

*The following information is taken from [*Reparable Harm: Fulfilling the Unkept Promise of Educational Opportunity for California's Long Term English Learners*](#), a report that calls upon state policymakers and leaders to provide solutions and outlines basic principles and promising approaches for school districts to meet the needs of English Learners more effectively.

By the time Long-Term English Learners arrive in secondary schools, a set of characteristics describe their overall profile. The academic and linguistic issues for LTELs are complex and include the following:

Long-Term English Learners struggle academically

Students struggle with the academic work expected of them. Test scores tend to show that achievement in math and English language arts is two to three years below grade level. By eighth grade, students who are still classified as English Learners demonstrate some of the lowest performance of any student group.

Long-Term English Learners have distinct language issues

While LTELs are similar to struggling native speakers in that they struggle with academic language and comprehending academic texts, they are still English Learners and have gaps in the basic foundation of the English language. LTELs are still acquiring basic English syntax, grammar structures, and vocabulary that native English speakers have by virtue of growing up in homes where English was the spoken language. Linguistic characteristics include:

- ***Ability to be high functioning in social situations in both their home language and in English***

LTELs are often described as orally bilingual. Most learners function relatively well in everyday social interactions in both their home language and in English. However, the vocabulary they draw upon in both social and academic contexts tends to be at once general and imprecise. Because they have lived most or all of their lives in the United States, they usually have been exposed to English and been in schools in which English is the primary language of instruction.

- ***Weak academic language, and gaps in reading/writing skills***

LTELs lack rich oral language and literacy skills in scholastic English needed to participate and succeed in academic work. They exhibit little to no literacy skills in either language and often only a skeleton academic vocabulary in their home language. In order to engage with the academic demands of secondary school curriculum, they must learn more complex syntax, richer oral language, and the specialized vocabulary needed to understand academic text and participate in classroom discussions. When long term English Learners are asked about their academic experiences in school, they often talk about struggles with reading textbooks, making sense of specialized words, and handling long written passages. Writing is generally weak, approached by LTELs as written down oral language and suffering from both lack of understanding of academic genres and still weak proficiency in basic ENGLISH syntax, grammar and vocabulary.

- ***Becoming “stuck” at Intermediate levels of English proficiency or below***

Some reach higher levels of English proficiency but do not attain adequate enough academic language to be reclassified as proficient.

The majority of Long-Term English Learners want to go to college, and are unaware that their academic skills, academic record and the courses they are taking are not preparing them to reach that goal. Neither students, their parents nor their community knows that they are in academic jeopardy

Many LTELs do not know they are English Learners, particularly those who have been placed into mainstream settings for years and are socially comfortable in English.

Long-Term English Learners have significant gaps in academic background knowledge

If students don't know the language used for instruction, they miss some or all of the academic content that is taught in a language they don't comprehend. They have missed chunks of curriculum and background information that were taught in the periods of their schooling where they may have been in and out of programs, with inconsistent support or no support.

Some Long-Term English Learners have become discouraged learners, tuned out, and ready to drop out of high school.

Most are amazingly resilient and optimistic; over time, however, many LTELs have become convinced they simply cannot do it, and are wearied of not understanding and doing poorly. Interviews with students indicate that this begins around fifth grade. By high school, this group has disengaged; they have internalized a sense of failure, and no longer see themselves as belonging in school.

Citation

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