

EL Reclassification and Achievement on a State Standardized Examination: Evidence from Minnesota

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Abstract

School districts in Minnesota have experienced an influx of English learner (EL) students over five decades. This study evaluates the process for reclassifying EL students as English proficient to determine whether EL students made smooth transitions to English proficiency after their reclassification. Exploiting the threshold-based reclassification policy in Minnesota, we use a regression discontinuity design to recover counterfactuals— how much would EL students who were not reclassified due to the reclassification policy have improved in academic achievement had they been reclassified? We find that 5th-grade EL students worsened in reading and 6th-grade EL students improved in math owing to the reclassification policy. Our subgroup analyses indicate that these effects were driven by Asian students who did not need special education and did not attend charter schools. Consulting with practitioners from the Minnesota Department of Education, we also find that the change in learning environment from elementary to middle schools amplified the effect of reclassification for 5th-grade ELs and that these effects were more pronounced in districts with district-level reclassification criteria that closely follow the Minnesota Department of Education’s recommended criteria. Our conclusions are consistent with the findings from the previous studies and the non-binding nature of the Minnesota Department of Education’s reclassification policy.

JEL Classification: I21, I28, J15.

Keywords: Regression Discontinuity Designs, Nonrandom Selection, EL Reclassification.

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