

RESEARCH BRIEF 11

When Do Students Attempt Credit Recovery?



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About This Brief

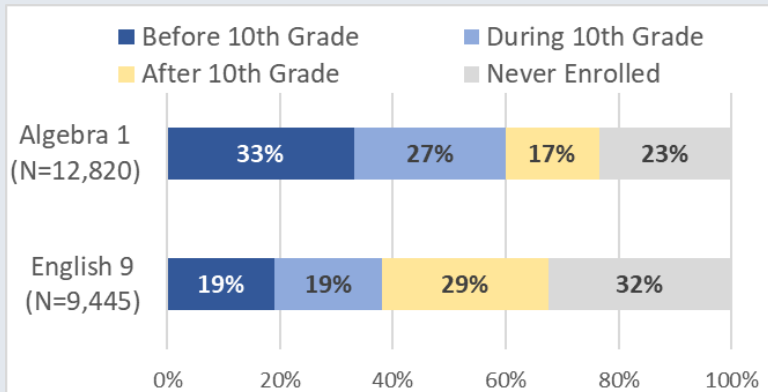
Students who do not pass a core course required for graduation in their first year of high school must recover the course credits to graduate. Whether students attempt credit recovery early on or later in their high school journey could have implications for their opportunities to take, or succeed in, other courses critical for high school graduation. In this brief, we describe when students attempted credit recovery and what systematic differences, if any, exist for those who attempted credit recovery early in high school (before starting 10th grade) and those who attempted credit recovery later.¹

The analysis for this brief is based on students in Los Angeles high schools who did not pass an Algebra 1 (12,820 students) or English 9 (9,445 students) course during their first year of high school.² Early credit recovery may have been particularly important for the two student cohorts included in this analysis: those who started high school in the 2017–18 or 2018–19 school year. For these student cohorts, the COVID-19 pandemic began disrupting their high school experience in the second half of their 10th or 11th grade year.

Most Students Did Not Attempt Credit Recovery Immediately After Their First Year

To stay on track for high school graduation, it is important for students who do not pass an Algebra 1 or English 9 course in their first year of high school to recover the credit during the summer between their 9th and 10th grade year. However, only 33% of the students who needed to recover Algebra 1 credit and 19% of the students who needed to recover English 9 credit attempted credit

Exhibit 1. Percentage of Students Who Attempted Credit Recovery by Year of First Credit Recovery Attempt



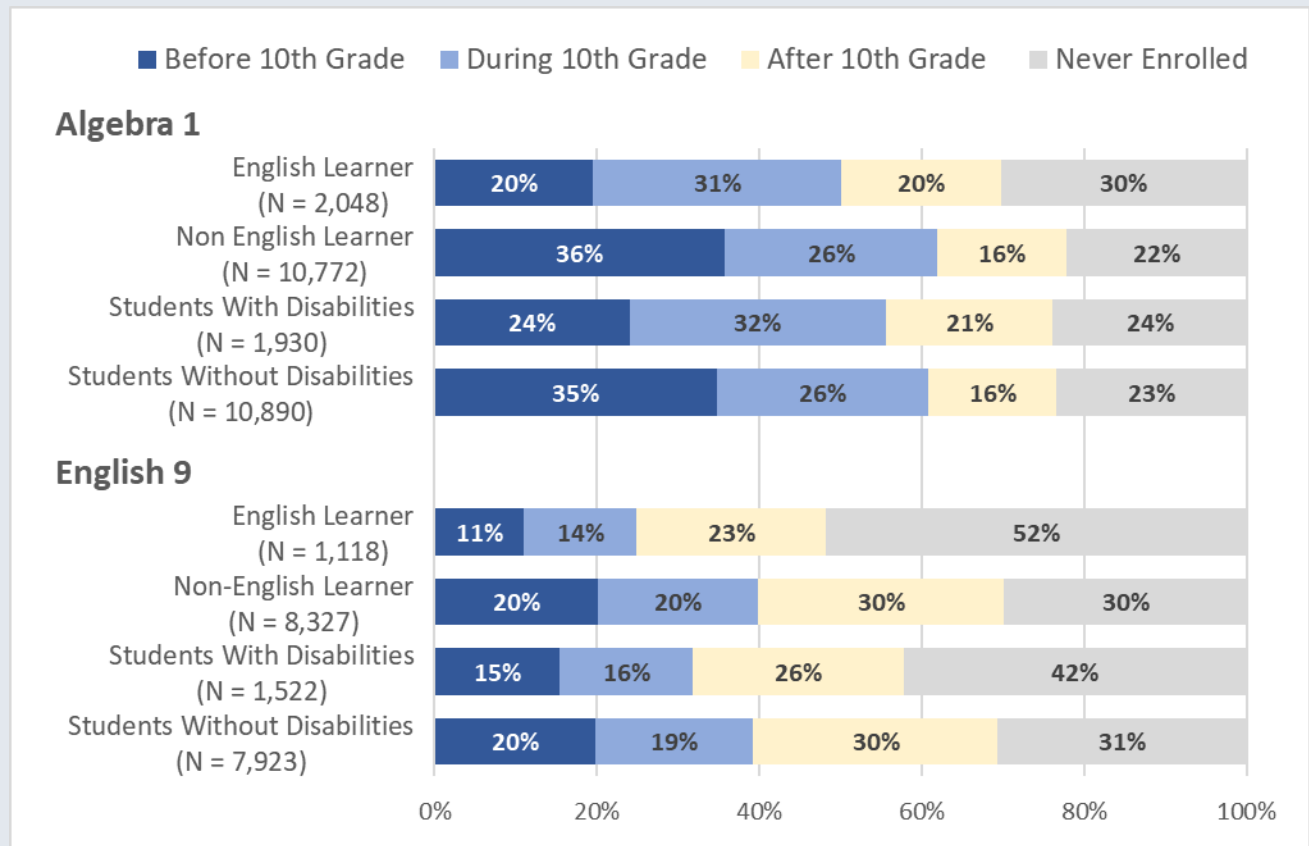
recovery before their 10th grade year (see Exhibit 1).

