Evaluation of San Diego Unified School District's Standards-Based Grading Reform in Secondary Schools

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YEAR 2 REPORT, 2022-2023

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KEY FINDINGS FROM YEAR 2

QUALITATIVE EVALUATION

- At the end of 2022-23, roughly 4 out of 5 middle school teachers (81%) and just over 2 out of 3 high school teachers (70%) had begun to implement standards-based grading in their classrooms.

- The majority of teachers (83%) say they have made changes to the way they design and score assessments since the implementation of the standards-based grading policy, with roughly half of those (39%) having made _significant_ changes.

- In general, teachers found collaboration with other educators (both in and out of Professional Learning Communities or PLCs) and resources they found on their own to be more useful than District training or resources.

- There is widespread inconsistency among teachers on the translation of standards-based proficiency levels into A-F grades, leading many to request a districtwide standard conversion scale.

- Teachers rate lack of time as the greatest barrier to Standards-Based Grading (SBG) implementation.

- Teachers report allowing students to revise their work more often than students report having this opportunity. Discrepancies between teacher and student responses are smaller and more varied for opportunities to revise test answers and allowing multiple chances to show proficiency.

- There is a widespread lack of awareness among both teachers and site administrators regarding SBG supports and resources offered by the District, which may be due, at least in part, to restrictions on communication between central office and school site personnel.

QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

- In 2022-23, academic GPA among female students recovered from pandemic lows but remained well below the predicted trend from before the pandemic. The gap between female and non-female students, the latter of whom have had lower grades each year relative to females, narrowed significantly, not just from the decrease among female students but also from a return to the pandemic trend among non-female students.

- The citizenship GPA among African American students increased above the historical mean during 2020-21 and persisted above the pre-pandemic trend for 2021-22 and 2022-23. These findings may be the result of purposeful changes in decoupling behavior from academic marks, at least for this student group.

- The percent of English Learner (EL) students meeting or exceeding standards on the state test, the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA), did not improve in 2023 over 2022.

- Among the student groups, ELs and students with less highly educated parents lagged their counterparts in college prep course taking and completion.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

In October 2020, the San Diego Unified School District's (SDUSD) Board of Education voted to implement a new Standards-Based Grading Policy (AR 5121) for secondary schools as a critical part of the transition toward Standards-Based Learning throughout the District. Standards-Based Learning (SBL) is an approach to education that focuses instruction and assessment on students' progress toward a set of strategically grouped, prioritized standards, known as Critical Concepts. These Critical Concepts are a subset of the Common Core State Standards that have been identified as the most essential for students to master by the end of each course. As such, they establish a shared, minimum expectation for end-of-course objectives that encompass both knowledge and skills.

Simply put, Standards-Based Grading (SBG) is a component of a Standards-Based Learning framework in which grades are intended to clearly reflect students' progress toward mastery of Critical Concepts. SBG differs from traditional grading practices in several key ways that involve both the evaluation of student work and the way final grades are determined. In traditional grading practices, students typically receive a points-based grade for assignments, quizzes, tests, etc., and the final grade is derived from an average of their performance on these assignments throughout the term, often modified by additional factors such as attendance, homework, or classroom participation. In SBG, students are given multiple opportunities to practice the skills that they are working to develop, but these "practice assignments" are not necessarily scored. Then, students are given multiple opportunities to show that they have learned the skills and competencies that have been taught, and the final grade reflects their ultimate level of proficiency in the Critical Concepts, regardless of their performance on initial assessments, homework, or behavioral factors. In addition, non-academic factors are removed from the academic grade. The student's level of proficiency is determined using Proficiency Scales (1-4), which clearly describe the performance expected from the student at each level of standard proficiency for each Critical Concept. The use of Proficiency Scales helps foster clear communication to students (and parents) about what each student knows and can do.

Standards-Based Learning and Grading reflect a substantial philosophical shift in the approach to education. SBL is touted as an asset-based approach that aims to empower students as co-collaborators in their learning journey. Proponents of SBL assert that it leads to greater consistency, clarity, accuracy and equity in teaching, assessment, and grading. Critics voice concern that SBG amounts to a lowering of expectations and allows students to ignore deadlines without consequences. They argue that schools should teach more than academic skills and content and that SBG is unfair to those students who do things correctly the first time and turn in work in a timely manner.

In order to evaluate the impact of the SBG policy on teachers and students, as well as to inform San Diego Unified's work and that of other districts interested in making similar reforms, SDUSD has partnered with the San Diego Education Research Alliance (SanDERA) at UCSD to observe and evaluate the implementation of SBG at middle and high schools in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years.

1.2 ELEMENTS OF THIS EVALUATION

This evaluation of the first two years of the SBG reform consists of two parts, a qualitative study and a quantitative study. The qualitative study is based on conversations with administrators and observations of teacher meetings at eight focus schools, supplemented by analysis of student surveys conducted by the District and teacher surveys conducted by SanDERA. Together, these analyses paint a detailed picture of implementation, awareness of the reform among students, teachers and administrators, and successes and challenges to date. The quantitative study examines trends in student outcomes including grades (both academic and citizenship), enrollment in, and completion of, the "a-g" college preparatory courses needed for students to be eligible to attend either of the state's public university systems, attendance rates, and test scores on California's Smarter Balanced summative assessments. In addition to studying overall trends, the quantitative section of this report also details gaps in outcomes across student groups and examines how those have changed in 2021-22 and 2022-23 compared to earlier years.

2. THE PATH TO STANDARDS-BASED GRADING IN SDUSD

2.1 FOUNDATIONAL WORK

SDUSD made the transition to a standards-based report card (SBRC) for elementary schools more than 15 years ago in 2007. At first, as with any major systemic change, not everyone supported the District's decision to move away from the familiar categories and marks of Excellent, Very Good, Good, Satisfactory and Needs Improvement. Some were simply more comfortable with the system they knew and understood, others voiced concerns that standards-based report card marks were unfair to students who put in a lot of effort but struggled academically. According to one of the evaluators who was involved with the initiative, many teachers felt that the new report cards required more work from them, both in assigning marks to their students and in explaining the new marks to families accustomed to the old system. After a few years, however, the objections quieted as the SBRC became the status quo for elementary grade reporting.

The Standards-Based Grading Policy for Secondary Schools was the result of several years of collaboration with [Marzano Resources](), a highly regarded educational research and consulting firm and leader in standards-based learning. In 2018, several years prior to the official change in policy, the District began identifying Critical Concepts in secondary English language arts, mathematics, and science curricula, and professional development (training) was offered to teachers in these content areas in the 2018-19 school year to help with the transition to a standards-based learning framework. During the 2019-20 school year, the District began developing Guaranteed Viable Curricula—a construct that articulates how each student will receive a comprehensive, equitable, rigorous, and standards-based education, across all grade-levels, in all subject areas—for high school courses in English language arts, science, and history/social science. Also, the mathematics team continued working with Patrick Callahan, a leader in standards-based math education, to develop a standards-aligned "Enhanced Math" program.

In spring 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, creating an unprecedented disruption of every aspect of teaching and learning. Not only were teachers and students faced with a sudden switch from classroom-based to distance-learning, but professional development, collaboration

and planning also had to adapt. With no way to predict how long the pandemic would last, everyone did what they could to minimize the effects of the disruption. The District organized "think tanks" focused on standards-based assessment and feedback and work continued on the development of the revised grading policy; the final revision was presented to and approved by the SDUSD Board of Trustees in October, 2020, at the start of a school year when all instruction was done virtually.

2.2 SBG POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

2020-21: Despite the pandemic, some schools opted to move forward with the implementation of SBG in the 2020-21 school year. These schools are considered to be Cohort A; the remaining schools, Cohort B, began SBG implementation in 2021-22.
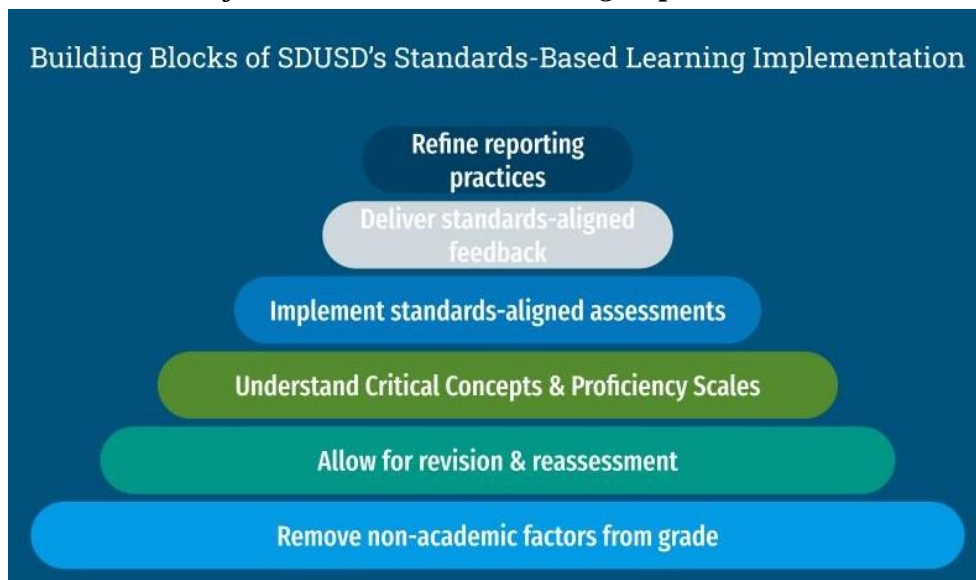
*Professional Development (PD)***:** Marzano Resources offered virtual professional development to principals and teacher teams. Because the sessions were virtual, schools were not limited on the number of people they could send to the training. The District also launched its first Micro-Credential for Educators: "SBL: Critical Concepts & Proficiency Scales." (Micro-Credentials are professional development courses offered to educators free of charge, with the option to purchase UCSD continuing education credits that can be used to move up on the salary scale.) The District also hosted a "Guaranteed Viable Curriculum Institute" that included professional development focused on SBG.

Resource Development: Critical concepts and proficiency scales for English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science were refined to better support instruction and align to any updated standards and practices emerging in their fields, and critical concepts were introduced for all remaining content areas: history/social studies (HSS), college, career and technical education (CCTE), world languages, visual and performing arts (VAPA), English language development (ELD), and physical education (PE). During summer 2021, the District launched a web-based "One Stop Shop" for teachers to make it easier to access SBG resources.

Technology/Reporting System Development: The District's student information and grade reporting system, PowerSchool, began development of a platform pilot (PowerTeacher Pro) that aimed to test functionality for a standards-based reporting system at the secondary level.

2021-22: When the District returned to full, in-person instruction at the start of the 2021-22 school year, Standards-Based Learning was established as a primary area of focus for all secondary schools. However, in recognition of the additional pressures schools faced as a result of the pandemic, the timeline for SBG implementation was revised and schools were asked to focus on two key aspects of SBG: removing non-academic factors from academic grades and providing opportunities for revision and reassessment. Figure 2.1, found on the District's SBL Family Engagement website (https://sites.google.com/sandi.net/sbl/families) shows how these steps fit into the overall plan for SBL and lays out a roadmap for SBG implementation that culminates in the refinement of grade reporting practices.

Figure 2.1 SDUSD's Plan for Standards-Based Grading Implementation

Professional Development: Marzano Resources provided professional development for administrators and up to four staff members from each secondary school through a virtual professional learning series known as Leadership Labs. The District launched a second SBG Micro-Credential for Educators focused on Critical Concept-Aligned Assessments.

Resource Development: Multiple tools and resources were added to the "One-Stop-Shop" for educators (e.g., Body of Evidence Chart, Claims Tracker, Portfolios, and Rubrics.)

Technology/Reporting System Development: A small pilot of standards-based PowerTeacher Pro was run with 6 educators from ELA, math, and science content areas, who determined that significant additional development of the software was required to adequately support SBG.

Inviting Input: In order to keep educational partners informed and involved, the District launched an SBG website for families, created an SBG Student Advisory Board and hosted school cluster meetings to focus on the transition to SBG. District leaders also conducted "empathy interviews" with administrators to advise on next steps with implementation.

2022-23:

Professional Learning: The District offered a 3-part, opt-in professional learning series, held on the most common early release days (W/Th). One middle and one high school emerged as "SBL Through PLCs Lab Schools." Designed to be exemplars of this learning series, each site received four, intensive learning sessions throughout the year, involving the entire staff, and was co-facilitated by site administration and Central Office leaders. Internal professional learning was also offered to Central Office leaders and staff, through a 6-part series co-led by Marzano Resources and Instructional Innovation, to ultimately help support sites with SBL through greater clarity, consistency, accuracy and equity.

Resource Development: Critical Concepts in all areas continued to undergo revision and refinement. The District also continued to expand its library of standards-aligned assessments and proficiency scales for teachers' use.

Technology/Reporting System Development: Two rounds of pilot testing were done for the PowerTeacher Pro Educator gradebook. In fall, the system was tested by 9 educators from 3 content areas at both middle and high school. A spring pilot followed, with 16 educators from 4 content areas. Unfortunately, PowerTeacher Pro Educator gradebook was determined to still be insufficient for SBG reporting.

Inviting Input: An SBL Work Group was formed at the request of District executive leadership, in an effort to redesign Instructional Cabinet efforts. This work group was comprised of District leaders ranging from Deputy Superintendent, Executive Leaders, Area Superintendents, Central Office Directors, Managers, and Resource Teachers. The goal of this work group was to learn, calibrate, and co-design based on the implementation needs of SBL within the district. This group met roughly every 3 weeks.

3. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL PARTNER EXPERIENCES

3.1 STAKEHOLDER VOICES

The qualitative component of the evaluation focuses on feedback from three distinct stakeholder groups at SDUSD's middle and high schools: site administrators, classroom teachers, and students. Districtwide student and teacher input was sought through surveys distributed to all secondary students and teachers in spring of 2022 and 2023.

To augment the teacher and student surveys that were made available to all 68 District sites that serve secondary students, eight schools—four middle and four high schools—were invited to participate in deeper study through annual semi-structured interviews with administrators and observations of Professional Learning Community (PLC) or Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meetings in spring of 2023. These focus sites were selected to include a balance of schools with a high versus low academic performance history and a high versus low rate of socioeconomic disadvantage, as well as schools from both the first and the second cohort of SBG implementation.

Focus Site Interviews/PLCs

As the evaluator, SanDERA interviewed principals and, if possible, a second administrator, at each of the eight focus schools in the spring of 2022 and 2023. Just over half of those interviewed in 2022 (8 of 14) had some experience with standards-based grading before the District adopted the policy, either at other districts or at alternative or specialized sites (e.g., International Baccalaureate.) The administrators all voiced enthusiastic support for the idea of Standards-Based Grading and the reasoning behind the change in grading policy, although they reported varying degrees of success with implementing the policy at their sites. All but two of the administrators personally attended the SBG professional development sessions led by Marzano Resources. (One had been newly placed at their site after the training was offered, and the other had extensive experience with SBG and had worked with Marzano in the past.) All eight schools sent teachers to the trainings, although several sites in Cohort B reported that a lack of available substitute teachers in 2021-22 meant that only two or three teachers were able to attend.

To supplement the information gleaned through the administrator interviews and to provide context for the teacher survey responses, we were able to observe SBG-related teacher team meetings at half of our focus sites in spring, 2023. These included meetings of the

Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) at a middle and a high school, a middle school grade-level PLC and a high school mathematics PLC. The remaining schools had no relevant meetings during the time frame of our observations.

Teacher Survey Respondents

Teacher surveys, developed by SanDERA in collaboration with District administrators, were distributed to all (approximately 2,400) secondary teachers by SanDERA in the spring of each school year. Responses were received from just under 20% each year (449 teachers in 2022 and 427 in 2023), although not all teachers answered all questions. In 2022, middle school teachers accounted for 46% of survey respondents; 57% were high school teachers. (Note that about 3% of respondents each year taught at both the middle and high school level.) In 2023, the distribution was 40% middle school to 64% high school. Figure 3.1 shows the distribution of teacher respondents across content areas for both years.

*Figure 3.1 Content areas of teacher survey respondents*
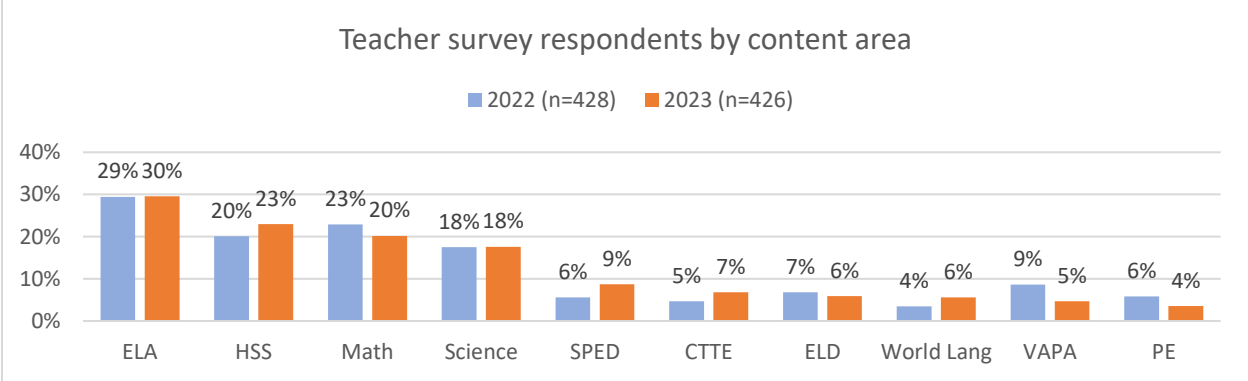
Despite the District push, 18% of the teachers who responded to the survey at the end of Year 2 (2022-23), said that their site has not yet begun to implement SBG, and an additional 21% said they don't know when (or if) their site has begun implementation. As shown in figure 3.2, middle schools appeared to be further along in the process of SBG implementation than high schools: among high school teachers, 20% said their site had not yet begun and an additional 25% were unsure.

Figure 3.2 Sitewide SBG Implementation Stage by School Type, per teacher survey
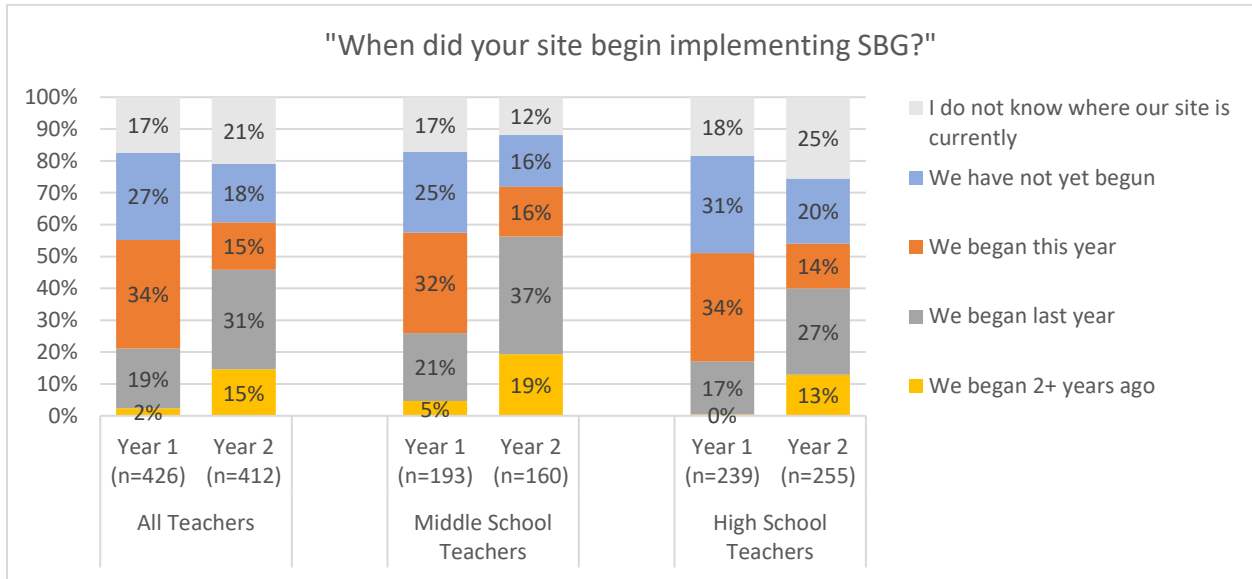
When asked about implementation in their own classrooms, 26% of teachers who responded in Year 2 reported that they had not yet, personally, begun to implement SBG (as compared with 32% the prior year.) Again, more middle school teachers had begun implementation than high school teachers: at the end of the 2023 school year, 30% of high school teachers had not yet begun SBG implementation, compared with 19% of middle school teachers (See figure 3.3.)

Figure 3.3 Individual SBG Implementation Stage by School Type, per teacher survey
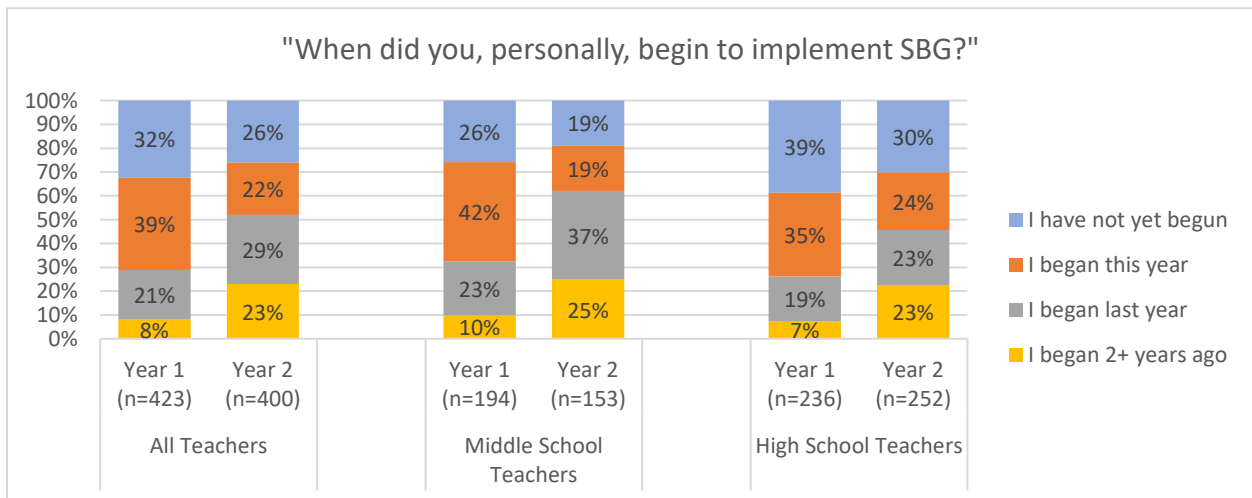
Student Survey Respondents

A student survey was developed and distributed by SDUSD to all secondary students in the spring of 2022 and 2023, via their district email accounts. A web-based version of the survey was also made available for sites at which student email accounts are not currently being used, and versions in Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese were also available. In Year 1, 6,634 students responded to the survey, representing approximately 14% of the secondary student population,

although not all respondents answered every question. The response rate fell significantly in Year 2, with only 2,424 students, or approximately 5% of the secondary students responding to the survey. The grade levels of respondents each year is shown in figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 Grade level distribution of student survey respondents

Student Survey Respondents by Grade Level

■ 2022 (n=6,634) ■ 2023 (n=2,424)

	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
2022	13%	13%	20%	12%	18%	14%	10%
2023	14%	11%	16%	17%	16%	16%	11%
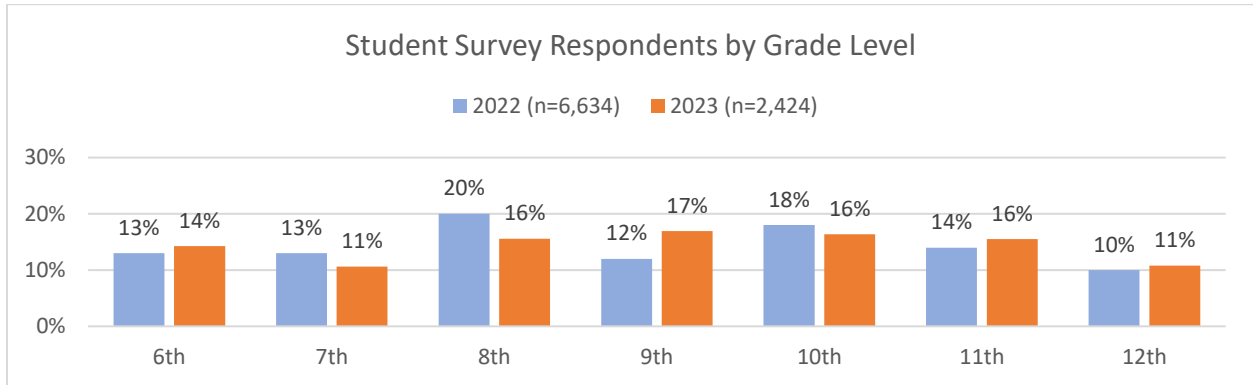
3.2 STANDARDS-BASED GRADING IMPLEMENTATION – BUILDING BLOCKS

Removing non-academic factors from academic grades

As illustrated in figure 2.1 above, the first step identified by the District for SBG implementation was the removal of non-academic factors (e.g., attendance, homework, classroom behavior) from academic grades. One major challenge of this first step can be seen in the survey data, where 50 percent of the teachers who responded each year said that, prior to AR5121, they would have agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "A student's academic grade should include behaviors related to achievement such as study skills, homework, class participation, and respect for the subject and teacher." The student survey data showed a similar pattern, with 57% of students agreeing with the statement in 2022 and 50% agreeing in 2023. Despite that belief, however, figure 3.5 shows that many teachers have taken steps to remove behavioral factors from their academic grading practices. Data from the student survey confirms that grading practices are changing, with about half the students reporting that teachers have removed some or all non-academic factors from their grades in each subject area. (See figure 3.6.)

