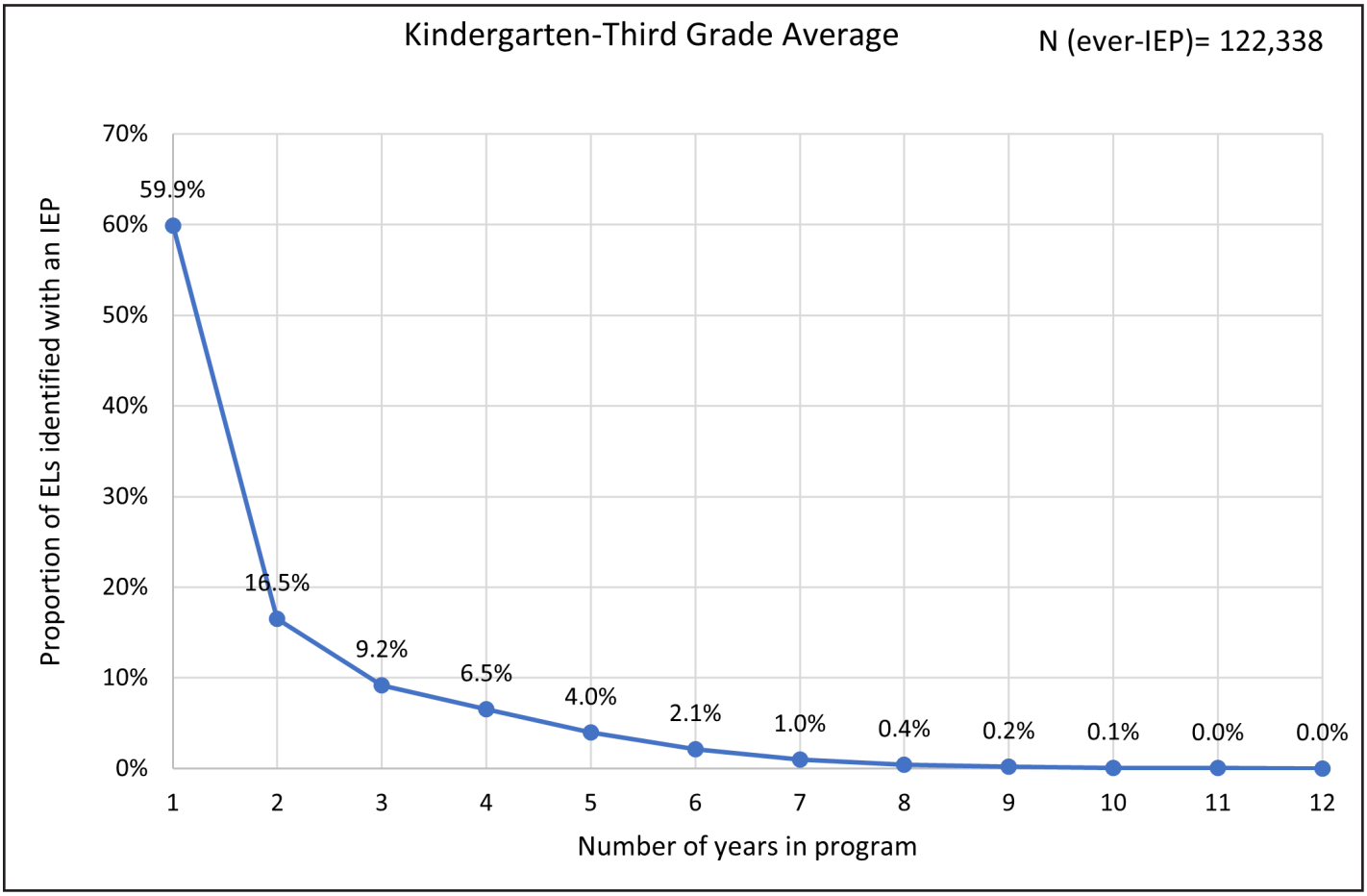
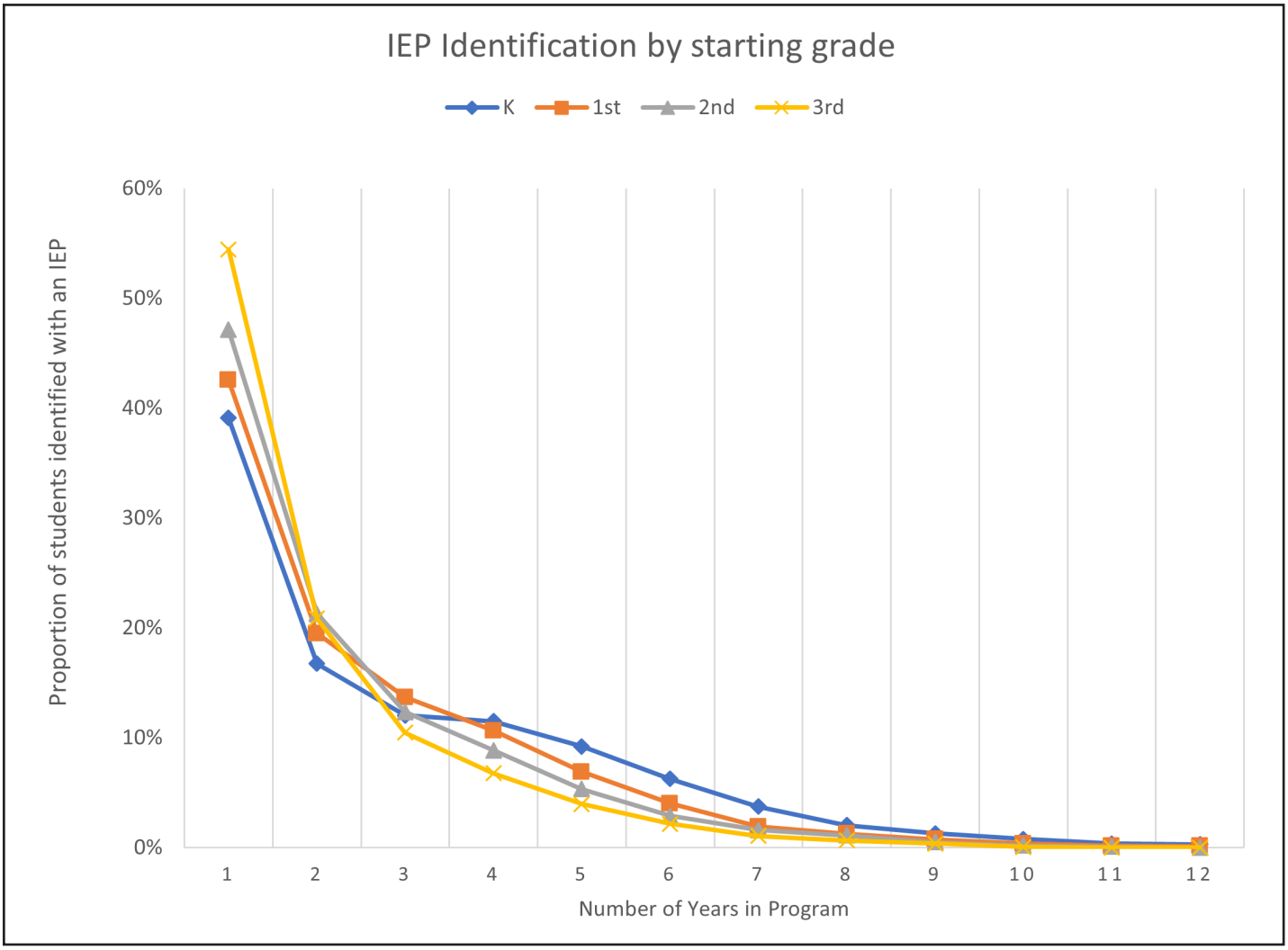


Figure D-2: IEP Identification by grade and number of years in EL program



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Wisconsin Center for Education Research
University of Wisconsin–Madison
1025 West Johnson St., MD #23
Madison, WI 53706

Client Services Center toll free:
(866) 276-7735

help@wida.us

wida.wisc.edu