Some Students Attempted Credit Recovery Later Than Others

Compared with their peers, English learners and students with a disability who needed to recover Algebra 1 or English 9 credit were less likely to attempt credit recovery before their 10th grade year (see Exhibit 2).

- Among English learners, 11% and 20% attempted Algebra 1 and English 9 credit recovery, respectively, before their 10th grade year. That rate is 16 percentage points and 9 percentage points lower, respectively, than for non-English learners.
- Among students with a disability, 24% and 15% attempted Algebra 1 and English 9 credit recovery, respectively, before their 10th grade year. That rate is 11 percentage points and 5 percentage points lower than students not eligible for special education.

Exhibit 2. Year of First Credit Recovery Attempt by Student Group (Percentage of Students Who Attempted Credit Recovery)



These differences raise concerns about the additional barriers that English learners and students with disabilities might face when enrolling in a credit recovery course. Additional efforts are necessary to understand why some student groups disproportionately attempt credit recovery later in high school and identify ways to ensure equitable opportunities for students who fall behind early in high school to get back on track.

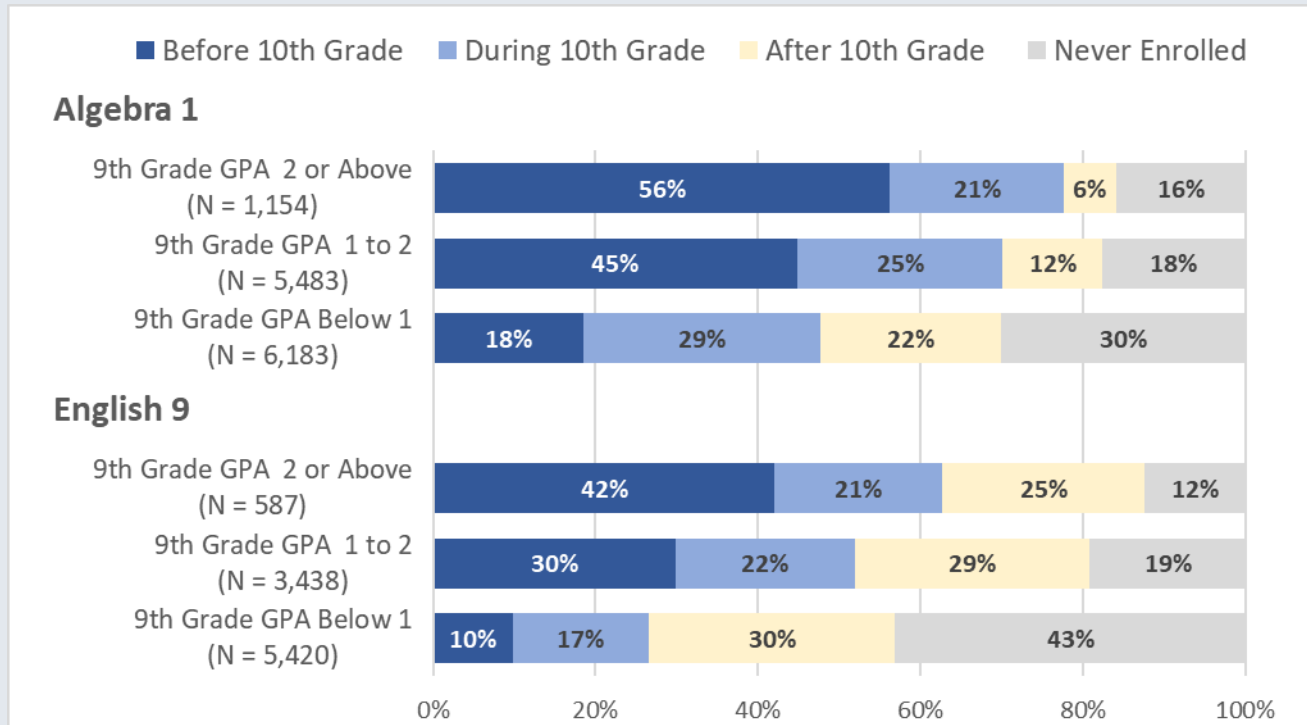
Students Who Struggled More With Ninth Grade Coursework Were More Likely to Attempt Credit Recovery Later

