

Project: The Correlates of Academic Performance for English Language Learner Students in a New England District

Do the research findings in this study apply to my district?

The study “The Correlates of Academic Performance for English Language Learner Students in a New England District” examined the relationship between the characteristics of English learner students, programs, and schools and students’ English proficiency and content assessment scores using data from one urban district in Connecticut.

Can you learn from this study if you are not the urban Connecticut school district that was in the report? YES! Practitioners often tell us that findings from studies based on district- or state-specific data other than their own have little relevance to them. We always encourage them to reconsider, and this tool will help you do just that. Designed by the support team for the English Language Learners Alliance at REL Northeast & Islands, you can use and adapt this Discussion Tree tool to help make sense of the study results in relation to your own context.

How does it work? On the next page, follow the discussion tree branches and compare the study findings to your own context. The tool prompts you to examine what you know and don’t know about the patterns in your own district. It then asks you to:

- Consider whether what you “know” is based on anecdotal information or data
- Identify the type of data you need to determine the patterns in your district
- Analyze your data
- Consider the steps you need to take to improve the quality of education for your English learner students

The major study findings are summarized in the question box at the top of the discussion tree. After reading the study, think about your own district in relation to the findings; it may be that you have similar patterns—or not. Or it may be that you don’t know what patterns you have. Answer yes, no, or I don’t know (middle boxes) for each of the findings and then consider the follow-up questions for each of your answers (lower boxes).

Team Up on This Activity!

You can do the discussion tree activity on your own or in teams. We find that more knowledge and information are shared when colleagues who have responsibility for English learner students work together. As a team, you can discuss the study findings—especially how they relate to what you know about your district—and agree on action steps. By engaging in this process and revisiting it periodically, you can arrive at a clearer understanding of the correlates of performance for your own English learner students, which can help inform improvements.

Are the patterns identified in the study about the district's ...

- low performance of English language learners with disabilities
- variations in outcomes for students enrolled in different English learner programs at different grade spans
- importance of English proficiency for content performance

... similar to those in your district?