Figure 3.5 Teacher report of factors included in academic grades pre- and post-SBG
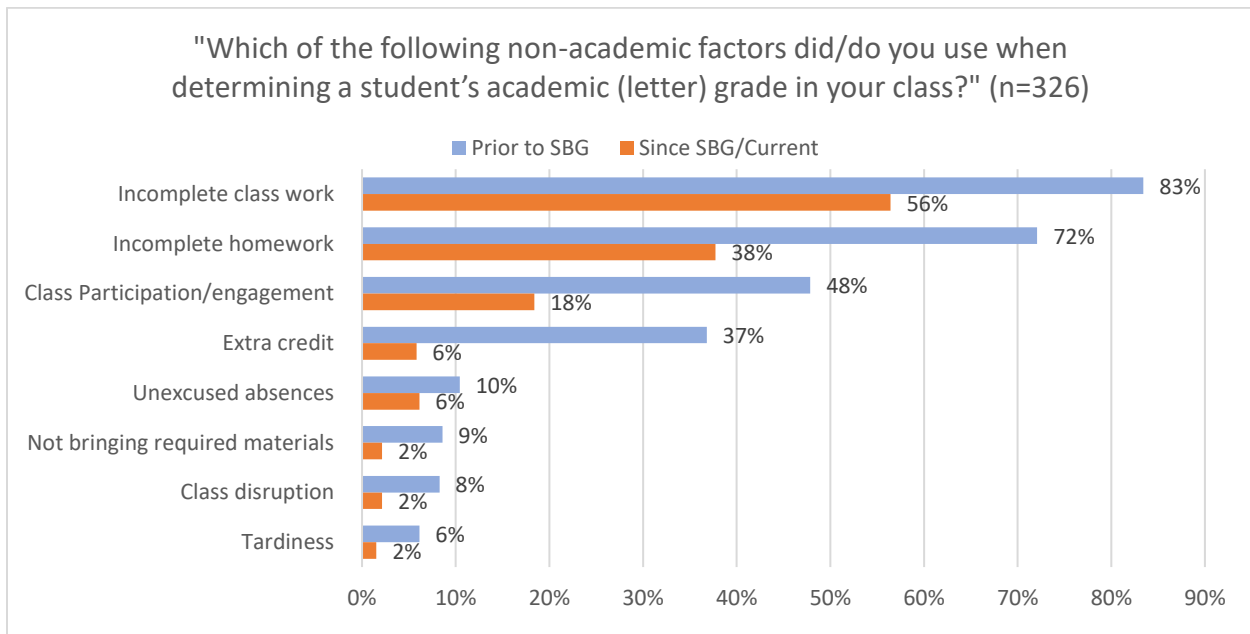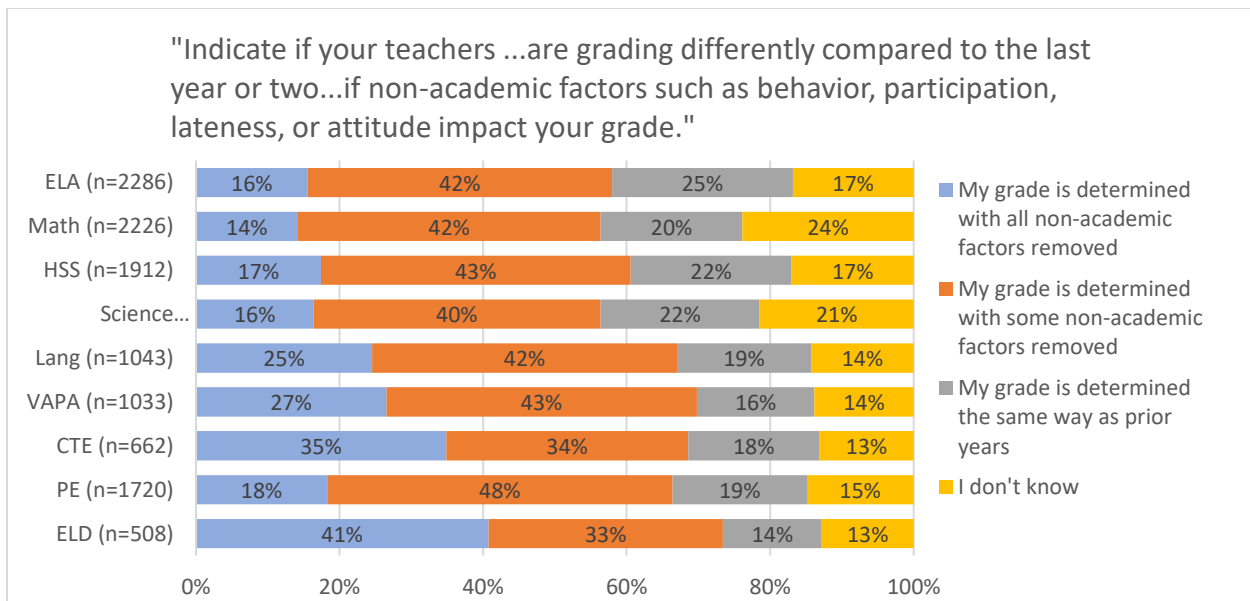

"Which of the following non-academic factors did/do you use when determining a student's academic (letter) grade in your class?" (n=326)

Legend: ■ Prior to SBG ■ Since SBG/Current

Factor	Prior to SBG	Since SBG/Current
Incomplete class work	83%	56%
Incomplete homework	72%	38%
Class Participation/engagement	48%	18%
Extra credit	37%	6%
Unexcused absences	10%	6%
Not bringing required materials	9%	2%
Class disruption	8%	2%
Tardiness	6%	2%

Figure 3.6 Student report of changes in grading practices pre- and post-SBG

"Indicate if your teachers ...are grading differently compared to the last year or two...if non-academic factors such as behavior, participation, lateness, or attitude impact your grade."

Subject	My grade is determined with all non-academic factors removed	My grade is determined with some non-academic factors removed	My grade is determined the same way as prior years	I don't know
ELA (n=2286)	16%	42%	25%	17%
Math (n=2226)	14%	42%	20%	24%
HSS (n=1912)	17%	43%	22%	17%
Science…	16%	40%	22%	21%
Lang (n=1043)	25%	42%	19%	14%
VAPA (n=1033)	27%	43%	16%	14%
CTE (n=662)	35%	34%	18%	13%
PE (n=1720)	18%	48%	19%	15%
ELD (n=508)	41%	33%	14%	13%

Not having late or missing work affect a student's grade was the biggest concern voiced by both administrators and teachers. About a third of the teachers who responded to the survey said that, prior to SBG, they would have agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Standards-based grading isn't fair to kids who get things done right the first time and turn in their work in a timely manner," a view shared by 40% of the student respondents. Teachers and parents say that not penalizing students for late or missing work does them a disservice, as one teacher commented, "SBG is not preparing students for high school and beyond...we are failing them…they are gaming the system." Another reported, "kids are not turning in final papers because they didn't do formative work because it wasn't required." Some of this concern,

however, may arise from a limited understanding of SBG, as one administrator found that "non-academic factors was an easier sell once teachers understood it wasn't just a no-consequences free-for-all," and began to work toward school-wide re-testing policies and late work guidelines.
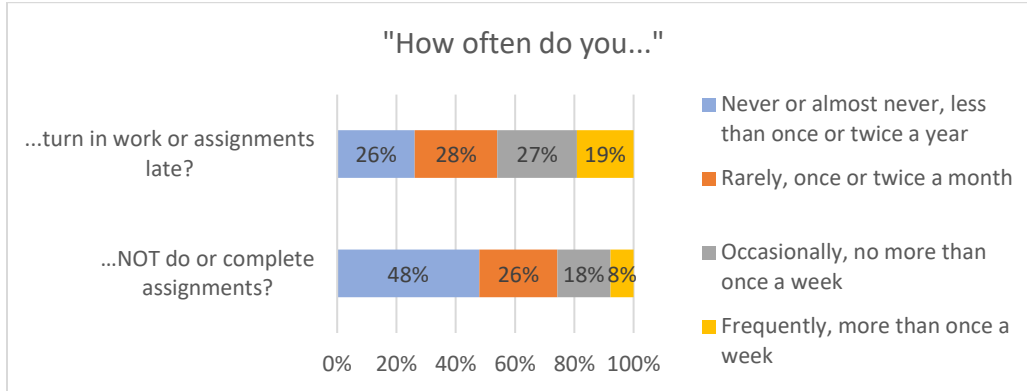
Figure 3.7 Frequency of late or missing work

Figure 3.7 shows the frequency of late or missing work, according to the students. Nearly three quarters of the students who responded to the survey reported that they turn in work late (or not at all) at least once a month, and for nearly one in five students this happens more than once a week, which has likely had a significant impact on academic grades. Although 32% of high school teachers and 42% of middle school teachers report that they have historically (prior to SBG) accepted late work without penalty, more often they penalized students for late work by deducting points or lowering the grade, or not accepting late work at all. (See figure 3.8.)

Figure 3.8 Teachers' late work policies prior to SBG
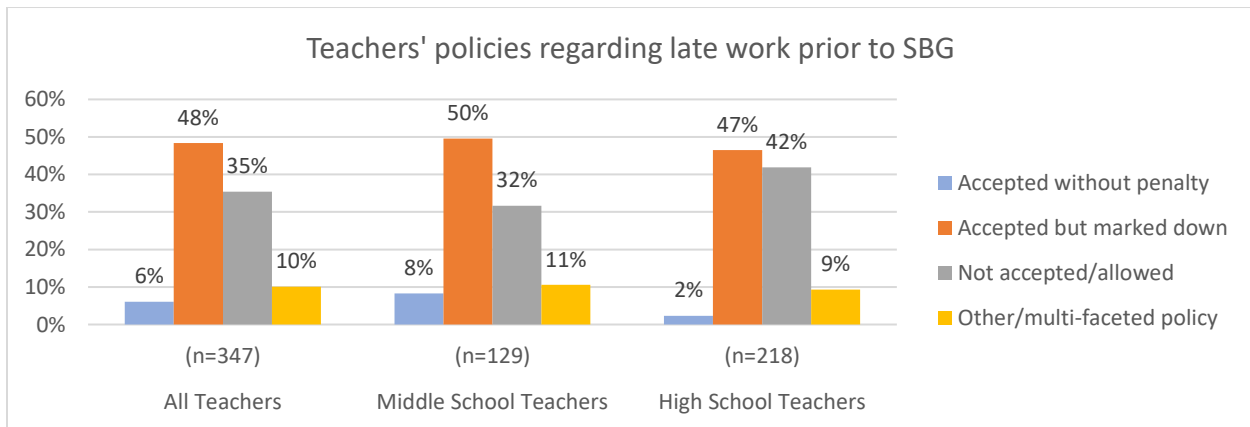
When asked the reasons for late or missing work, the most common reason students gave was simple forgetfulness. Of those who reported turning in late/incomplete work at least occasionally, more than a third of students say they have forgotten to complete assignments, and half report that, even after completing the work, they have forgotten to turn it in to the teacher, and 15% say they forget the details of the assignment. Ten percent of those responding checked "other" and wrote in a reason, the most common of which are included in table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Reason endorsed by students for late/incomplete work (n=2428)

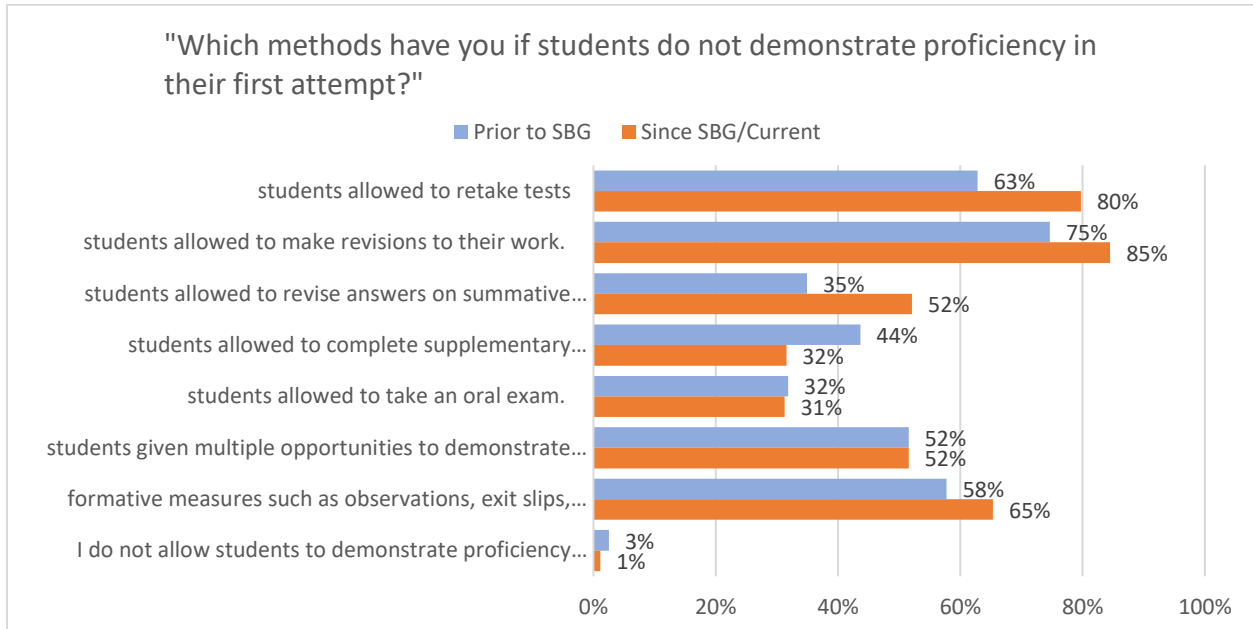| *"When your work is late/incomplete, what are the reasons?"*	N	%

I do the work but forget to turn it in	1,248	51%
I forget to do the work	903	37%
I have other responsibilities (siblings, a job, etc)	881	36%
I participate in extracurricular activities (sports, theater, music, etc.)	851	35%
I feel like I am not given enough time	776	32%
I do not find the work relevant or interesting	662	27%
The work is too hard for me or I do not understand it	524	22%
I forget what the assignments are	375	15%
I don't have a quiet place to study or do homework	237	10%
Other: I was absent	38	2%
Other: The work doesn't count toward my grade	25	1%
Other: I am given too much work in multiple classes	22	1%
Other: I have mental health struggles	19	1%
Other: Teacher/Technology Errors	24	1%

A related concern is that SBG leads to a lack of motivation among students. As one teacher stressed, "Once again, my main issue with SBG is a lack of motivation amongst students to complete assignments that are not graded." Prior to SBG, 42% of teachers believed that SBG would result in "decreased motivation to succeed" and 39% of students currently share this belief (compared with 22% who disagree/strongly disagree.) It will be interesting to see if these beliefs change in the next few years as SBG becomes more common across the District.

Allowing opportunities for revision and reassessment

As the second step of the District's SBG Implementation plan, teachers are asked to allow students additional opportunities to demonstrate mastery of Critical Concepts that they were not able to master when they were first assessed. Figure 3.9 shows that many teachers were already providing opportunities for revision and reassessment before the change in grading policy, but have increased those opportunities under SBG. Notably, 85% of teachers responding to the survey allow students to revise their work, and 80% allow test retakes. Just over half of the teachers reported that they have historically provided multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of concepts and continue to do so under SBG.

Figure 3.9 Teacher-provided opportunities to display mastery after 1st attempt

"Which methods have you if students do not demonstrate proficiency in their first attempt?"

■ Prior to SBG   ■ Since SBG/Current

students allowed to retake tests	63% / 80%
students allowed to make revisions to their work.	75% / 85%
students allowed to revise answers on summative…	35% / 52%
students allowed to complete supplementary…	44% / 32%
students allowed to take an oral exam.	32% / 31%
students given multiple opportunities to demonstrate…	52% / 52%
formative measures such as observations, exit slips,…	58% / 65%
I do not allow students to demonstrate proficiency…	3% / 1%

Figures 3.10-3.12 break down the teacher responses by content area and compare them with responses from students on parallel items. For all content areas, teachers reported allowing students to revise their work more frequently than students report having that opportunity. In general, the same pattern was seen, although with smaller differences, for opportunities to revise answers to tests; however, for math, science, and world language classes, more students than teachers reported that students are allowed revisions to tests. On the more general "allow multiple opportunities to show proficiency," the pattern of responses is more complex. Overall, differences between teacher and student responses are fairly small (less than 10%); however, in world language and ELD courses, more teachers reported giving multiple opportunities to show proficiency than students reported.

Figure 3.10 Teacher-provided opportunities to display mastery after 1st attempt: work revision
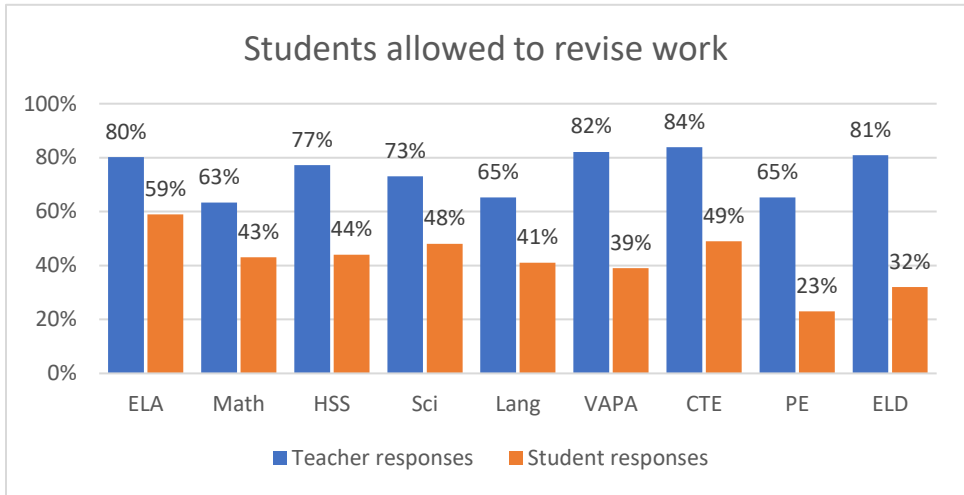
Students allowed to revise work

Subject	Teacher responses	Student responses
ELA	80%	59%
Math	63%	43%
HSS	77%	44%
Sci	73%	48%
Lang	65%	41%
VAPA	82%	39%
CTE	84%	49%
PE	65%	23%
ELD	81%	32%

Figure 3.11 Teacher-provided opportunities to display mastery after 1st attempt: revision of test answers

Student allowed to revise answers on tests

Subject	Teacher responses	Student responses
ELA	50%	41%
Math	35%	62%
HSS	49%	46%
Sci	50%	56%
Lang	43%	46%
VAPA	46%	26%
CTE	48%	38%
PE	30%	22%
ELD	57%	35%
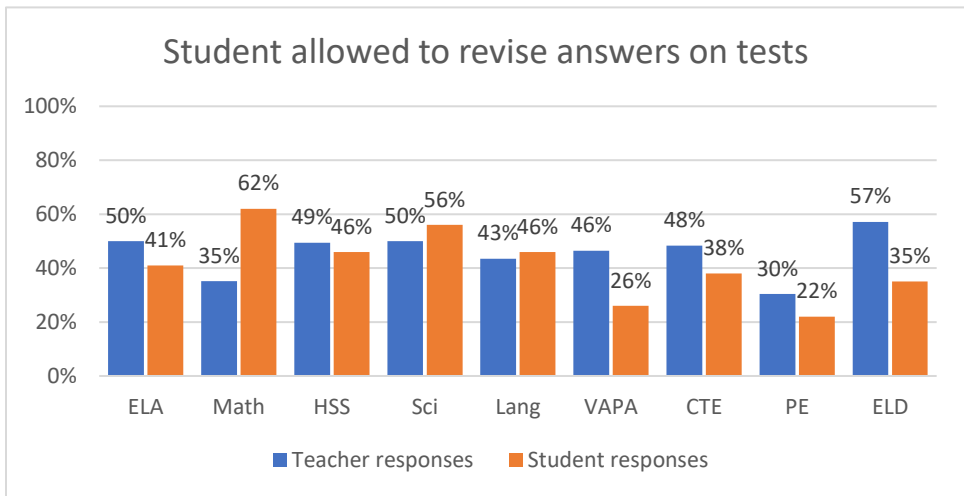
Figure 3.12 Teacher-provided opportunities to display mastery after 1st attempt: multiple opportunities

Students given multiple opportunities to show proficiency

	Teacher responses	Student responses
ELA	52%	49%
Math	42%	48%
HSS	38%	48%
Sci	44%	47%
Lang	65%	48%
VAPA	43%	48%
CTE	52%	45%
PE	39%	43%
ELD	48%	26%
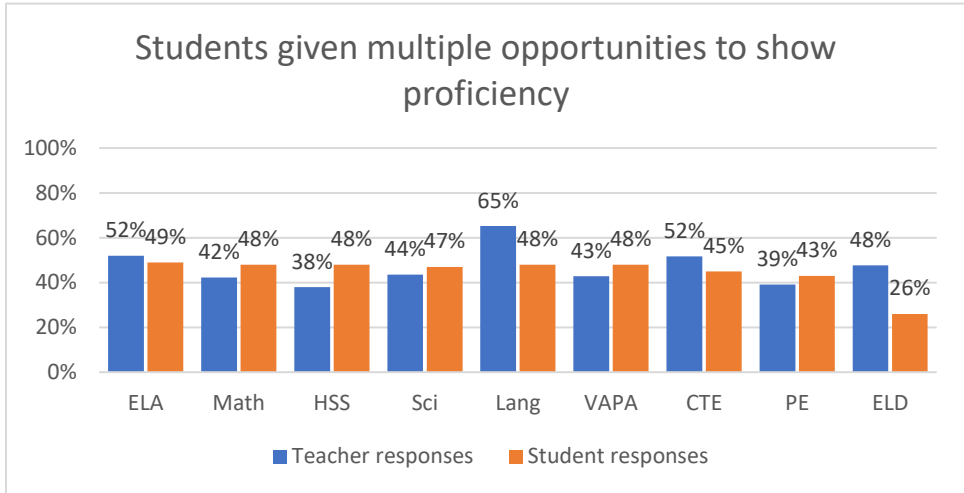
While these opportunities for revision and reassessment might seem straightforward, conversations with teachers show a more nuanced reality. One high school math team realized that struggling students were not taking advantage of before- or after-school opportunities for help or reassessment, while others were putting in little effort on their first test-taking attempts. They decided to make re-testing mandatory for all students, saying, "students are engaged from the beginning if both tests count," and noting that many do worse on their second attempt. At another school, the ELA team is ensuring multiple opportunities by using a common chart to log every time they assess each standard.