Overall grade point average (GPA) during a student's first year of high school is a strong marker for whether a student will graduate from high school on time.³ Our analysis indicates that even among students who need credit recovery, those with lower first-year GPAs are less likely to attempt credit recovery before their 10th grade year compared with their peers (see Exhibit 3).

- Among students who did not pass Algebra 1, 56% of the students with a first-year GPA of 2.0 or above attempted credit recovery before their 10th grade year. In contrast, only 18% of the students with a first-year GPA below 1.0 attempted credit recovery before their 10th grade year.
- Among students who did not pass English 9, 42% of the students with a first-year GPA of 2.0 or above attempted credit recovery before their 10th grade year. In contrast, only 10% of the students with a first-year GPA below 1.0 attempted credit recovery before their 10th grade year.

These differences underscore the challenges of relying on credit recovery to get students with lower academic performance back on track for high school graduation. Students with a very low GPA in their first year of high school must retake multiple courses, but most of them do not enroll in credit recovery until later in high school, if at all, which could further inhibit their options for successfully completing high school.

Exhibit 3. Year of First Credit Recovery Attempt by Ninth Grade GPA (Percentage of Students Who Attempted Credit Recovery)



Conclusions

Failing a core course during the first year of high school may limit academic and extracurricular opportunities in subsequent years and puts students at risk of not graduating on time. The sooner students can take credit recovery to get back on track, the better positioned they should be for high school success. However, the results on credit recovery timing presented in this brief indicate that most students enroll in credit recovery later in high school. In addition, systematic differences exist for those who attempt credit recovery earlier in high school and those who wait, with students who face barriers to academic progress more likely to engage with credit recovery later or not at all. More research is necessary to understand the factors that hinder students from enrolling in credit recovery, and education leaders should look for ways to minimize barriers and expand opportunities for students to recover credit early in their high school careers.

Notes

¹ The brief is based on an extension of work conducted for the *Online Credit Recovery Study*. The study is funded with research grant R305A170152 from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the Institute, the U.S. Department of Education, or the Los Angeles Unified School District. Please visit <https://www.air.org/online-credit-recovery-study> to access all the research briefs and for more information about the study. The authors would like to acknowledge the many people who helped make this study possible.

² Students included in this analysis are those students who were enrolled in ninth grade in the fall and were still enrolled in the spring in ninth grade either in the 2017–18 or 2018–19 school year. A student who failed Algebra 1 or English 9 was identified as a student who was enrolled in that course and had a GPA in that course that was lower than 1. This brief presents the results of our analysis for English 9B; however, we also looked at English 9A and the results are comparable.

³ Allensworth, E. M., & Easton, J. Q. (2007). *What matters for staying on-track and graduating in Chicago public high schools: A close look at course grades, failures, and attendance in the freshman year*. Consortium on Chicago School Research.
<https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/What%20Matters%20for%20Staying%20On-Track-Jul2007-Consortium.pdf>



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