Understanding and Using Critical Concepts and Proficiency Scales

CRITICAL CONCEPTS

In order to successfully implement SBG, teachers need to have a deep understanding of Critical Concepts and Proficiency Scales, which are at the core of a standards-based learning framework. By the end of the 2022-23 school year, 92% of teachers say they are either very (45%) or somewhat (47%) familiar with these concepts, a slight shift forward from the spring 2022 responses. The majority of teachers also report using Critical Concepts and Proficiency Scales at least occasionally in their instructional practice, as seen in figure 3.14. However, responses at the end of 2022-23 show little change from the previous year's data and, in some cases, show an increase in the percent of teachers replying that they "never" use these resources (i.e., to create rubrics or for students to self-assess).

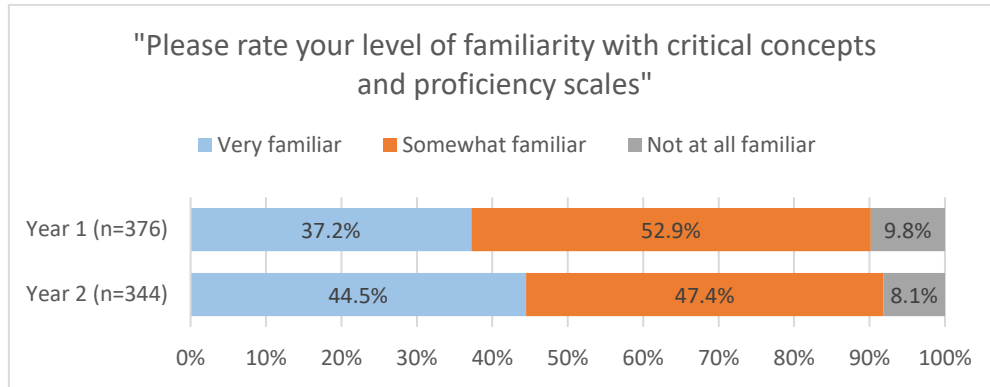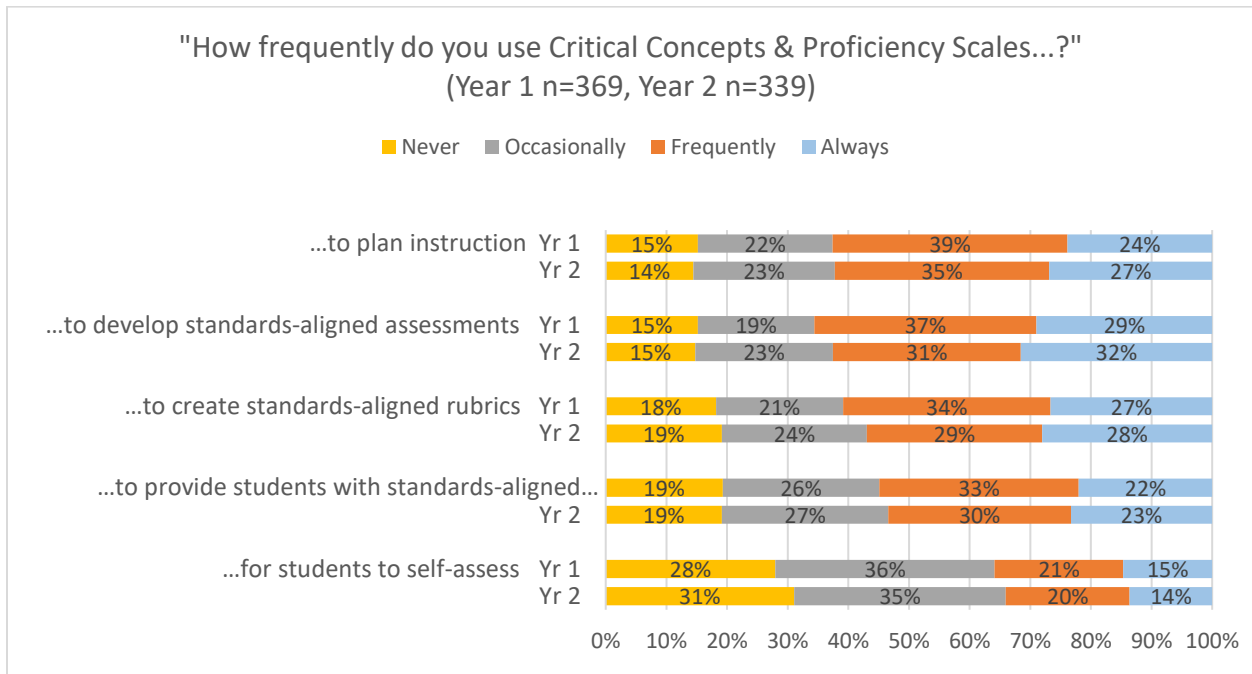*Figure 3.13 Teacher-reported familiarity with critical concepts and proficiency scales*

"Please rate your level of familiarity with critical concepts and proficiency scales"

■ Very familiar ■ Somewhat familiar ■ Not at all familiar

	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar
Year 1 (n=376)	37.2%	52.9%	9.8%
Year 2 (n=344)	44.5%	47.4%	8.1%

Figure 3.14 Teacher-reported use of critical concepts and proficiency scales

"How frequently do you use Critical Concepts & Proficiency Scales...?"
(Year 1 n=369, Year 2 n=339)

■ Never ■ Occasionally ■ Frequently ■ Always

		Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Always
...to plan instruction	Yr 1	15%	22%	39%	24%
	Yr 2	14%	23%	35%	27%
...to develop standards-aligned assessments	Yr 1	15%	19%	37%	29%
	Yr 2	15%	23%	31%	32%
...to create standards-aligned rubrics	Yr 1	18%	21%	34%	27%
	Yr 2	19%	24%	29%	28%
...to provide students with standards-aligned...	Yr 1	19%	26%	33%	22%
	Yr 2	19%	27%	30%	23%
...for students to self-assess	Yr 1	28%	36%	21%	15%
	Yr 2	31%	35%	20%	14%

One obvious impediment to the widespread integration of Critical Concepts in teaching practices is that not everyone is aware that they exist. The District's "One-Stop Shop" for SBG resources includes Critical Concepts and Proficiency Scales for all content areas and the vast majority of courses, but teachers at two of the focus sites made comments about not having Critical Concepts set up for their content area (CTE and PE.) Even among those who are actively using them, not all agree with the District's choice of Critical Concepts for the courses they teach. One ELA teacher created their own list of critical standards for reading and writing, feeling that the District's Critical Concepts "dumbed that down a bit." A team of math teachers at one focus school conducted their own standard study in lieu of Critical Concepts they deemed unclear or insufficient; for example, the Critical Concepts collapse "graphing" into a single mark. A teacher at another site voiced frustration that the Critical Concepts for music weren't appropriate for their band and orchestra classes.

Proficiency Scales are rubrics that focus on a single Critical Concept. They define and describe four distinct stages of proficiency for a given standard—insufficient evidence to determine proficiency, approaching proficiency/grade level, at proficiency/grade level, beyond proficiency/grade level—and articulate the means by which a student's proficiency level (1-4) can be determined. This is what educators refer to as the "four-point scale" at the heart of SBG. By contrast, traditional grading practices generally rely on a student's accumulation of points, and use a percentage system to determine a letter grade from A (typically 90-100%) to F (typically <60%.) This fundamental difference between the a point/percentage-based system and the proficiency scale model of learning progression is at the heart of the philosophical shift from traditional grading practices to SBG and, as such, is a sticking point for many educators as they move toward SBG. Although the purpose of a Proficiency Scale is to articulate distinct levels in the progression of mastery, applying the scales to actual student work is not always straightforward. In particular, teachers often struggle with the distinction between levels 3 (at proficiency/grade level) and 4 (beyond proficiency/grade level). Administrators often identified teams of teachers who have dedicated many hours of collaborative work to callibrating this distinction across their department. One middle school principal, after describing the work of the ELA and science teams to agree on what distinguishes a 3 from a 4, said "if we know what mastery is, it will be easy to assign 1-4, but [teachers] are still stuck there."

Insight into this work was seen at a meeting of a math team where teachers discussed a recent common assessment. Looking closely at student responses to evaluate understanding, they found that evidence of understanding was often inconsistent across different questions, with a student's answer indicating a high level of mastery on one item but revealing potential errors in thinking on another, similar question. They then delved deeper into the nuances of each question, hoping to determine if there was one question that could be used specifically to differentiate between *at* proficiency/grade level and *beyond* proficiency/grade level. When they found no clear answer, their conversation turned toward the student experience, noting that classroom conversations show a deeper level of understanding than might be concluded from the answers on the test, and they began to look at how they might alter the wording of a question to better lead students to providing the complete answer they were seeking. These teachers also talked about how the use of proficiency scales is changing the conversations they have with their students. For instance, when a student who got a 2 on the exam noticed that another student appeared to make the same number of mistakes but got a 3, the teacher was able to refer to the proficiency scale to show the student how their errors were related to lack of understanding of a main concept, while the other student made only computational errors but demonstrated understanding of the concept.

Implementing Standards-Aligned Assessments

Since shifting to standards-aligned assessments, the math teachers above say that they are seeing a "totally different mindset" in their students, adding "it's exciting to see that they care!" They also acknowledge the tremendous amount of teamwork required to develop common, standards-aligned assessments for each course, and note that they are the only group on campus that has put in the work to get to this point. Fortunately, a growing library of standards-aligned assessments are available for many courses on the District's "One-Stop Shop." Figure 3.15 shows the degree to which teachers have made changes to their assessment systems as they make the transition to SBG, with most teachers having made at least minor changes so far.

Administrators at several sites reported that specific departments or teaching teams are focusing their energy this year and/or next on identifying or designing common, standards-assessments.
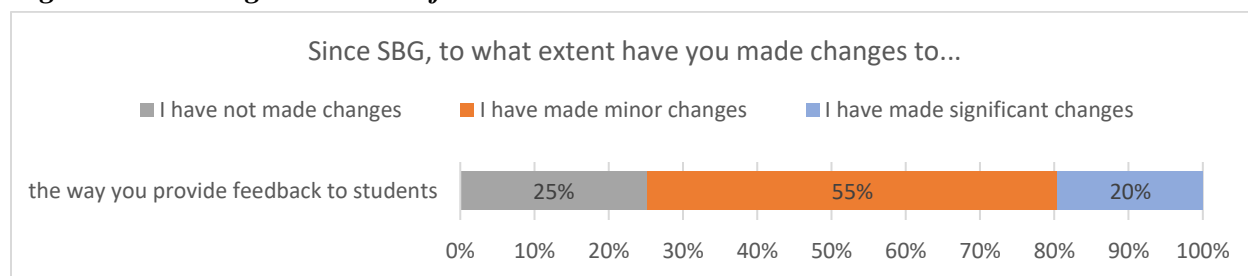
Figure 3.15 Changes to the design and scoring of assessments and assignments

"Since SBG, to what extent have you made changes to..."

■ I have not made changes   ■ I have made minor changes   ■ I have made significant changes

...the way you design or score assessments and assignments: 17% | 44% | 39%

(0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%)
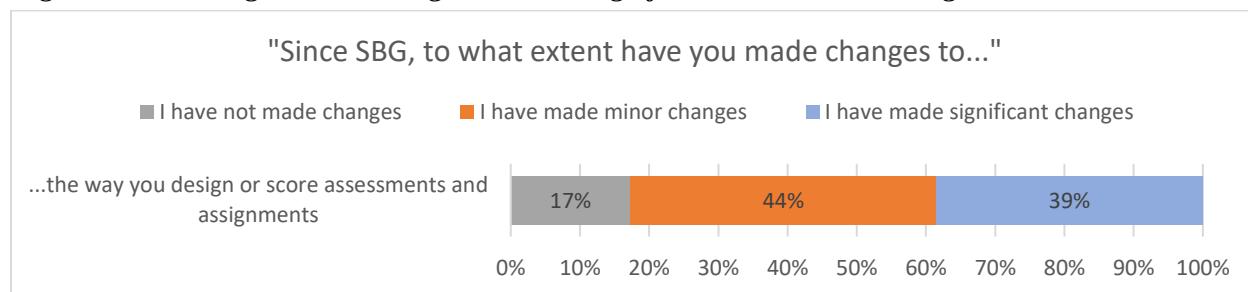
Providing Students with Standards-Aligned Feedback

Another key aspect of the shift to SBG involves the way feedback is provided to students. Feedback within a standards-based framework focuses attention on a student's progression toward mastery of Critical Concepts, giving students clear information about what they need to do or learn in order to progress. Administrators and teachers at all focus sites discussed how conversations about student performance under SBG puts the focus on a student's ability to demonstrate what they know and can do rather than how a student can earn additional points to bring up a grade. However, teachers report that providing this type and level of feedback to students requires a lot more work from them. In an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meeting at one focus school, ELA teachers reported that providing standards-based feedback on student writing in a timely manner requires them to take days off from work to devote to reading papers. Figure 3.16 shows the degree to which teachers have made changes to the way they provide feedback to students under SBG. While most (75%) have made some changes, only 1 in 5 say they have made significant changes to the way to provide feedback to students.

Figure 3.16 Changes to student feedback

Since SBG, to what extent have you made changes to...

■ I have not made changes   ■ I have made minor changes   ■ I have made significant changes

the way you provide feedback to students: 25% | 55% | 20%

(0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%)

Refining reporting practices

Changes to grading practices are the final step in the District's SBG implementation plan and represent the culmination of the many and varied shifts in teaching and learning outlined above. However, despite efforts to focus stakeholders on the foundational building blocks of SBG, it is this final step that seems to elicit the most controversy and present the greatest challenge. Concerns about SBG at the secondary level center around the difficulty of implementing a standards-based grading framework within a larger educational system rooted in traditional letter grades that range from A to F. The demands of the established system (e.g.,

report card software, college admissions requirements) seem to necessitate some sort of conversion scale, but the fundamental differences between the two systems make this virtually impossible. One middle school administrator expressed frustration with having to use the high school's A-F report card system rather than the standards-based report card system used at elementary schools, asserting that the A-F system "kills the momentum of standards-based grading." Another deemed it "bizarre to be doing SBG while still using an A-F report card."

GRADE EQUIVALENCE: SBG VS. A-F

One of the greatest challenges in the transition to SBG arises out of the need to convert SBG proficiency levels (1= insufficient evidence to determine proficiency, 2= approaching proficiency/grade level, 3= at proficiency/grade level, beyond proficiency/grade, 4= proficiency/grade level) to a traditional A-F scale for report cards and transcripts. The philosophical framework of standards-based learning, and, in turn, the meaning of SBG, is easily lost in translation. Although A-F grades have no intrinsic meaning, they do have deeply personal and cultural meaning for students and parents. For many, an A is the mark of a job well-done, and any mark below that indicates a deficit of some sort. In the traditional system, if a student is dedicated, tries their best and completes all of the work assigned to the best of their ability, they are "rewarded" with an A grade, and grades of C or lower are assumed to indicate a lack of effort on the part of the student. Essentially, grades are seen as rewards for good academic behavior: "straight-A student" is synonymous with "good kid," which can easily lead to grade inflation. One administrator voiced concern that students who make straight As at their high school often need remedial courses when they get to college because, despite their GPA, they did not master the material taught. Similarly, a middle school administrator was bombarded by parent complaints after a world language teacher switched to SBG and grades fell drastically. However, the controversy ended up leading to "richer conversations because SBG gave us the leverage and the ability to be detailed in how we explained things to parents."

Most educators would agree that a student who has not mastered the material should not receive an A grade, but converting SBG marks to A-F grades directly (i.e., 4=A, 3=B, 2=C, 1=D or F) creates another layer of complexity because the top mark in SBG is "advanced," which requires demonstration of a skill or knowledge that goes beyond proficiency. It is important to note that this does not mean that a student has to know or be able to do things that were not taught, (i.e., higher grade level standards) but that a student demonstrates a deeper level of understanding or a more skillful ability than most others who are proficient in the same standards. A student who fully meets the expectations for a course and demonstrates proficiency on all of the critical concepts, therefore, receives an SBG mark of 3, which, in the above conversion approach, translates to a B, and a student who works hard but falls short of demonstrating proficiency on some critical concepts might receive a C. This can be a difficult adjustment for students who were accustomed to receiving an A mark for working hard and completing assignments, and especially for those who meet expectations for mastery of critical concepts but receive an SBG mark of 3 rather than 4 because they do not demonstrate a level of mastery that goes *beyond* proficiency or mastery.

This discrepancy, which centers around the meaning (in A-F terms) of proficiency (an SBG mark of 3) is at the heart of the much of the controversy and frustration surrounding SBG in SDUSD. In an effort to respect teachers' autonomy and to allow for differences in professional opinion (as well as to comply with Ed. Coe 49066, which states that grades are to be determined by the teacher), the District has not adopted a universal conversion scale between SBG and A-F report card marks. As a result, there is widespread disagreement about what constitutes an A

grade, and the resulting inconsistency in grading practices among schools, departments, and among teachers within departments undermines the success of the transition to SBG. Some teachers adhere to the direct conversion illustrated above (4=A, etc.) while others establish conversion systems in which an SBG 3 translates to an A and others, perhaps most, struggle to find a conversion scale that makes sense to them and their students.

Whilst the lack of consistency among conversion scales was brought up in every administrator interview and every teacher meeting, this is not an SBG issue. In fact, prior to the new grading policy, the District's secondary school teachers used more than 2,000 different scales to assign letter grades in Powerschool. The switch to SBG has merely shed light on this longstanding problem of grading inequity. At one site where most of the faculty has embraced SBG, the principal allowed, "Everyone is doing it a different way, but they are at least trying something." A comment from the teacher survey spells out some of the commonly heard concerns and illustrates some common misconceptions regarding District policy as well as the wide range of opinions regarding the meaning of proficiency:

> *A HUGE issue I have with standards based grading is turning the standard based grade (1-4) into a letter grade. The District says a student should get a 1 even if they have learned zero about the standard. Since this translates to a D, which is enough to graduate high school, students could learn zero English or Math for their entire high school career, and as long as they earn a 2.0 overall GPA, they still graduate. I do not have a problem with the 1 meaning, but I have a huge problem with a 1=D and also huge problem with approaching standards 2=C. A letter grade of a C should be meeting standards. This MUST be addressed by the district or we will graduate even more students who are not reaching the level that the state of California expects.*

This teacher's belief that meeting standards should translate to a C must somehow be reconciled with the opinion of others who believe that meeting standards should translate to an A if SBG is to become the new status quo.

The issue of letter grade equivalence is especially contentious as it relates to college admissions. As one teacher expressed in their survey comments, "I am concerned about our students competing…for college acceptance. I worry that, until colleges get on board with SBG, our students will be penalized." This concern is shared by many students; one third of the student survey respondents said they either agreed (20%) or strongly agreed (14%) with "It is harder for a student with standards-based grades to get into college." The same proportion of teachers (34%) also said that, prior to implementing SBG, they would have agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Whether those opinions will change with more SBG experience remains to be seen.

LIMITATIONS OF GRADE REPORTING SOFTWARE (POWERSCHOOL)

The other significant challenge with SBG reporting is that the existing report card software relies on a percentage/point system to determine a letter grade. In order to assign grades, teachers need to define a percentage range that corresponds to each mark, but again, there is virtually no consistent agreement among educators about how this should be done. One high school administrator told us "most middle school students think SBG means 60% is a B." The ELA department at one middle school spent an entire year trying to adapt their SBG scales to work in PowerSchool and are still struggling after trying out six different approaches. Another teacher had their approach challenged by a mathematician parent who pressed them on the

percentage conversion until they relented and changed the child's grade, requiring a manual override of the software's settings.

The limitations of the PowerSchool gradebook software were identified early on by District administrators and work began in 2021 to develop a solution (PowerTeacher Pro) that would support SBG reporting. Unfortunately, after two years of work and three rounds of pilot-testing, PowerSchool was unable to deliver a functional solution and the District still does not have grade reporting software that adequately supports SBG. In the 2023-2024 school year, there will be a group of 17 secondary SBL Fellows (educators) piloting 3 different standards-based reporting platforms with their students, who will then submit evaluations and feedback leading to a recommendation for adoption to District leadership of one of these platforms starting in the 2024-2025 school year. The resolution of this issue is a top priority for the District moving forward, but remains a point of frustration for teachers, students and parents in the meantime.

3.3 STANDARDS-BASED GRADING IMPLEMENTATION – TRAINING AND SUPPORT

A cultural and philosophical shift as substantial as the transition to SBG requires a level of training and support for educators that is difficult in the best of times, especially in a district as large as SDUSD, and the added challenges of undertaking this initiative alongside the pressures of a global pandemic cannot be overstated. The District took a multi-faceted approach, leveraging Marzano's experience and resources for professional development and using the internet to distribute an ever-growing library of resources for educators. Table 3.3 shows the level of use and perceived usefulness of various training and support avenues for the teacher survey respondents each year. In general, the supports that teachers found most useful involved collaboration with other educators (both in and out of PLCs) and resources they found on their own, while Districtwide training and supports were rated lower in terms of usefulness.

Table 3.3 Utilization and response to available supports

Available Supports, Resources, and Professional Development Opportunities	% Utilized Resource		How useful was the resource?*		
	Yr 1	Yr 2	Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Useful
SBG PD facilitated by Marzano Resources	36%	38%	10%	49%	41%
District-provided PD or training focused on SBG	54%	63%	13%	42%	45%
District-provided tools or resources (CC/PS)	73%	81%	16%	53%	32%
Sitewide professional development regarding SBG	49%	61%	14%	48%	38%
Collaboration/planning relating to SBG in PLCs	71%	80%	23%	53%	24%
Collaboration with other educators outside of PLCs	65%	67%	30%	55%	14%
Information/resources sought out on your own	76%	77%	34%	52%	14%

* 2023 data not shown but nearly identical to 2022

Administrators reported that the early training was valuable for those who attended, but insufficient to adequately prepare teachers to implement Standards-Based Learning in their classrooms, or to become "trainers" for other teachers at their sites who did not attend the training. One administrator asserted, "the train-the-trainer model never works." However, most administrators reported that individual teachers who have personally embraced SBG have been able to take a leadership role within their departments.

In 2020-21 and 2021-22, Marzano-led professional development (PD) was focused primarily on teachers and administrators at sites. In 2022-23, in order to build internal capacity for SBG support to sites, the District focused the Marzano-led PD on central office curriculum leaders, and offered a 3-part, District-led PD series for teachers. However, despite strategically offering the series on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, the most common early-release days for sites, few teachers attended the District's series, with each session averaging 12 attendees representing 6 schools.

3.4 STANDARDS-BASED GRADING IMPLEMENTATION — CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Not surprisingly, a lack of time creates the biggest barriers to SBG implementation, according to teacher survey respondents, 75% of whom came into SBG believing that "making the switch to SBG requires more work from teachers." Lack of time accounted for three of the top five barriers identified by teachers—time to assess student work (a huge barrier for 71%), time for teacher team collaboration (a huge barrier for 50%), and time to align curriculum with SBG (a huge barrier for 48%). (See figure 3.17.) To address this issue, several schools are considering or planning changes to their schedules. For example, one school is moving from a traditional 6-period day to an 8-period A/B schedule to allow teachers collaborative prep time.

Other issues rated as "huge" barriers by a majority of teachers include PowerSchool functionality, as discussed above, and the clarity of SBG policies/best practices, which is further complicated by issues with communication between District leaders and classroom teachers. When the superintendent addressed teachers via Zoom at the start of the 2022-23 school year, many teachers reported that it was the first time in their careers that any superintendent had spoken to them directly.

Figure 3.17 Teacher-reported barriers to SBG implementation

To what degree is each of the following a barrier to your ability to implement standards-based grading?

■ Huge barrier   ■ Moderate barrier   ■ Not a barrier

	Huge barrier	Moderate barrier	Not a barrier
Time to assess student work	71%	5%	24%
Functionality of PowerSchool	61%	23%	16%
Clarity of standards-based grading policies / best practices	58%	29%	12%
Time to collaborate and plan with team during the day	50%	33%	17%
Time to align curricular resources and assessments	48%	39%	14%
District support	48%	34%	18%
Applicability of training	42%	40%	17%
Usability of disrict curricular resources	42%	38%	20%
Availability of disrict curricular resources	37%	34%	30%
Site support	26%	38%	37%

3.5 QUALITATIVE EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS

Three years after the SDUSD board approved a standards-based grading policy for secondary students, there remains a lot of confusion and uncertainty among teachers (and, in turn, among students and parents,) regarding exactly what is expected of them, and widely varying opinions about what SBG means and whether it is good or bad for students. Every focus site has teachers who are enthusiastic supporters of SBG and are moving forward and helping to lead others at their site, but we also heard that "the innovators are getting a lot of pushback and challenge [from parents and peers] and no recognition." One administrator told us, "The teachers who are involved are still totally bought in and don't want to ever go back," but others complain "we have to go to bat for a policy that isn't even ours!" and "we just feel lost." All of the administrators we spoke with support the philosophy behind SBG but struggle with how to best support the teachers at their sites who "need a blueprint so they know what they're supposed to be doing." Regrettably, comments from the teacher survey were overwhelmingly more critical than positive (see figure 3.18) and reveal a high level of frustration on the part of teachers.

Figure 3.18 Distribution of teacher survey comment categories
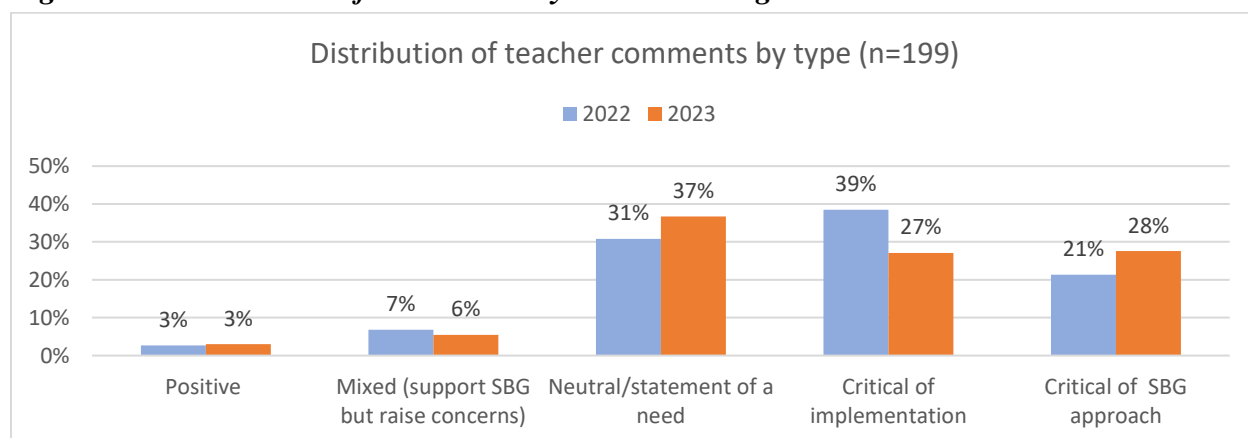
More specifically, some of the key points of teacher frustration include 1) the lack of district software that enables teachers to record mastery of individual standards, and then to convert this into a letter grade, neither of which the PowerSchool system can adequately handle, 2) disagreements among teachers, and their sense of a lack of direction from the District, on how to translate proficiency scales into letter grades, and 3) teachers' sense that they need better and more detailed training in SBG best practices.

We also observed a widespread lack of awareness among both teachers and administrators regarding SBG implementation at the District level (e.g., plans, expectations, resources, training.) For example, District leaders were disappointed by poor attendance at SBG PD sessions in 2022-23, but one site administrator told us they weren't aware of any supports or trainings provided to sites in 2022-23 and several teachers commented through the survey that they have not had any opportunities for training. This disconnect reflects the challenge of effective communication in a District with nearly 200 school sites and thousands of teachers. In order to minimize disruptions and demands on site staff, most communication from central office to sites is consolidated and distributed through a weekly "Principal Update" for administrators and "Educator Update" for teachers. Although this undoubtedly eases a burden, it also restricts the amount and depth of information teachers receive (literally, as there are word limits on submissions) and puts the onus on teachers, who are already overwhelmed by the demands of the

profession, to comb through sometimes pages of announcements from all areas of district operations to find critical SBG resources and instructional guidance. There are also reports that the list of educators who receive these updates is incomplete and/or outdated, so some may not be receiving this information at all.

4. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRENDS IN STUDENT OUTCOMES

4.1 OVERVIEW OF THE APPROACH

This section of the report provides an analysis of trends in academic GPA, a-g course completion, attendance, scores on the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA), and citizenship grades. Our goal was to compare trends in student outcomes in the years before the reform and prior to the pandemic (2016-17 to 2018-19) with outcomes from 2021-22 to 2022-23, the second year of our study In addition to studying overall trends, we also examined gaps in outcomes between student groups and looked at whether gaps narrowed or widened.

Hypotheses we examine are that 1) that as teachers learned to use only the citizenship grade to register any behavioral issues or late assignments (having removed them from the academic grade), it seems likely that academic GPA may have risen, while citizenship grades may have fallen and 2) as students are given multiple and varied opportunities to show growing proficiency of each Critical Concept, and as academic grades are purged of penalties for late assignments, student groups that historically have performed worse than average may have improved their GPA relative to other groups, reflecting a District goal of reducing inequality in outcomes through the SBG reform.

The data for this report include all students in grades 6-12 enrolled in San Diego Unified from 2014-15 to 2022-23. For measures of the number of college preparatory (a-g) semester courses taken per year or attempted per year, we focus on grades 9-12. Our methodology estimates trends in outcomes such as GPA using data from 2014-15 through 2018-19, and then linearly extrapolates that trend through 2022-23. We then compare actual outcomes in the last two school years to the predicted outcomes based on the linear extrapolation. This can tell us whether an outcome differs from pre-existing trends prior to the pandemic. In the graphs of trends over time, we also show outcomes in the two initial pandemic years, 2019-20 and 2020-21. However, due to the disruptions to education during this period, we exclude those from our estimate of pre-existing trends. Due to the pandemic, statewide testing was suspended so it is not possible to evaluate test scores from 2020 or 2021.

The pandemic's effects on all student outcomes will become readily apparent to the reader. These effects limit what we can say about the impact of the implementation of SBG itself, since COVID had such large effects in 2019-20 and especially 2020-21. We refer to the inherent uncertainties caused by COVID at some points below, while maintaining our focus on student outcomes in 2021-23, compared to the *pre-COVID trends* that we observe from 2014-15 through 2018-19.

Before looking at trends, it makes sense to reason through how to interpret breaks from the pre-pandemic trend, both during the two main COVID years, 2019-20 and 2020-21, and the first year of this study (2021-22). We know that nationwide, students faced multiple challenges and hardships during 2019-20 and 2020-21, so we might expect students to perform worse than the pre-existing trend during those years. If we find that students were still performing worse in 2022-23 than they did pre-pandemic, that might be partly or wholly attributable to the effects of the pandemic. The challenge is how to determine whether the SBG efforts in 2022-23 have

affected trends. If we see an improvement in 2022-23 relative to the two prior years, that improvement could be due either to the focus on SBG or to the effects of the pandemic receding. If, instead, we see a further decline in student outcomes in 2022-23 (when the pandemic's effects should be receding) relative to the two preceding pandemic years, any such decline could be attributable to the SBG or other policy changes in the District. One exception might be for the percentage of days absent. Because school was online for most of 2020-21, but in 2021-22 most students attended in person, but were cautioned to stay home if they had symptoms of a respiratory illness, it is quite conceivable that absence rates could have increased in 2021-22 solely due to the pandemic.

4.2 DETAILED FINDINGS

ACADEMIC GPA

At the end of 2021-22, we reported the initial results of standards-based grading while schools were still in the initial stages of implementing the policy. With the addition of another academic year, we are now able to see how the trend has continued. Figure 4.1 presents the trend of average secondary school GPA by year while appendix figures 2-5 show trends by student groups. As explained earlier, the trend line is based on a linear regression that is the best linear fit for the trend in GPA in the pre-pandemic years 2014-15 through 2018-19. The hollow circles represent the average GPA during the pandemic years, and these were not included in the estimated trend. Overall, academic GPA in 2021-22 and 2022-23 has lagged the predicted trend prior to the pandemic but there is a slight improvement in academic GPA in 2022-23 overall among all students relative to the prior year.

Figure 4.1: Trend in Academic GPA
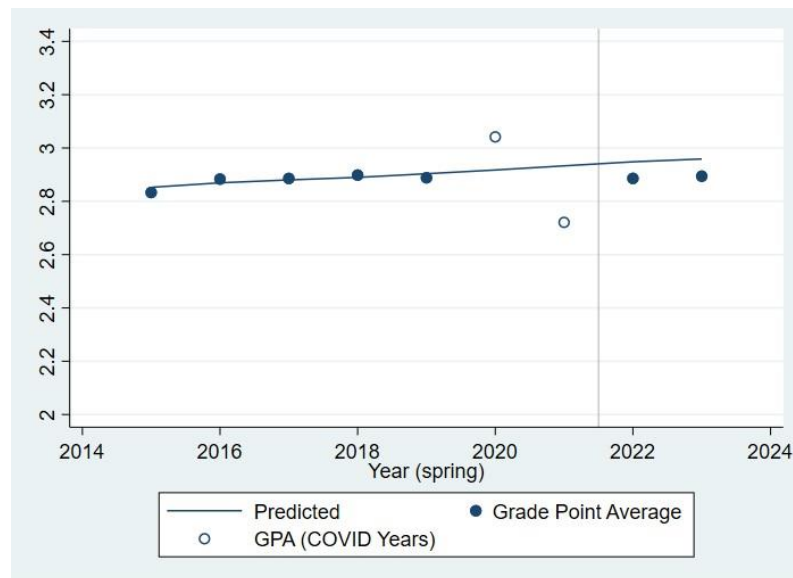
Note: In this and later figures the year refers to spring of the school year. So, 2022 refers to the 2021-22 school year.

In appendix figure 2, which shows results by race/ethnicity, White and Asian students in 2021-22 and 2022-23 were below the predicted trend with White students both quite a bit below the predicted GPA and below Asian students, whereas the two groups were roughly equal prior to 2021-22. Following a pandemic drop in GPA along with all other races/ethnicities, Hispanic

and African American students have recovered back to the predicted trend, with African-American students slightly above the trend in 2022-23. This shows some indication that the decoupling of citizenship from academic marks, as intended with Standards Based Grading, is perhaps working for that student group. As for gaps in academic GPA between races/ethnicities, the gap does appear to be narrowing, primarily due to the decrease in average GPA among Whites and Asians whereas the GPA among Hispanic and African American students did not decrease as much.

In appendix figure 3, which divides results by gender, we see a decrease in academic GPA for both groups following the pandemic in 2021-22 and 2022-23. In the non-female group (male and nonbinary), there is a recovery from the pandemic low in 2020-21 with a return to just below the predicted trend. Among females, there is also a recovery from the pandemic low, but they remained below the pre-pandemic trend. Because female students on average had higher GPA than non-female students in each year, this leads to a narrowing of the gap between female and non-female students.

Looking at students by English learner (EL) status in appendix figure 4, we see a notable decrease in academic GPA among EL students from 2021-22 to 2022-23 relative to non-EL students. During the pandemic year of 2020-21, the drop in GPA was sharp and significant relative to non-EL students, which makes the recovery in overall GPA the following year noteworthy. However, the GPA among non-EL students increased slightly in 2022-23 from the previous year as opposed to EL students who had a lower GPA from the previous year, leading to a widening of the gap in academic achievement.

One observation of note is that the post-pandemic trend among students with more highly educated parents (greater than a high school diploma) is upward in terms of academic GPA whereas the trend among students with less educated (high school diploma or less) parents is slightly downward. This is illustrated in appendix figure 5. There has been an unsettling pre-pandemic trend in that students with less highly educated parents have had a decreasing academic GPA which was exacerbated by the pandemic. Notice that average academic GPA for both groups falls in 2020-21 relative to the previous years, yet for students with less educated parents, the drop is significantly larger. There was a recovery back to the trend in 2021-22, and in that year and the following year, the academic GPA for students with less educated parents was slightly below the predicted trend whereas students with more highly educated parents appear to have been further below the predicted trend. Although the pandemic had less effect on the academic GPA of students with more highly educated parents, it appears that the gap between the two groups did narrow slightly in 2021-22 and 2022-23 due to the students with more highly educated parents not quite recovering back to the trend while students with less highly educated parents recovering to just below the trend.

CITIZENSHIP GPA

Because the policy that the district used to have teachers assign citizenship marks changed in 2021-22, average grades have been standardized to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of 1. This prevents us from comparing trends over time but will allow for a more meaningful look at gaps. Appendix figures 6 to 10 show the trends in citizenship GPA ("CGPA") by student group.

Figure 4.2 Trend in Citizenship GPA (CGPA), by Ethnicity
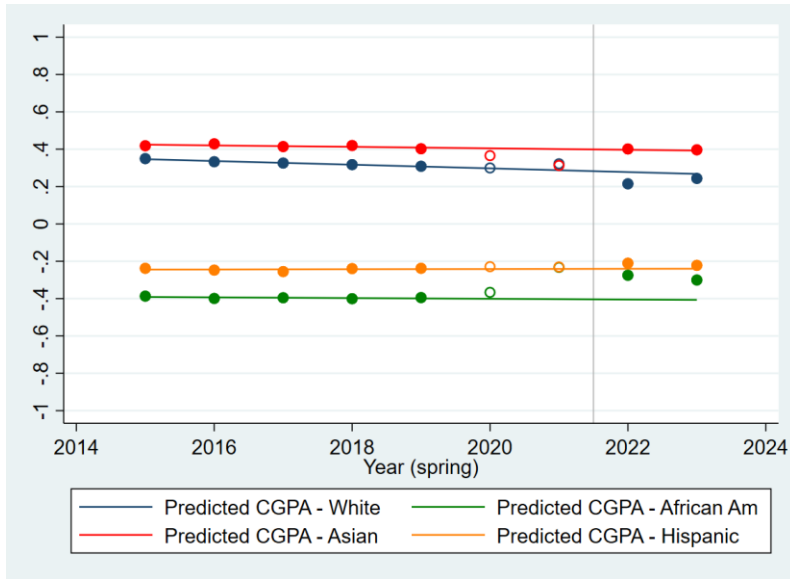
Figure 4.2 shows trends by race/ethnicity. There are noticeable improvements in standardized CGPA among African American and Hispanic students which leads to a noticeable narrowing of the gaps between those groups and White and Asian students. Even during the 2020-21 school year, there was an increase in CGPA among African American students relative to other ethnic groups. This is an encouraging sign that the policies put in place are perhaps having an effect in at least one student group. But again, assigning cause and effect here is very difficult because the pandemic's impact on student outcomes has been so large.

Improvement in CGPA in the non-female group and a reduction in CGPA among female students led to a narrowing of the gap between the two groups as seen in appendix figure 8, although the pre-pandemic trend was already showing a narrowing trend. It appears the gap narrowed faster in the last two years.

For EL and non-EL students, the gap between the two has not narrowed. EL students are above the mean citizenship GPA across the district while non-EL students are below the mean as shown in appendix figure 9. In 2021-22 and 2022-23 there does not appear to be much movement between the two groups and the gap between them appears to be about the same.

One encouraging sign was the improvement, above pre-pandemic trend, in CGPA among students with less educated parents relative to students with more highly educated parents as shown in appendix figure 10. Along with a small decrease in CGPA among students with more highly educated parents, the gap between the two appears to have narrowed.

COLLEGE PREPARATORY COURSE (UC/CSU A-G) ATTEMPTED AND COMPLETED

Figures 4.3 and 4.4 show, for all students, the number of college prep courses attempted and completed. Appendix figures 12-15 and 17-20 show, for student groups, the courses attempted and completed, respectively. The overall trend in college prep course taking shows that courses attempted increased in 2021-22 and 2022-23 over 2020-21 but courses passed decreased during that time period. There appears to have been an immediate increase in courses attempted in 2020-21 (the first full year of the pandemic) followed by a decrease in the overall average number of courses attempted the following year. By 2022-23, the number of courses

attempted had begun rising again. This was mirrored by the courses completed, which is an encouraging sign as course completion did not decrease over time.

Figure 4.3 Trend in annual a-g course attempted, overall
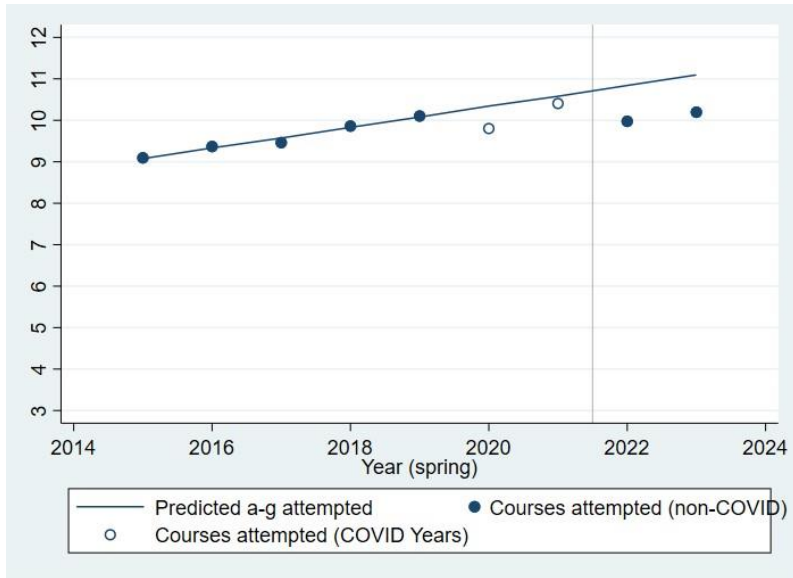
Figure 4.4 Trend in annual a-g courses completed, overall
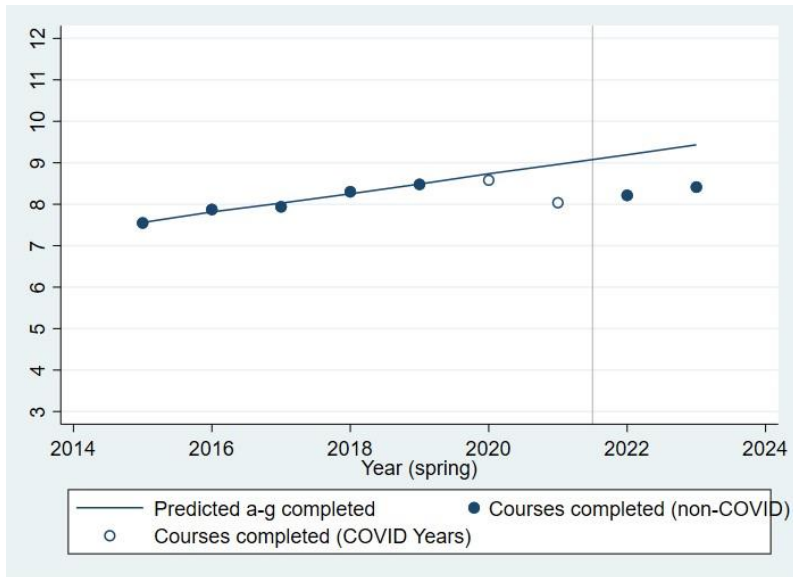
Prior to the pandemic, the predicted trend for a-g courses attempted among Hispanic students was a narrowing in the gap between White and Asian students. The gap was largely neutralized by 2018-19. In 2021-22 and 2022-23, there was very little gap between White and Hispanic students. African American students continued to lag in a-g courses attempted. Unfortunately, the courses attempted did not match the courses completed and we can still see a distinct gap between Hispanic students and White students in course completion. This is one area where the gap has not narrowed and will require more persistent efforts to make more progress.

Overall, the number of courses attempted has been increasing over time, but both 2021-22 and 2022-23 levels were still slightly below 2018-19 levels. What is interesting is that for

courses attempted, the gap between female/non-female has narrowed. However, the gap for courses passed remained the same, which means that non-female students are not passing the attempted college prep courses as often as females. In both the courses attempted and courses passed, the values for both female and non-female are below the predicted trend based on pre-pandemic years.

Prior to the pandemic, the gap in a-g courses attempted between EL and non-EL students narrowed over time. The gap reached a minimum in 2019 and then widened during the pandemic. That gap remained in 2021-22 and 2022-23, although both groups did show improvements in courses attempted. For courses passed, the story is a bit different. Although the gap was narrowing for courses passed until 2018-19, the pandemic exacerbated the situation, and we noticed a steep decrease in a-g courses passed during the pandemic. Although the number of a-g courses passed increased in 2021-22 and 2022-23 among non-EL students, the number of courses passed among EL students remained flat.

In terms of parental education level, the trend prior to the pandemic was a steep narrowing of the gap in courses attempted by students with less highly educated parents compared to students with more highly educated parents. In 2021-22 and 2022-23, the gap became very small but both groups were well below the pre-pandemic prediction. There is a different story when looking at courses passed. Even though students with less highly educated parents were taking more college prep courses, they were completing those courses at a lower rate than students with more highly educated parents. This trend continued through 2021-22 and 2022-23 where we see students with less highly educated parents substantially underperforming the predicted trend, as were students with more highly educated parents. Notably, the gap in a-g courses completed in 2022-23 was similar to pre-pandemic levels.

ATTENDANCE

Because the pandemic had such an enormous impact on attendance, we will comment mostly on trends over time. Overall, the percent of time absent among all students increased in 2020-21, the first full year after the pandemic began and the first year of SBG implementation. Absences peaked the following year in 2021-22 and then began to decrease in 2022-23 as shown in figure 4.5. The same pattern can be seen in each of the student group graphs. Note that the return to classrooms was initiated in August 2021, which corresponds to the peak in percent of time absent. As there were many factors which could have contributed to the peak in percent of time absent, this report will focus on the data rather than attempt to interpret the causes.

In 2021-22 and 2022-23 (the years to the right of the vertical line in appendix figures 23-25), the percent of time absent among Hispanic and African American students was quite a bit higher than White and Asian students. EL students also were affected at a greater rate than non-EL students in the same time span. Differences were also seen by parental education level,, as students with less educated parents had higher rates of absences than students with more highly educated parents. Parental education level tends to be correlated with socioeconomic status and access to technology which impacts distance learning outcomes. The peak of the coronavirus omicron variant occurred in January 2022, during the middle of the 2021-22 school year. Undoubtedly, many students were affected by this and those without access to online learning likely were affected to a greater degree.

Figure 4.5 Trend in percent of days absent, overall
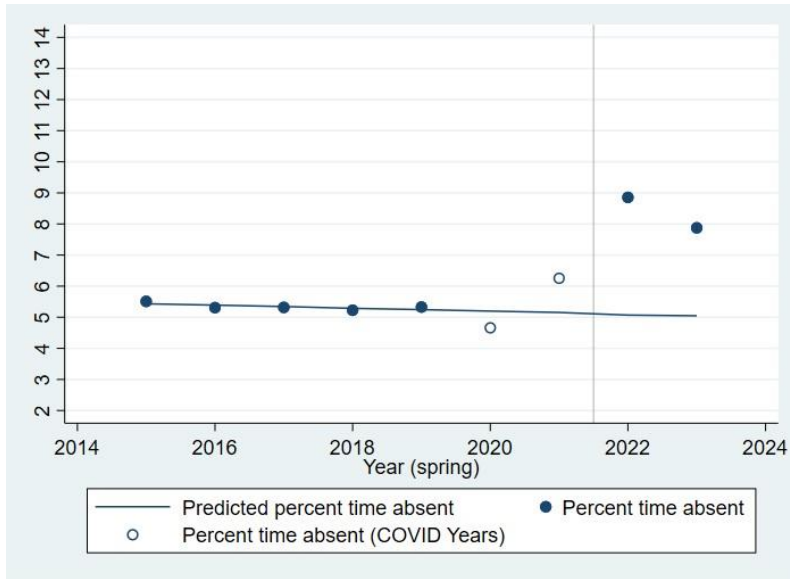
With the return to state standardized testing in spring 2022, the percent of students meeting or exceeding standards on the ELA portion of the CA Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) decreased compared with spring 2019 but improved the following year. (See figure 4.6.) Figure 4.7 shows that the percent of students meeting or exceeding standards in math decreased to an even greater extent than in ELA from 2019 to 2022. This pattern was mirrored by gender, race/ethnicity, and parental education level (appendix figures 26-35). Among EL students, the percent of students meeting or exceeding standards in ELA decreased in 2023.

Figure 4.6 Trend in percent of students meeting/exceeding standards: Overall CAASPP ELA
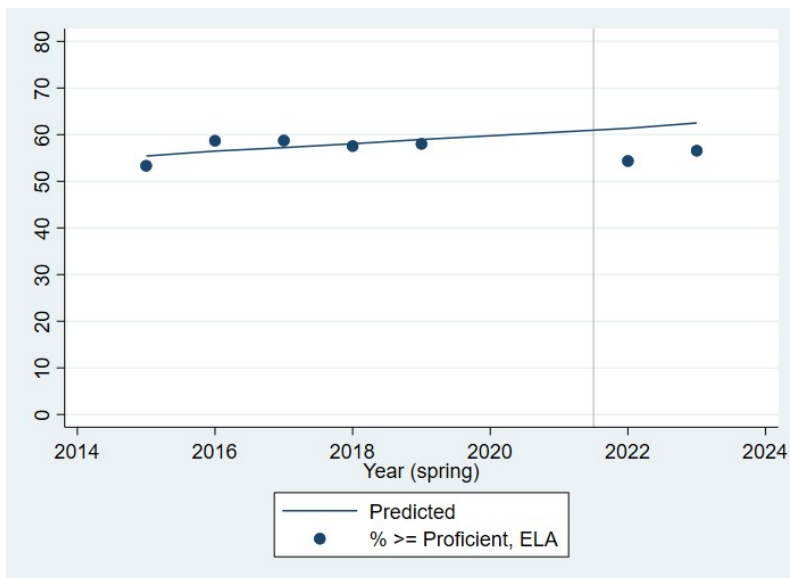
Figure 4.7 Trend in percent of students meeting/exceeding standards: Overall CAASPP Math
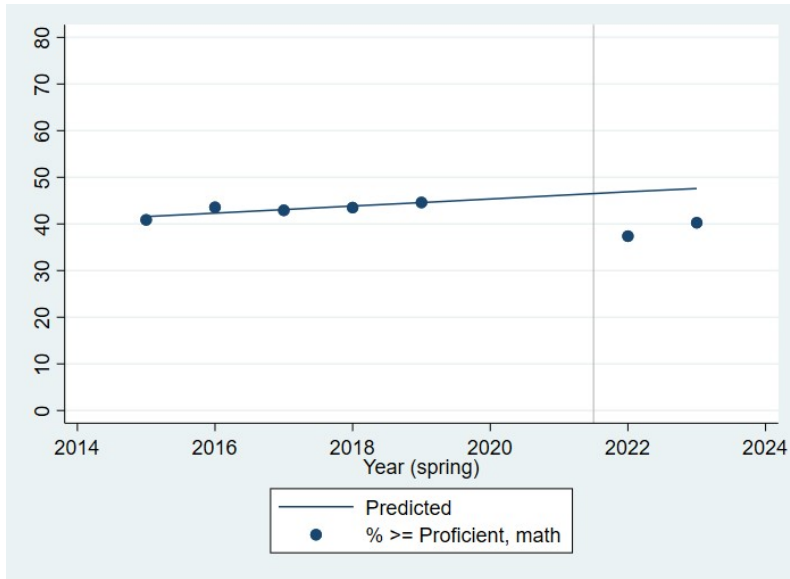
4.3 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS CONCLUSIONS

The limitations on our ability to draw conclusions from the data due to the coincidence of SDUSD's SBG implementation with the COVID pandemic cannot be overstated. However, there are some findings that, if trends continue, may indicate positive outcomes of the transition to a standards-based system.

In 2021-22 and 2022-23, the years covered by this study, academic GPA lagged behind predictions based on pre-pandemic/SBG trends overall and for White and Asian students but did not drop for African American and Hispanic students, who have historically had lower GPAs than their White and Asian peers. Similarly, the difference between predictions and post-pandemic/SBG GPA was greater for female students and those with more highly educated parents compared with non-female students and those whose parents were not as highly educated who have also had historically lower GPAs. This may be an indication that the SBG policy is having an intended gap-closing effect on grades. There is also encouraging evidence of increased citizenship marks for African American students relative to their peers post COVID/SBG, which may be due, at least in part, to the careful evaluation of the factors that contribute to both academic and citizenship marks under SBG, and suggest a more equitable approach to evaluating student performance across the board. The coming years will provide more evidence to aid in understanding how the transition to standard-based learning framework affects secondary students' academic and behavioral outcomes.

Appendix

The following figures are the complete set of results from the seven outcomes and four major subgroups. The outcomes include: academic GPA, citizenship GPA, percent of time absent, number of college prep courses attempted, number of college prep courses completed, percent of students scoring at or above the standard on CAASP ELA, and the percent of students scoring at or above the standard on CAASP math. The subgroups include: ethnicity, gender, English learner status, and parental education level.

Appendix figure 1: Academic GPA overall trend
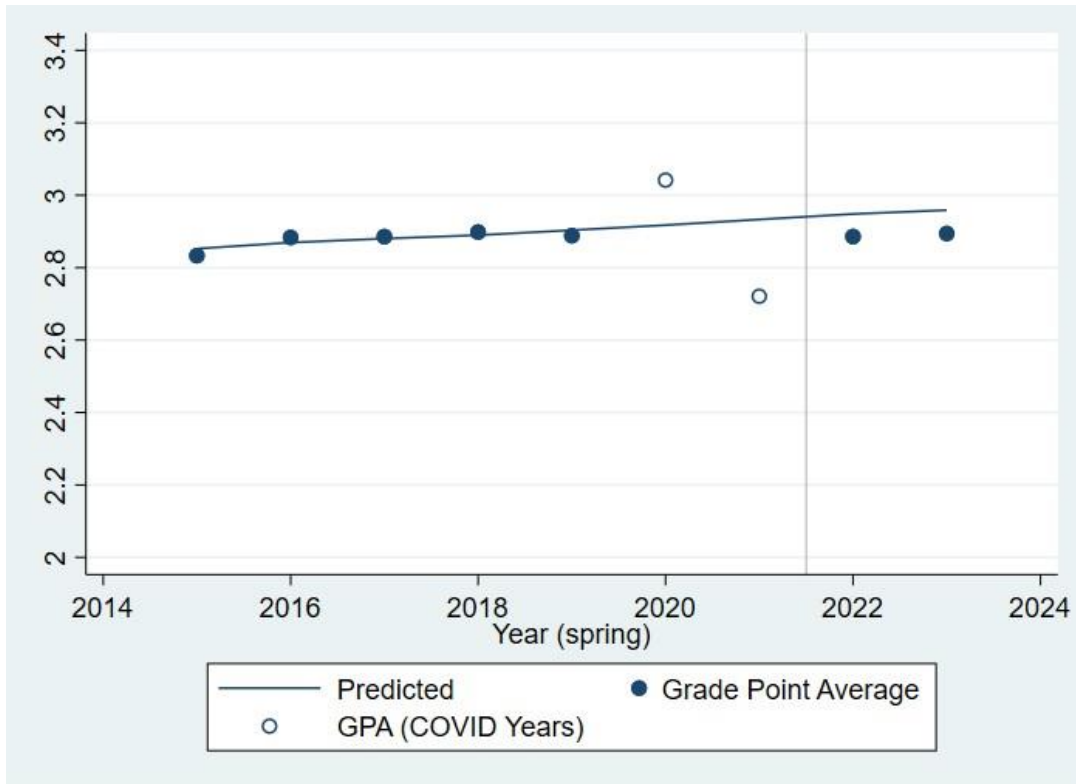
Appendix figure 2: Academic GPA trend by ethnicity
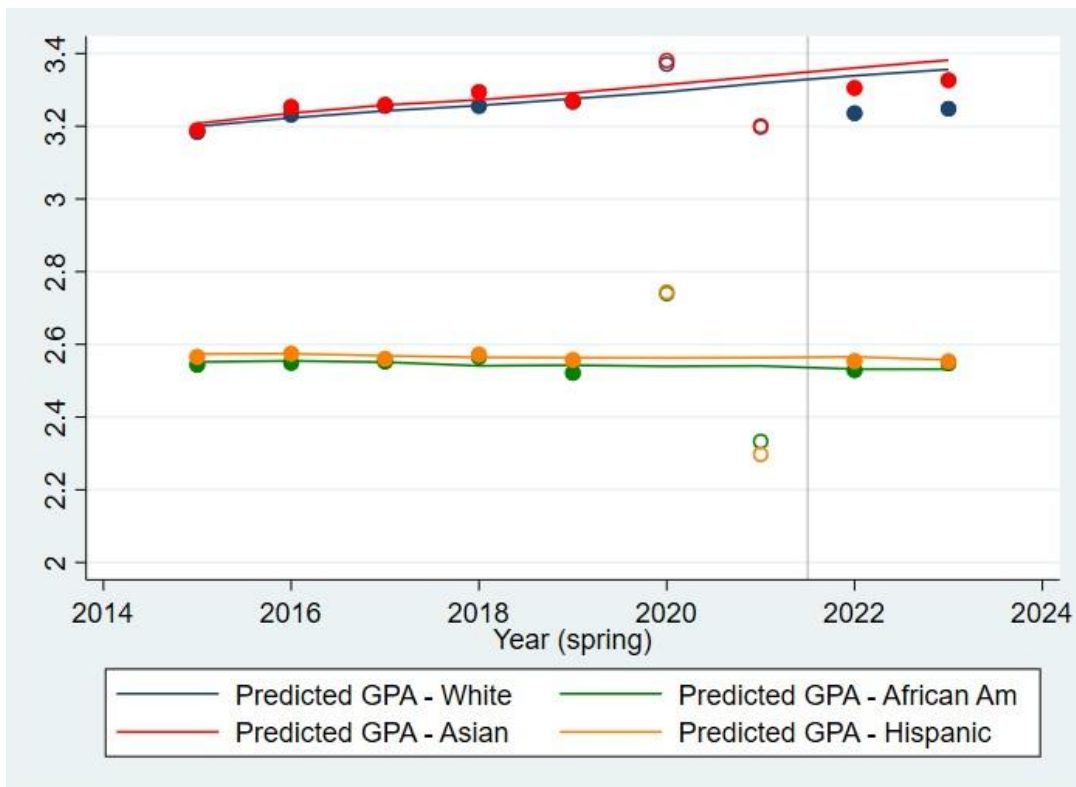
Appendix figure 3: Academic GPA trend by gender
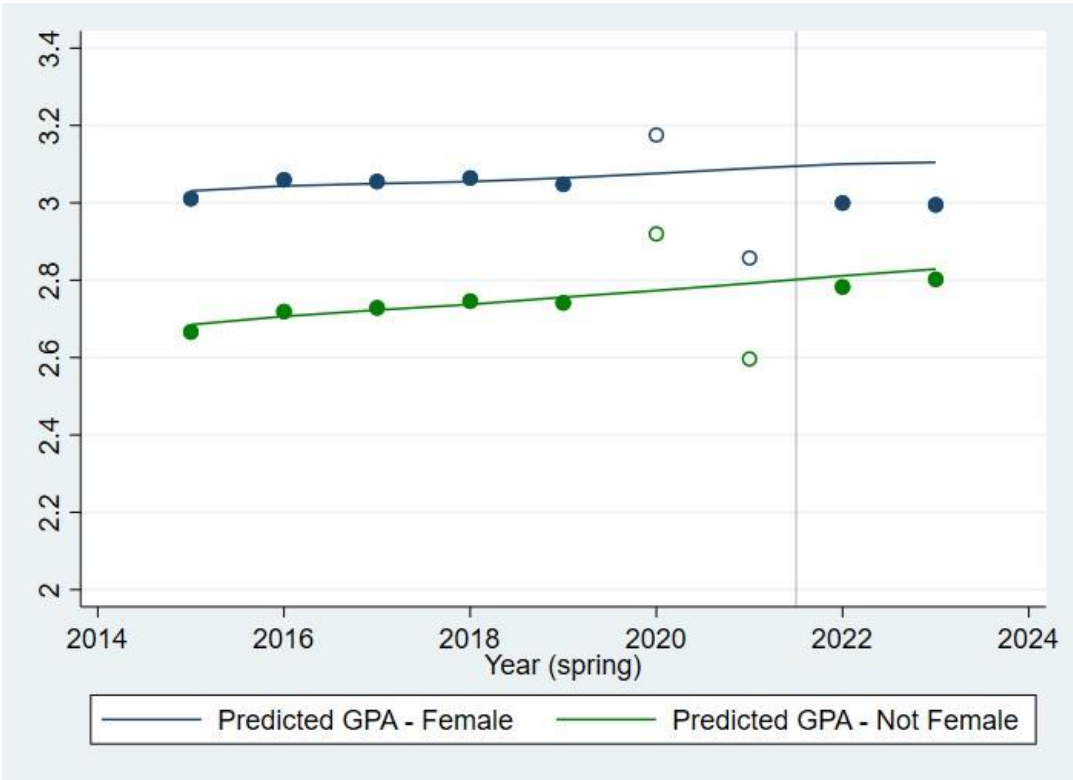
Appendix figure 4: Academic GPA trend by English learner status
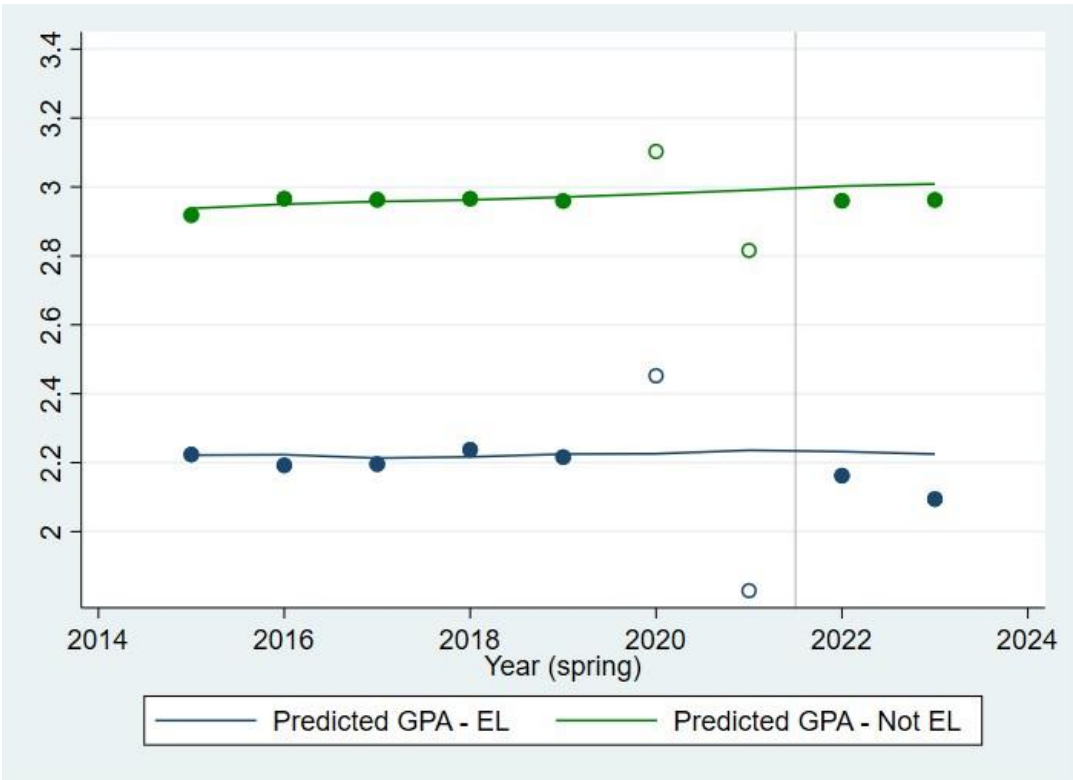
Appendix figure 5: Academic GPA trend by parent education level
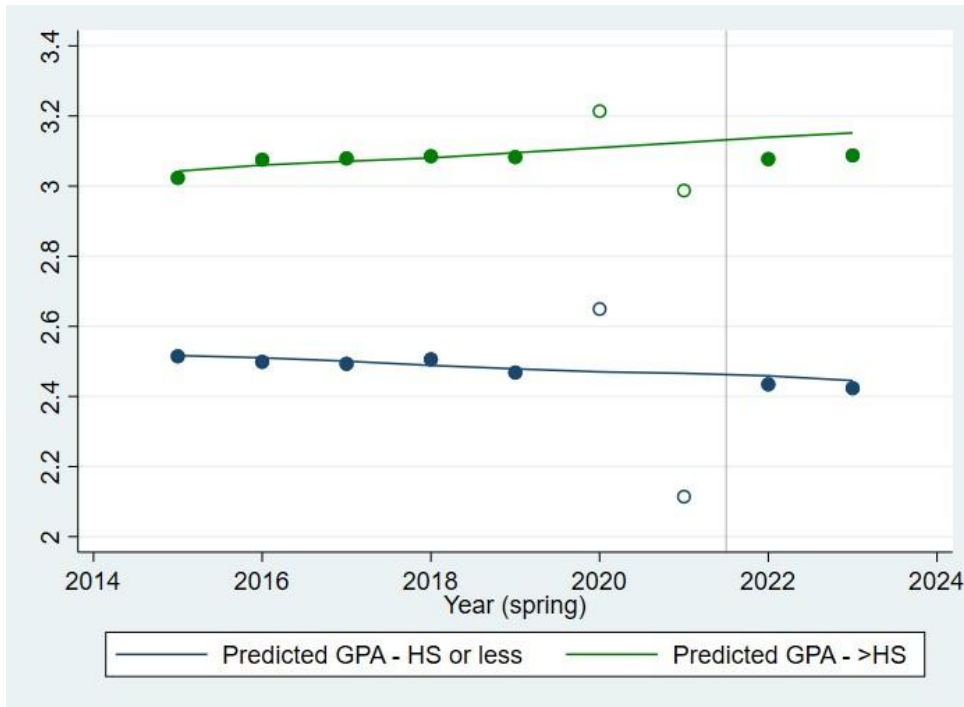
Below, we note that because we standardized citizenship GPA it has an average of 0 in each year. But this facilitates comparisons of trends in gaps by student subgroup, which is shown below appendix figure 6.

Appendix figure 6: Citizenship GPA overall trend
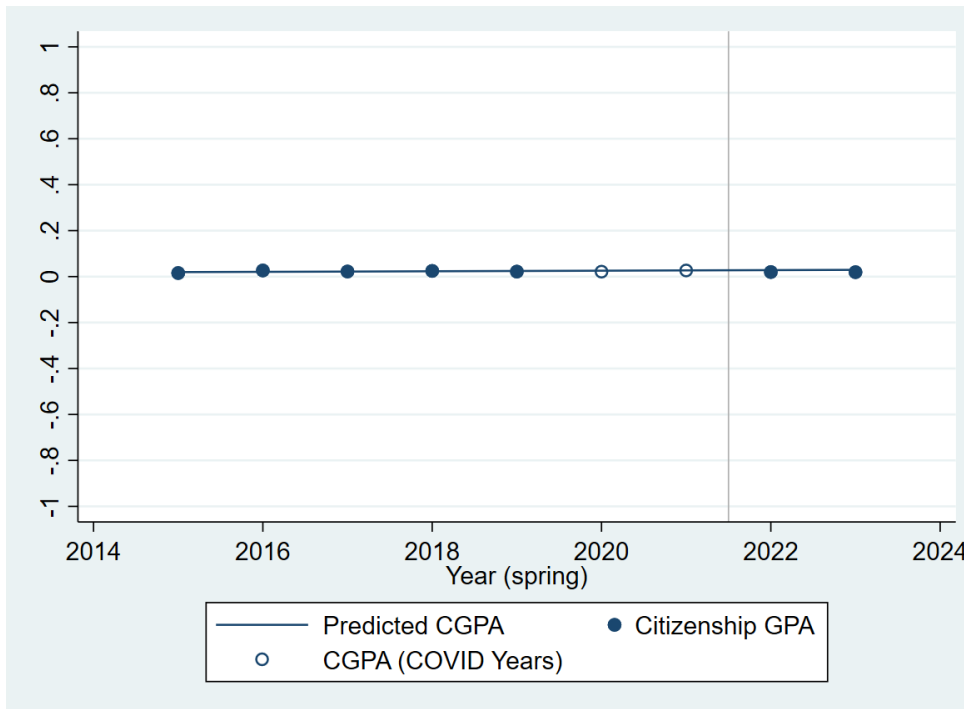
Appendix figure 7: Citizenship GPA trend by ethnicity
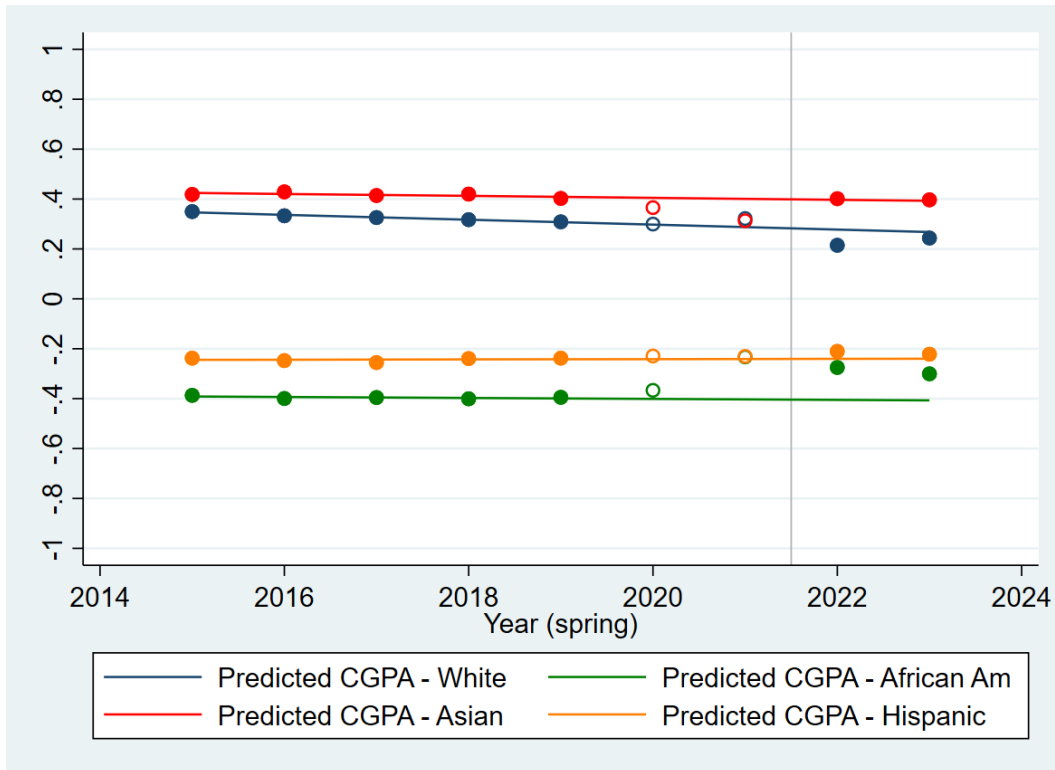
Appendix figure 8: Citizenship GPA trend by gender
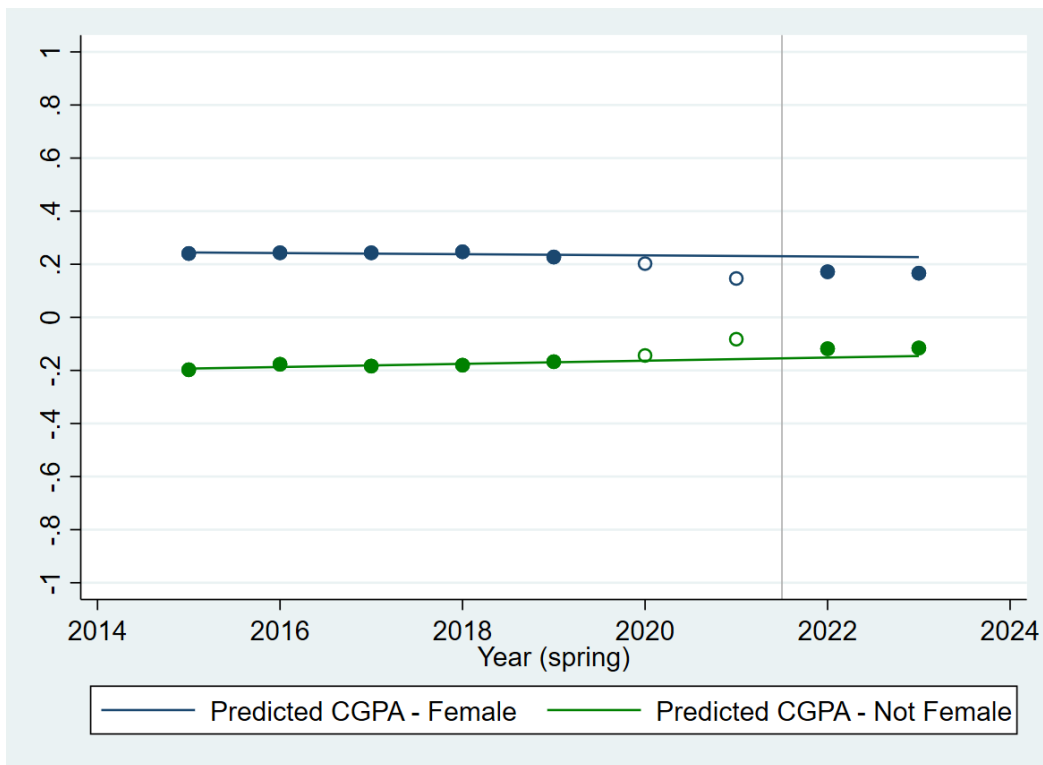
Appendix figure 9: Citizenship GPA trend by English learner status
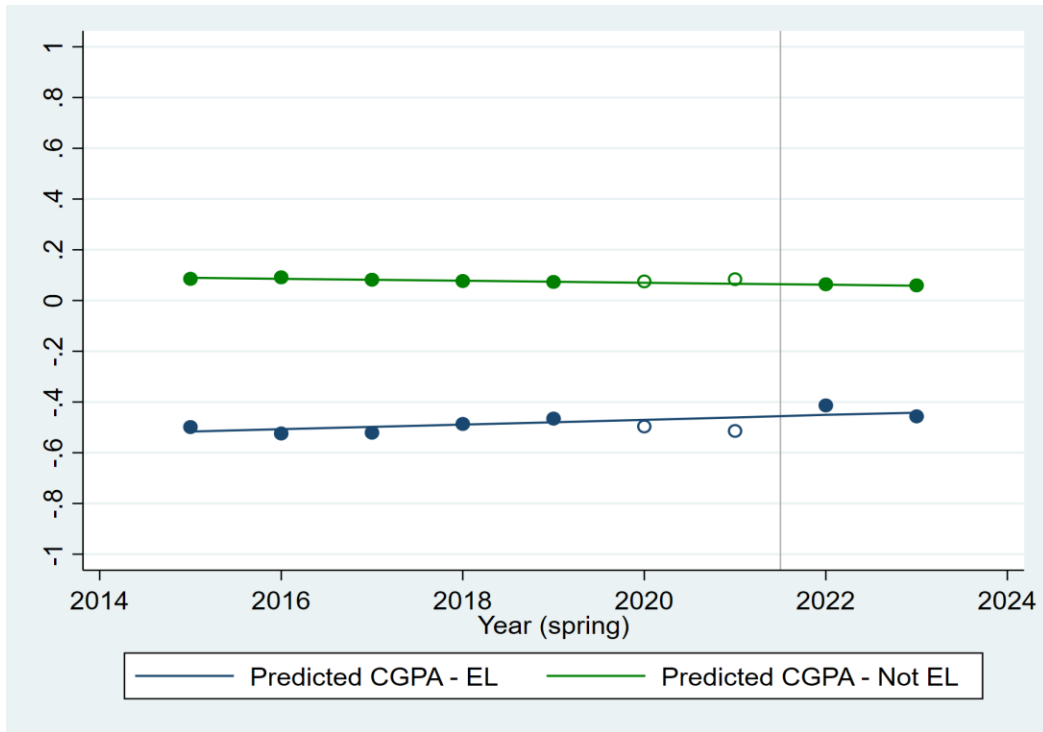
Appendix figure 10: Citizenship GPA trend by parent education level
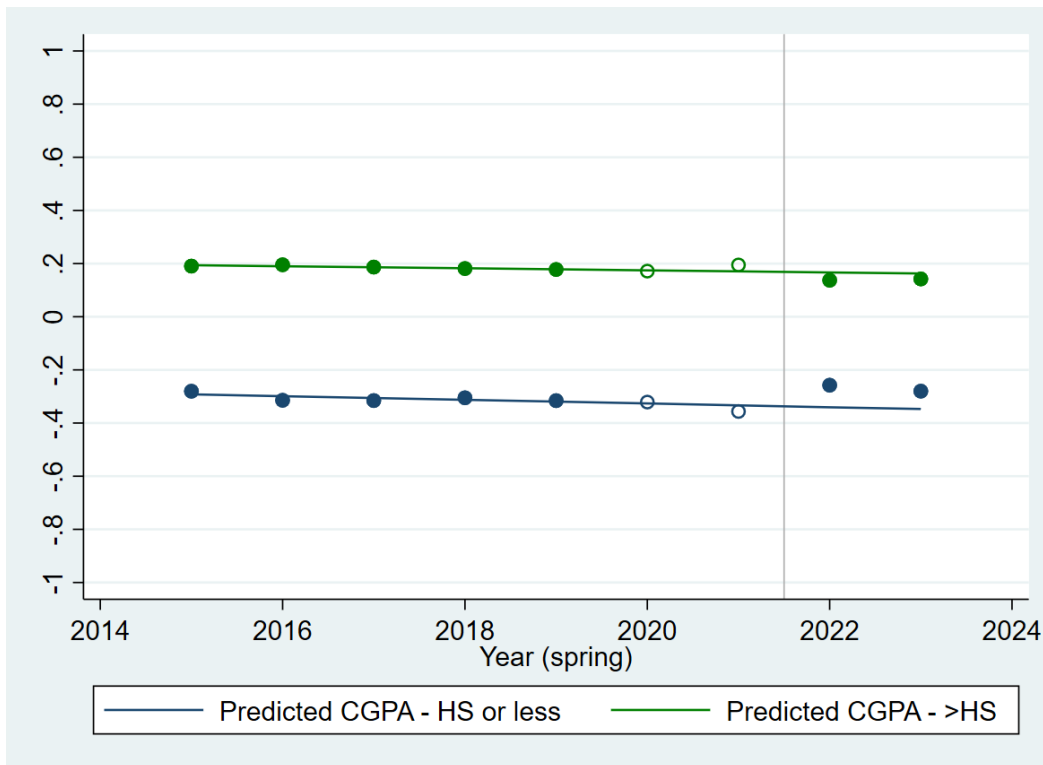
Appendix figure 11: Number of college prep courses attempted, overall trend
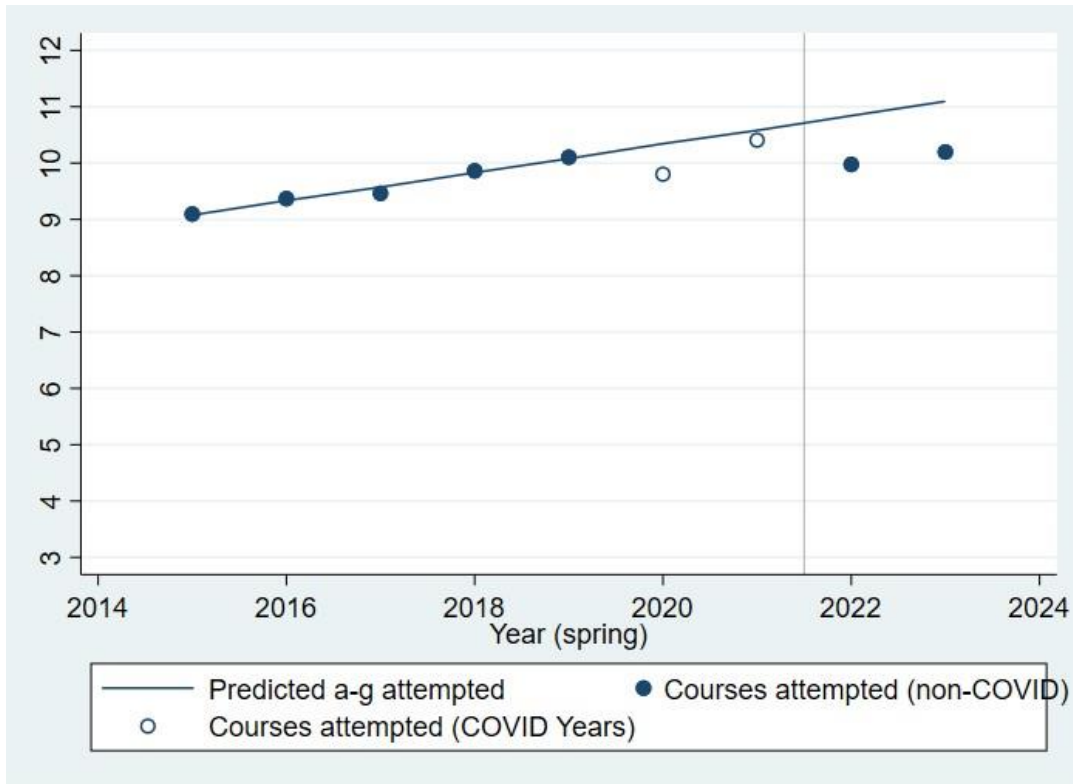
Appendix figure 12: Number of college prep courses attempted trend by ethnicity
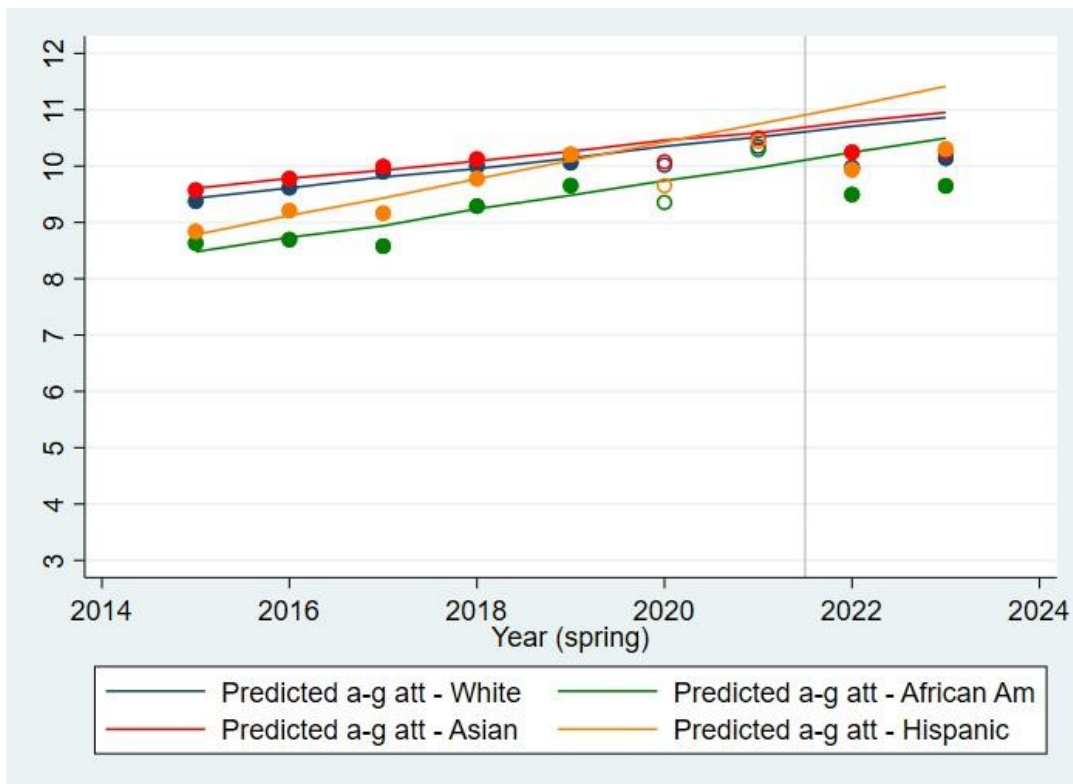
Appendix figure 13: Number of college prep courses attempted trend by gender
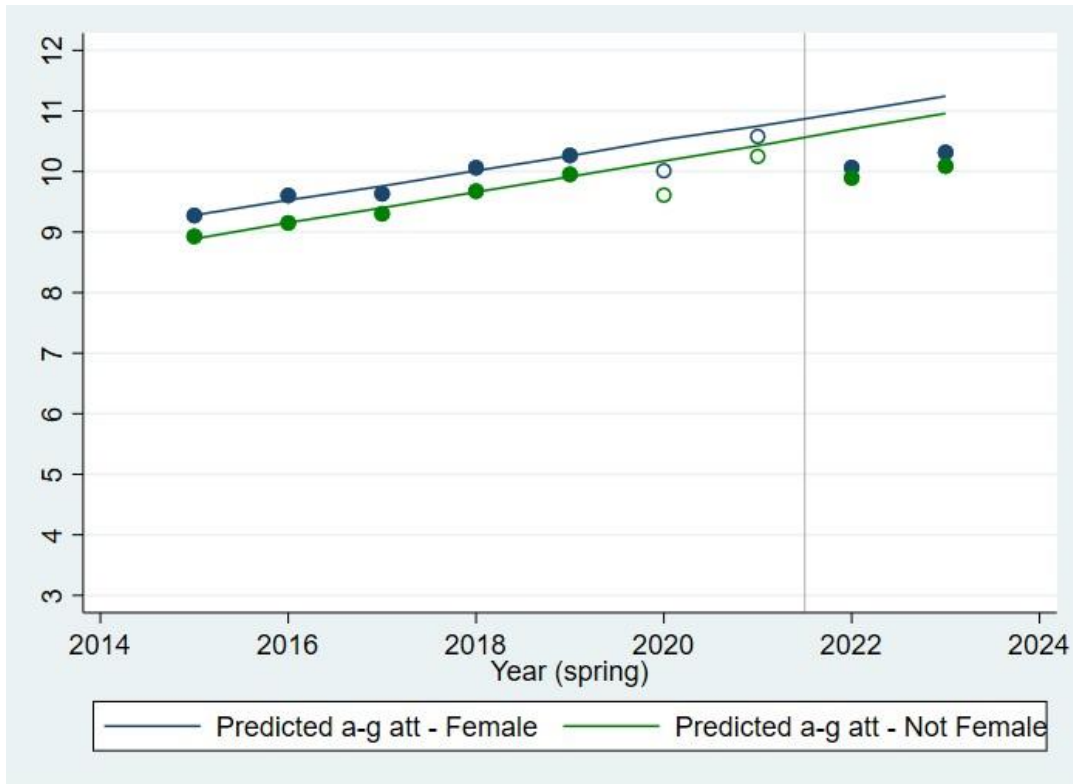
Appendix figure 14: Number of college prep courses attempted trend by English learner status
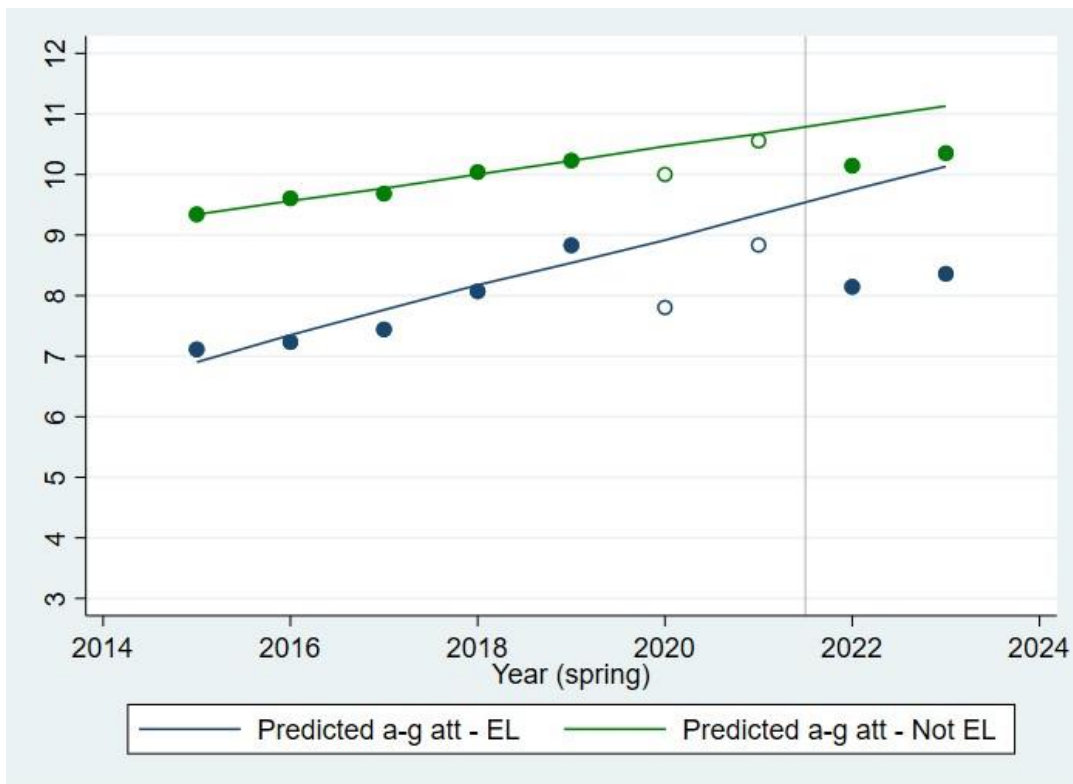
Appendix figure 15: Number of college prep courses attempted trend by parent education level
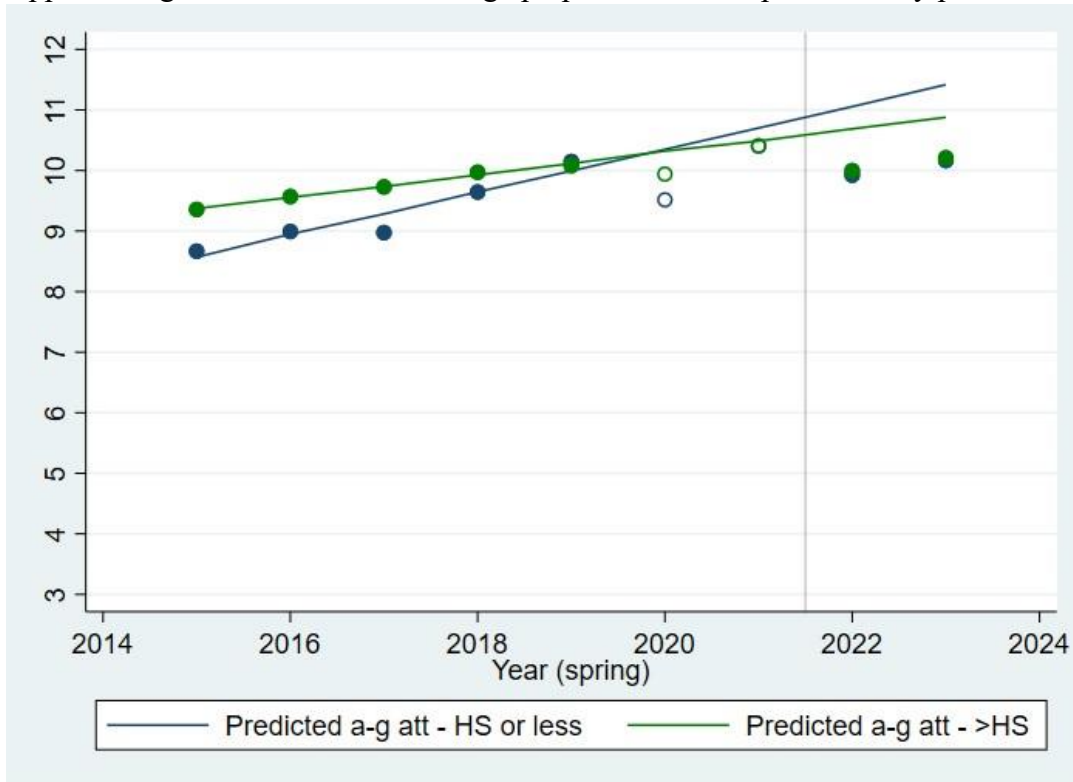
Appendix figure 16: Number of college prep courses completed overall trend
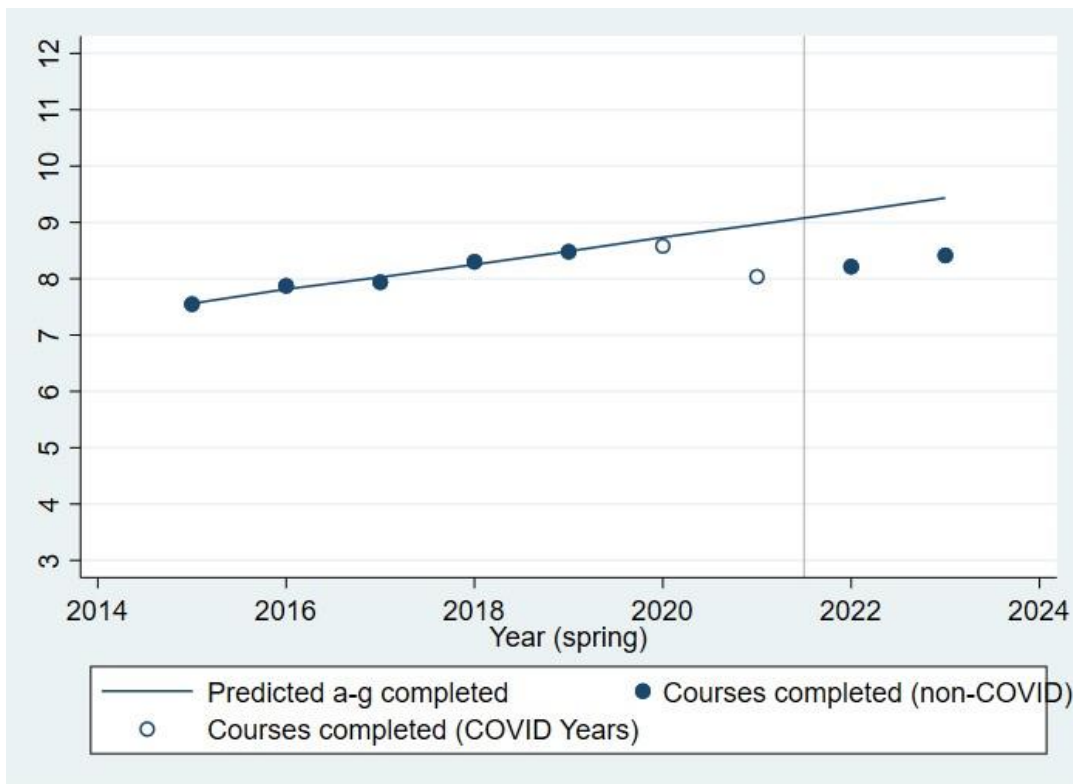
Appendix figure 17: Number of college prep courses completed trend by ethnicity
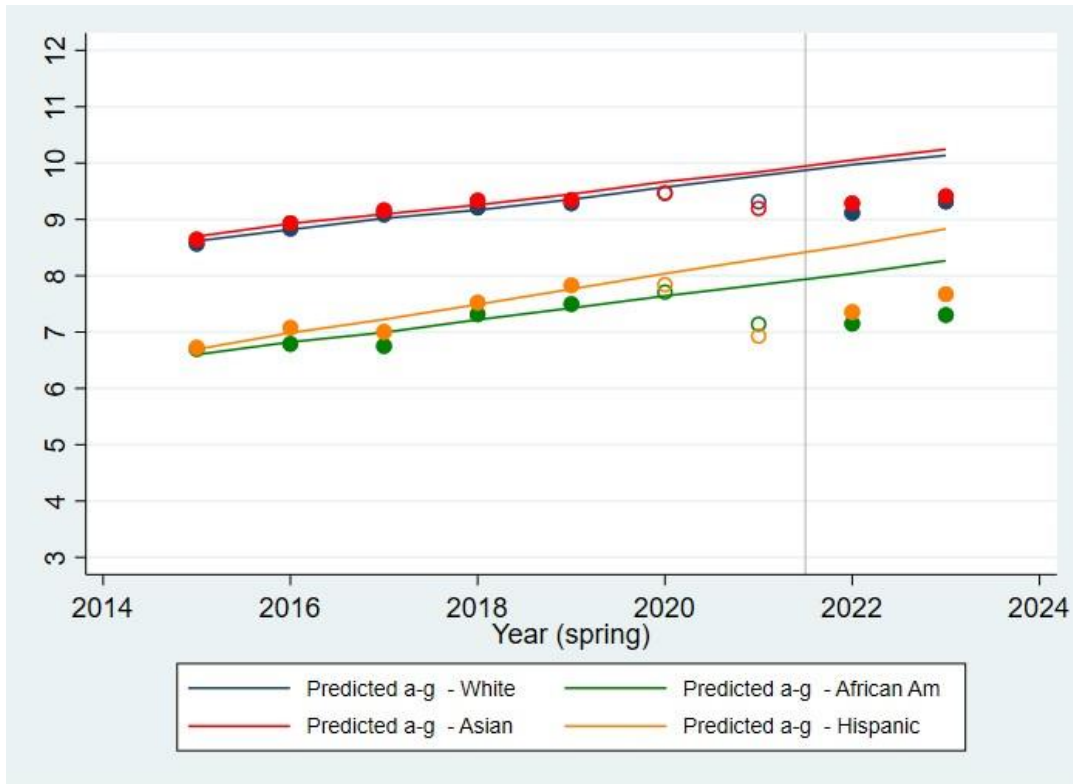
Appendix figure 18: Number of college prep courses completed trend by gender
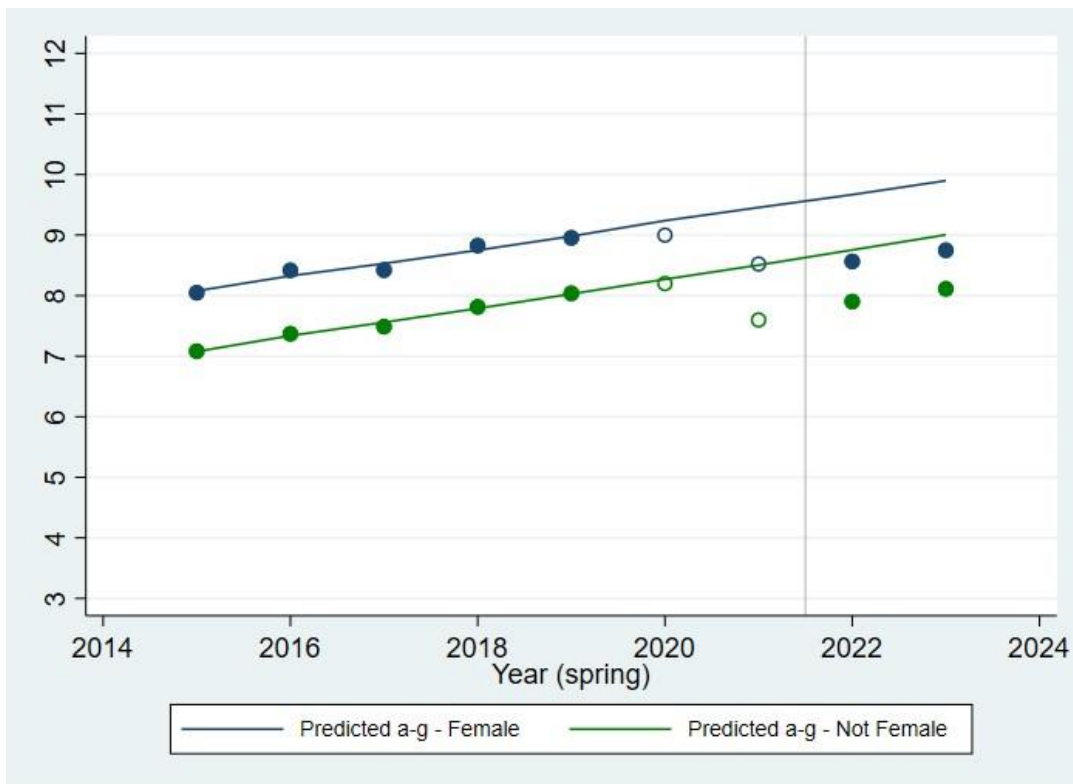
Appendix figure 19: Number of college prep courses completed trend by English learner status
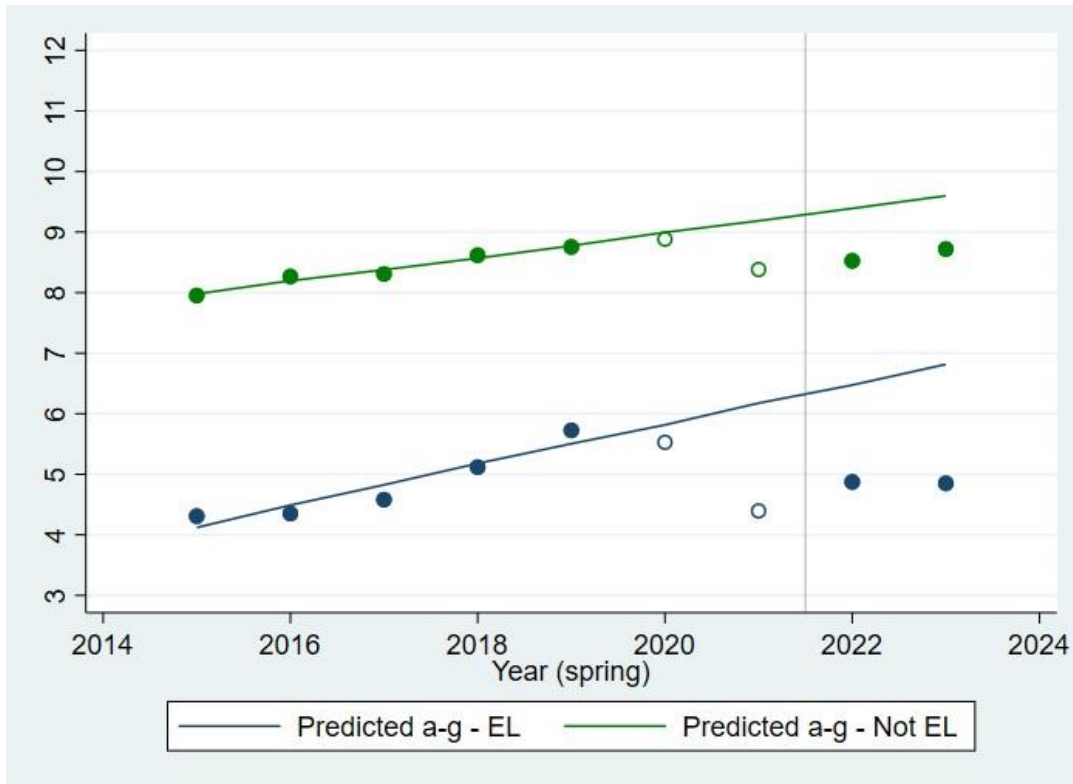
Appendix figure 20: Number of college prep courses completed trend by parent education level
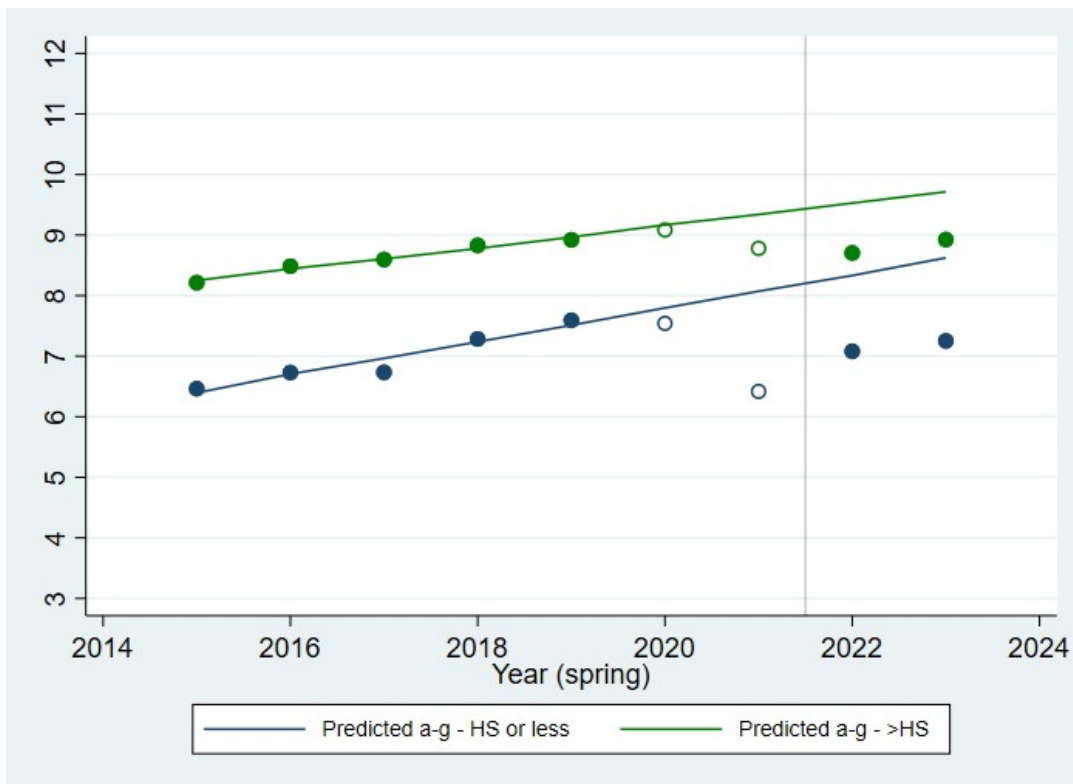
Appendix figure 21: Percent of time absent overall trend
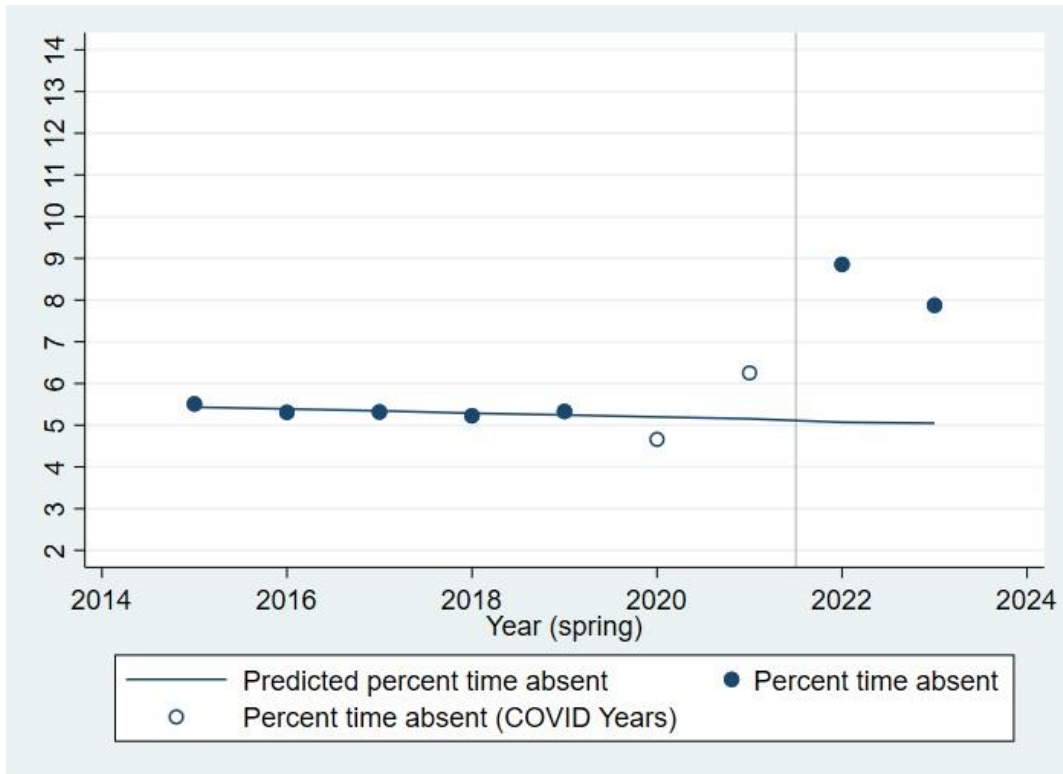
Appendix figure 22: Percent of time absent trend by ethnicity
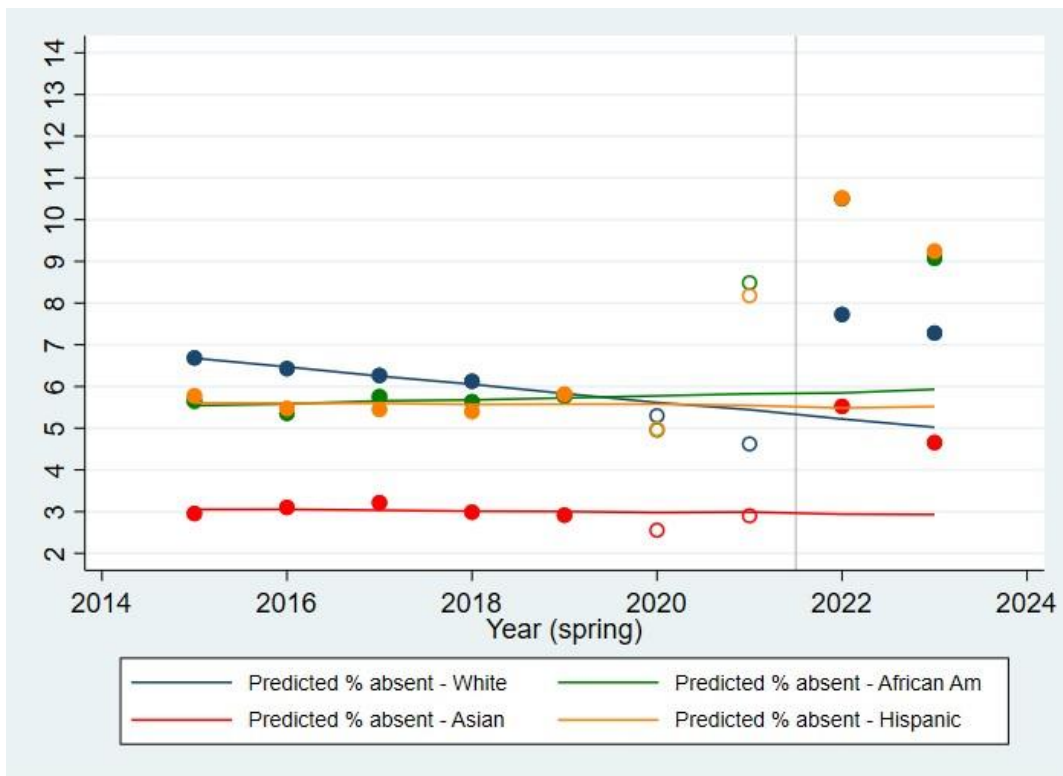
Appendix figure 23: Percent of time absent trend by gender
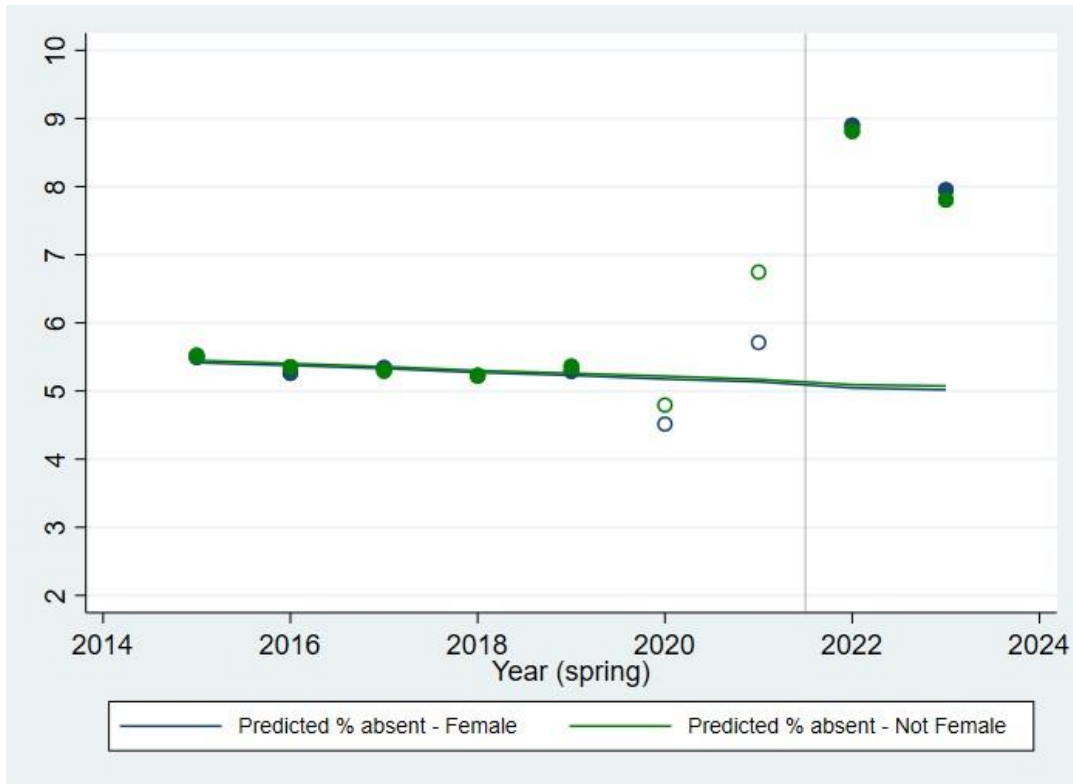
Appendix figure 24: Percent of time absent trend by English learner status
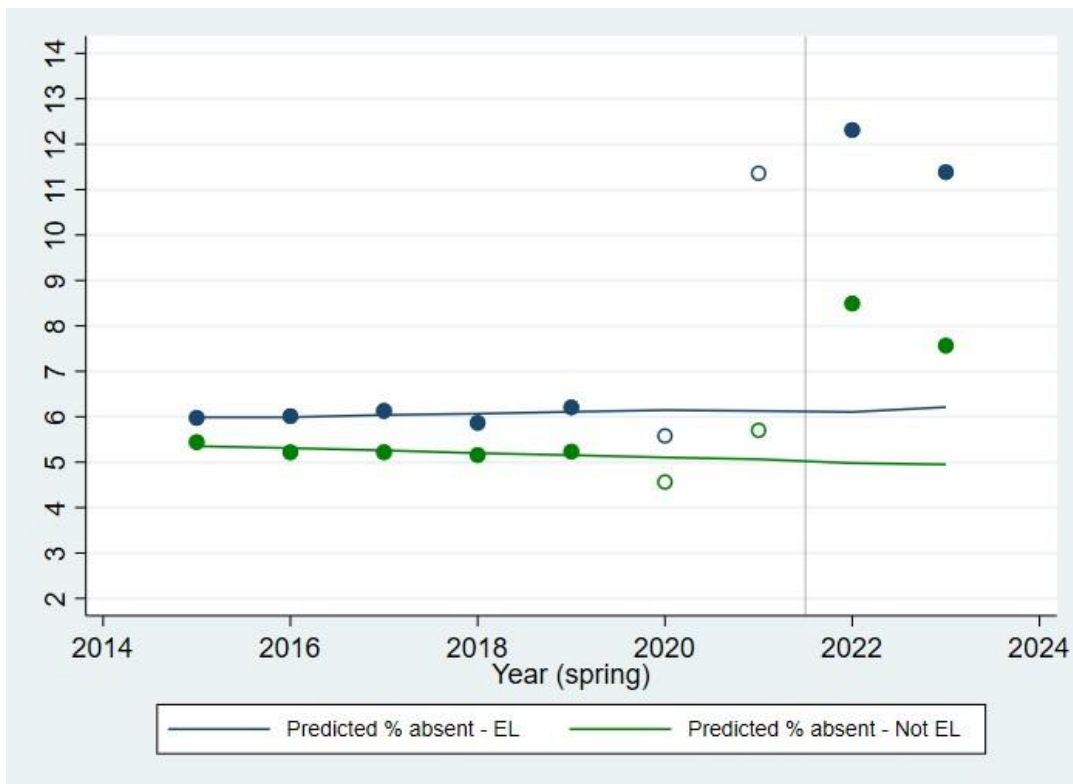
Appendix figure 25: Percent of time absent trend by parent education level
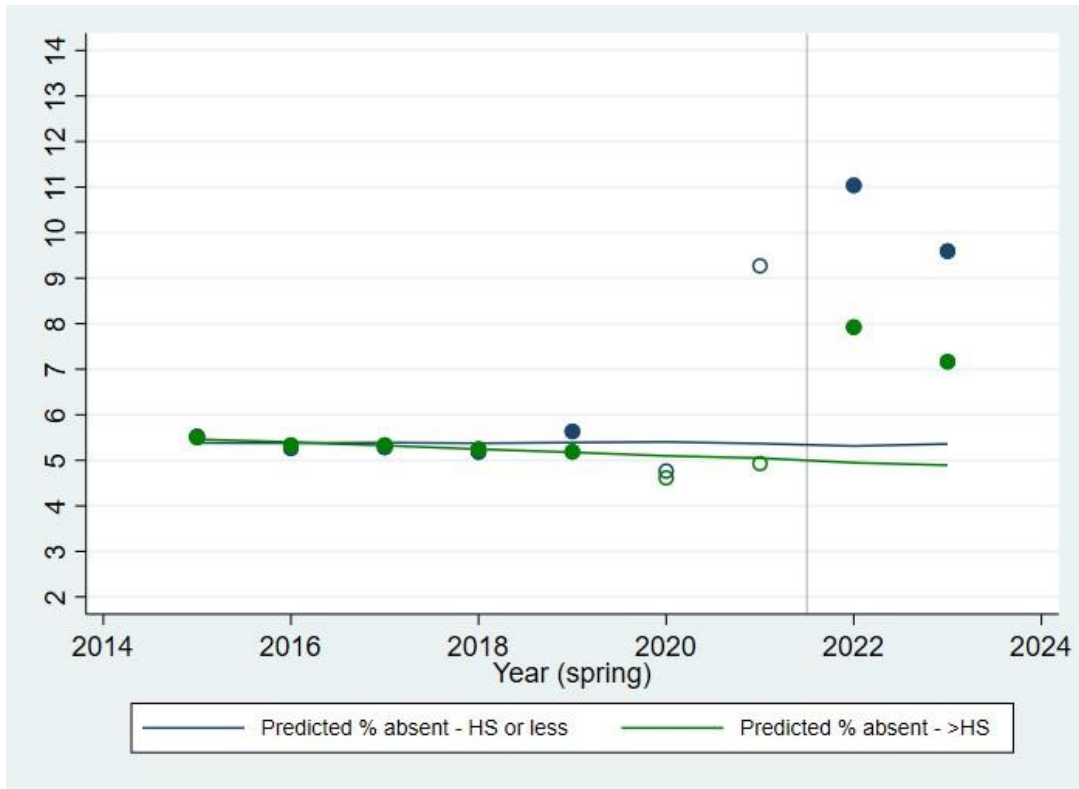
Appendix figure 26: Percent of students scoring at/above standard on CAASPP ELA overall trends
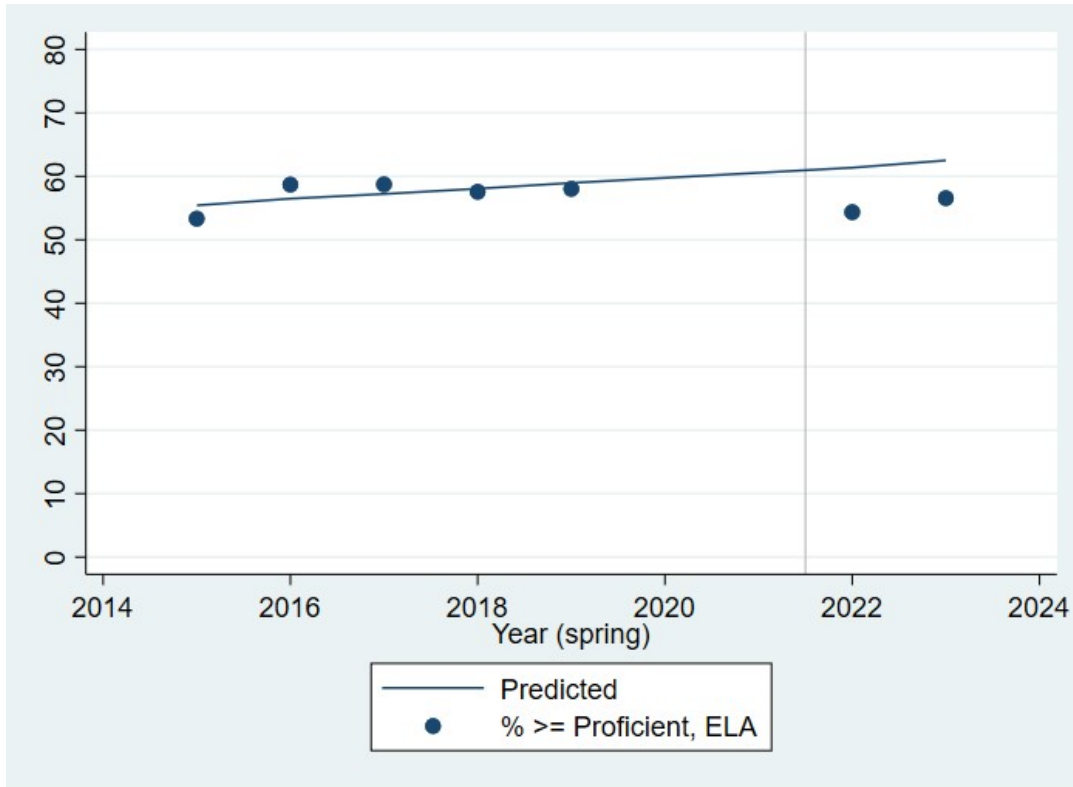
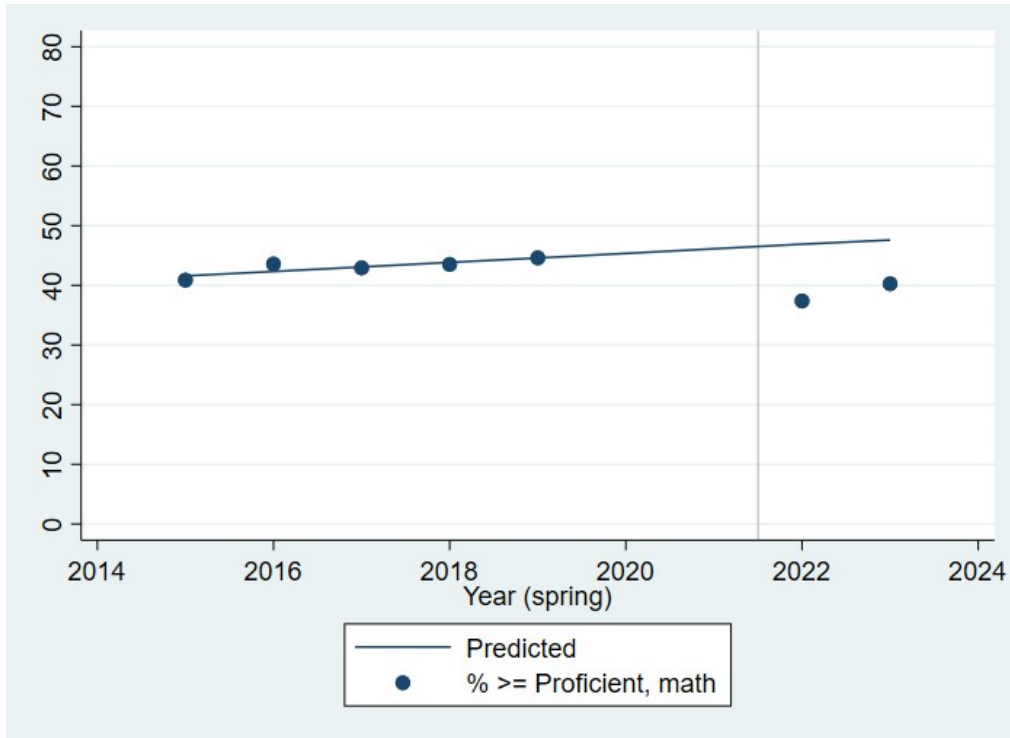Appendix figure 27: Percent of students scoring at/above standard on CAASPP ELA trend by ethnicity
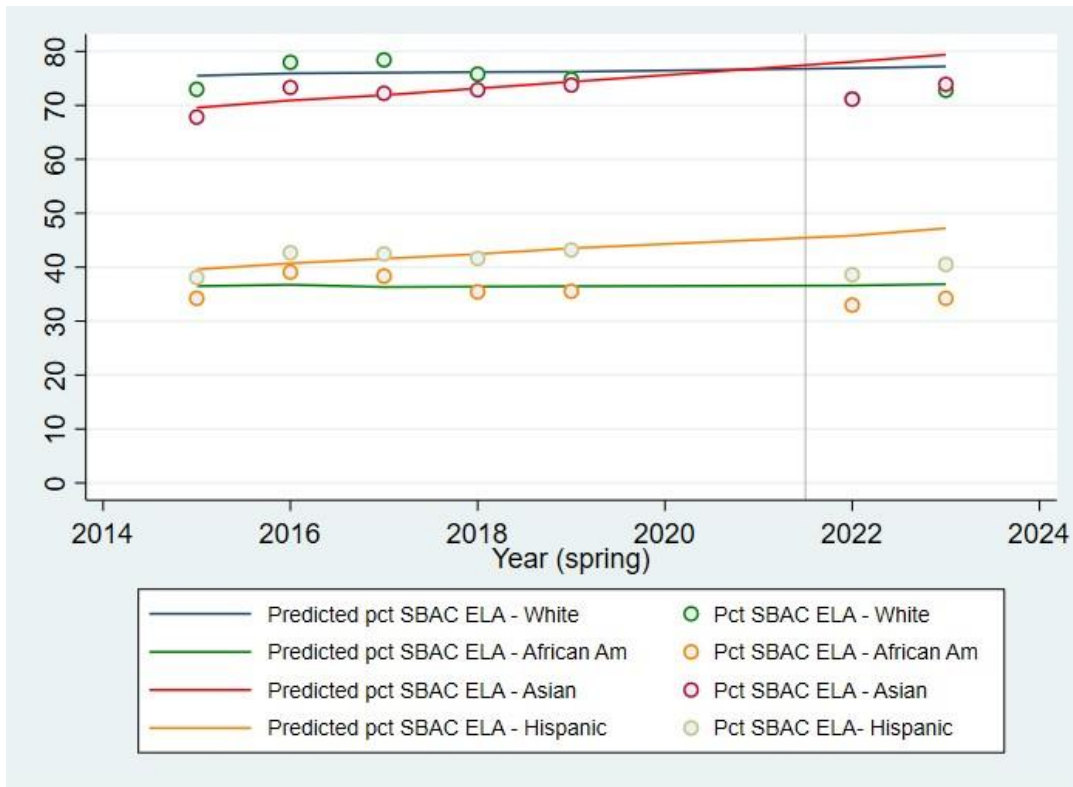
Appendix figure 28: Percent of students scoring at/above standard on CAASPP ELA trend by gender
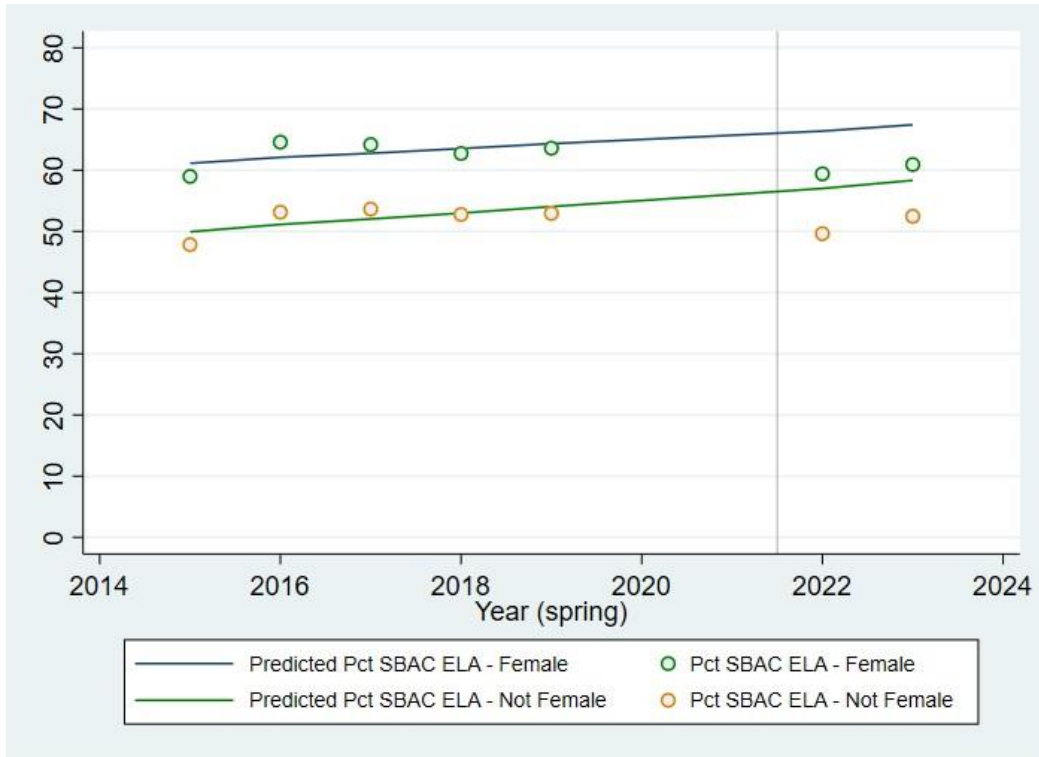
Appendix figure 29: Percent of students scoring at/above standard on CAASPP ELA trend by English learner status
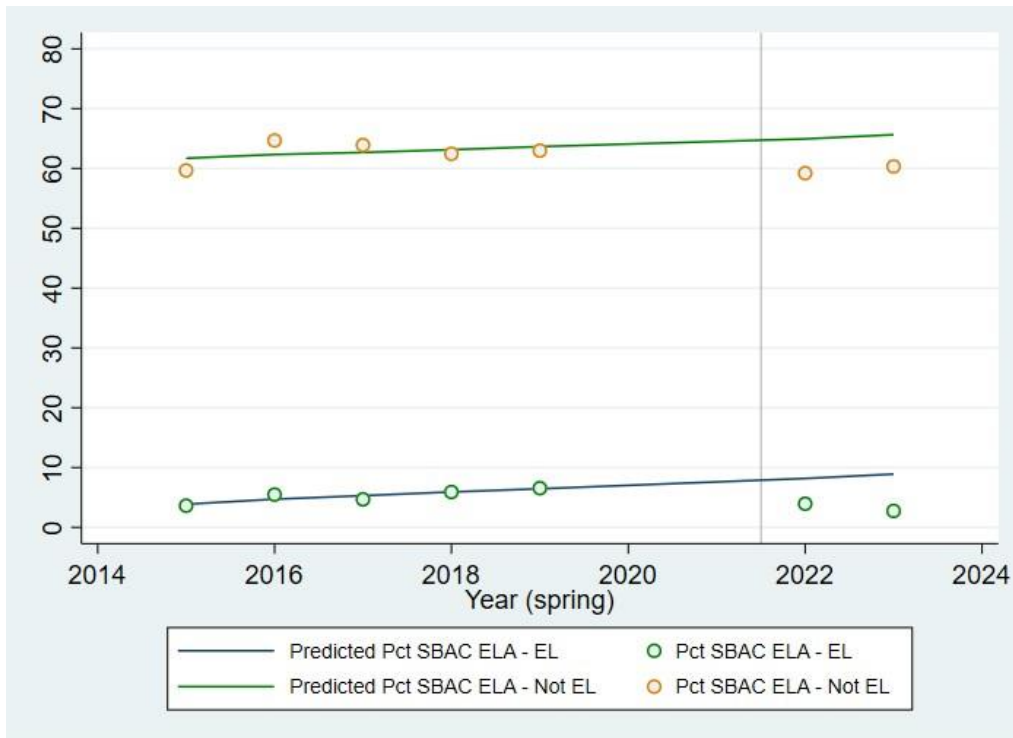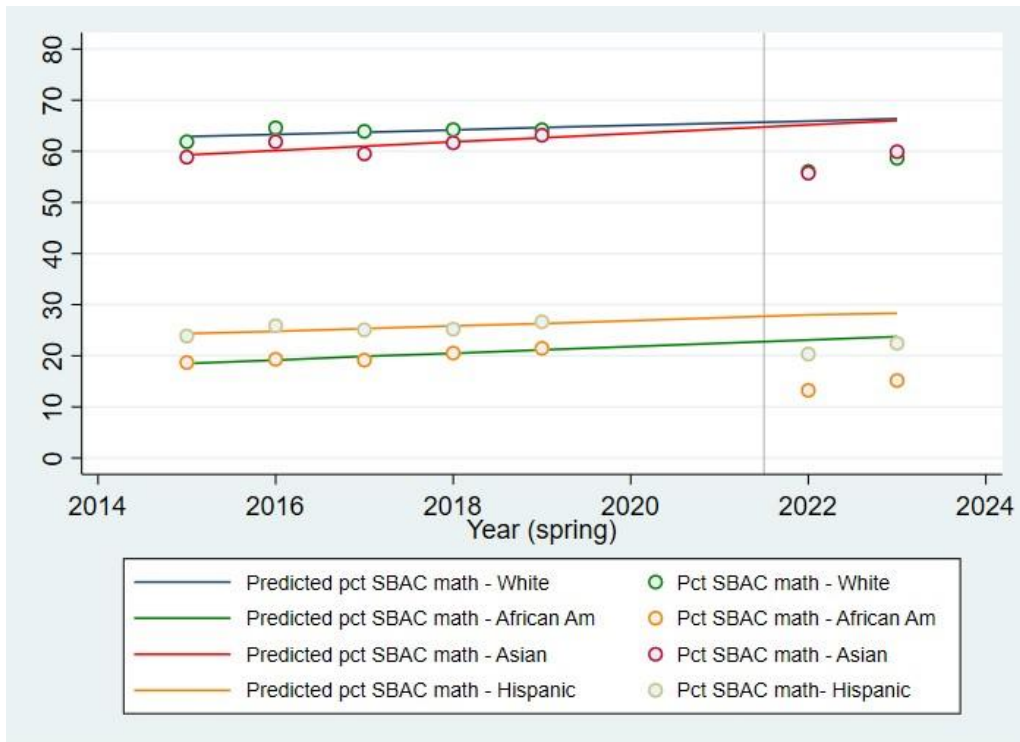
Appendix figure 30: Percent of students scoring at/above standard on CAASPP ELA trend by parent education level
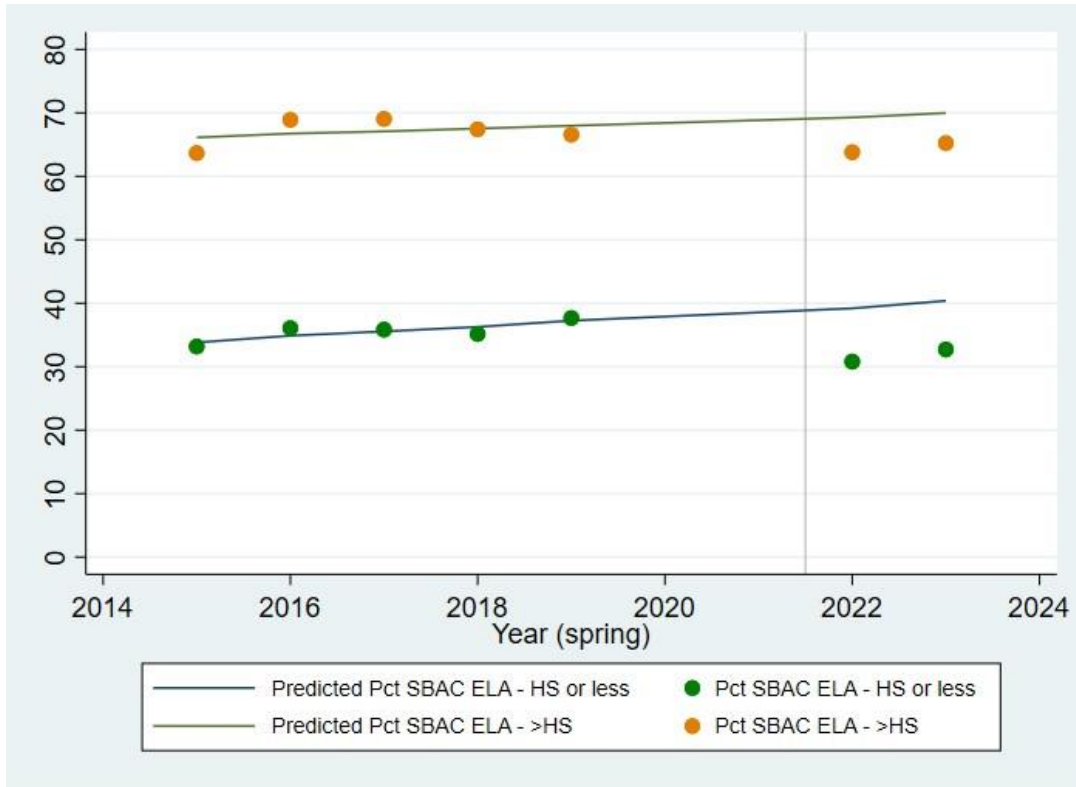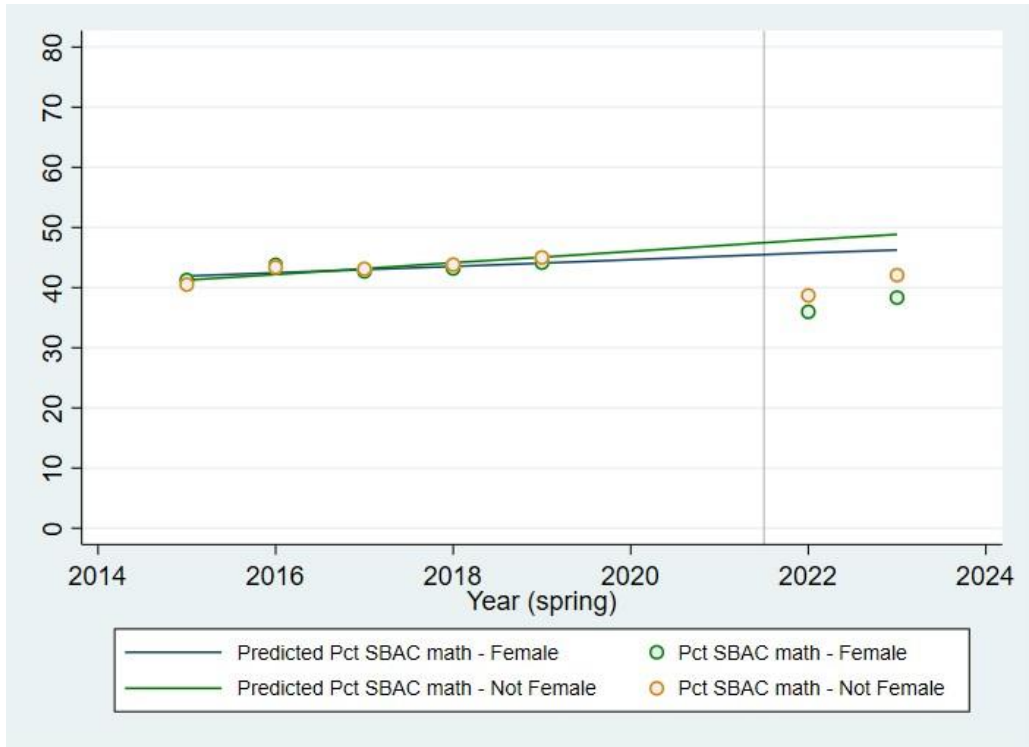
Appendix figure 31: Percent of students scoring at/above standard on CAASPP MATH overall trend
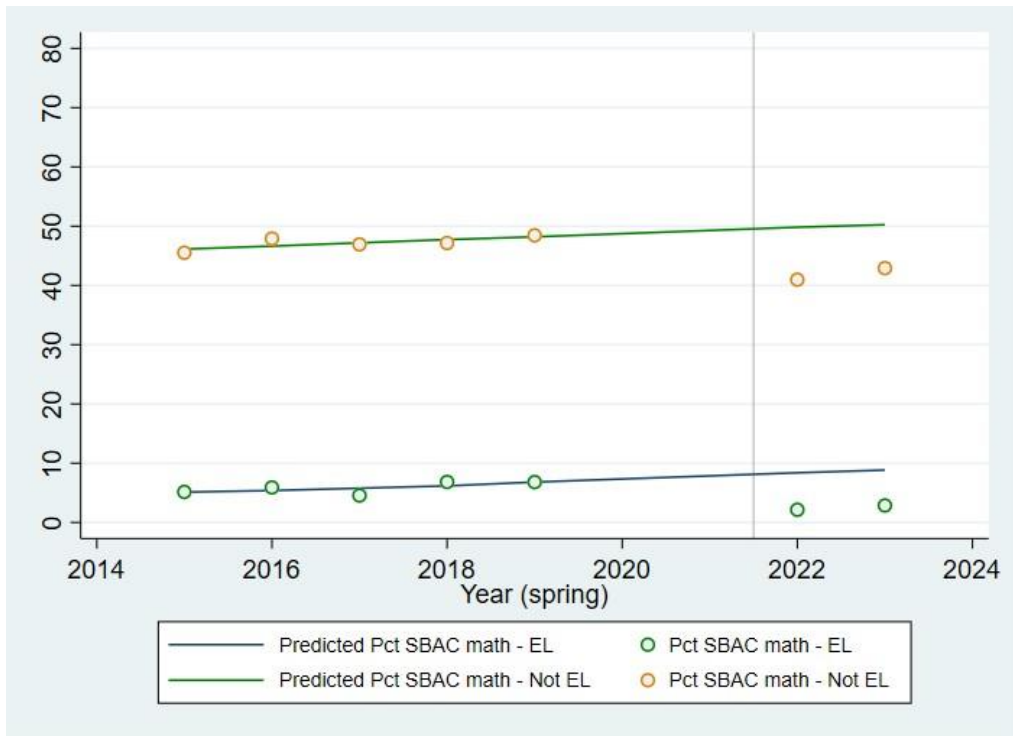

Appendix figure 32: Percent of students scoring at/above standard on CAASPP MATH trend by ethnicity

Appendix figure 33: Percent of students scoring at/above standard on CAASPP MATH trend by gender

Appendix figure 34: Percent of students scoring at/above standard on CAASPP MATH trend by English learner status

Appendix figure 35: Percent of students scoring at/above standard on CAASPP MATH trend by parent education level