



An Analysis of Advanced Course Enrollment and Performance among English Learner (EL) Students in Nebraska

July 2025

Key Findings:

- From 2020 to 2024, an average of 3.97% of all courses offered in Nebraska were classified as advanced.
- Relationship between advanced course enrollment and students’ ACT performance.
- Relationship between advanced course enrollment and students’ ELPA21 performance.

Previous studies have shown the importance of advanced course enrollment in high school in improving academic performance, college enrollment, and persistence. Additionally, a 2016 report by our agency looked specifically at advanced course enrollment on the academic performance of **English Learner (EL) students**. This brief replicates that 2016 study, using the same methodology and using the same data sources to describe the relationships between EL students’ performance on the ACT and ELPA21, and advanced course enrollment in high schools across Nebraska.

The NDE still does not have an official, operationalized definition of “advanced course.” However, related information can be inferred from course titles. Again, for the purposes of this study, advanced courses are identified as those with titles containing the terms “Advanced,” “Advanced Placement,” “AP,” or “IB.” The percentage of advanced courses offered for the years 2020 – 2024 is displayed in *Table 1*. Based on this definition, about 3.97% of all courses offered are classified as advanced.

Table 1. Advanced courses from 2020 to 2024.

Course	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
% of Courses at Advanced Level	4.06%	3.89%	3.99%	3.92%

Since the 2016-17 academic year, the ACT has been administered to all 11th-grade students in Nebraska public schools as the statewide assessment. Additionally, ELPA21 has been administered for EL students as the comprehensive English Language proficiency assessment since the 2015-16 academic year. Data used for this analysis includes ACT scores (Composite, ELA, Science and Math), ELPA21 scores, and class-taking information from school years 2020-

21 through 2023-24. The analysis results indicate **strong associations between advanced course enrollment and performance in the ACT and ELPA21 assessments.**

Specifically, the results show:

- The proportion of EL students who took at least one advanced course was lower than non-EL students. The average percentage of EL students who took at least one advanced course from 2020 to 2024 was 2.8% while that of non-EL students was 17.2%.

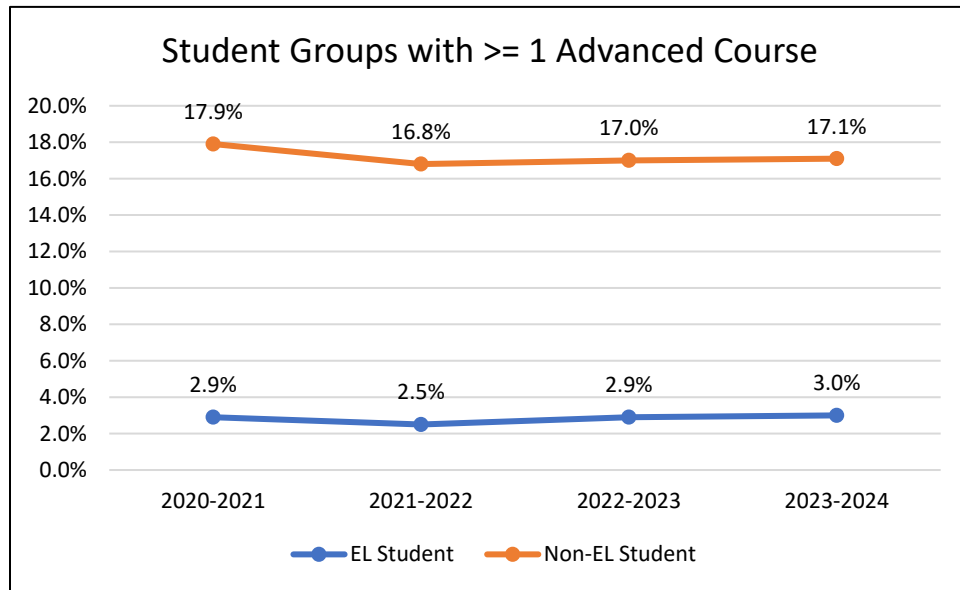


Figure 1. Percentage of students who took at least one advanced course from 2020 to 2024.

- Numbers of advanced courses taken by student groups were also examined. Among the students who took at least one advanced class, EL students took fewer advanced courses than non-EL students from 2020 to 2024. *Figure 2* shows the trends of the average number of advanced courses taken by EL and non-EL students across years.

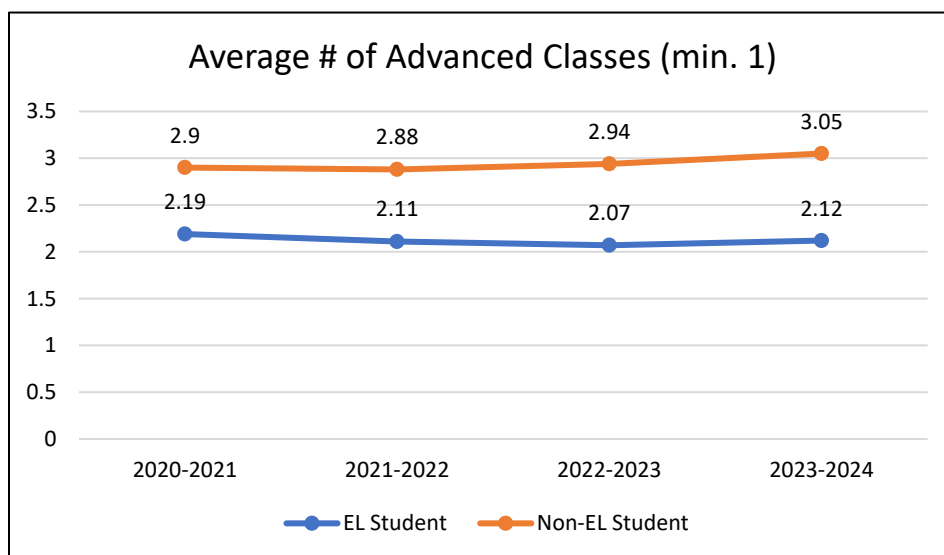


Figure 2. Average number of advanced courses taken by student groups from 2020 to 2024.

- In general, EL students showed lower performance on the ACT composite score than non-EL students. However, regardless of EL status, students who took at least one advanced course had higher ACT composite scores than students who did not. Table 2 and Figure 3 show detailed information about ACT composite scores across years by student groups.

Table 2. Average ACT composite scores from 2020 to 2024.

Student	Advanced Course	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
EL	Yes	14.5	14.2	14.2	14.1
	No	12.8	12.9	13.1	12.9
Non-EL	Yes	22.4	22.7	22.79	22.7
	No	17.8	17.6	17.76	17.7

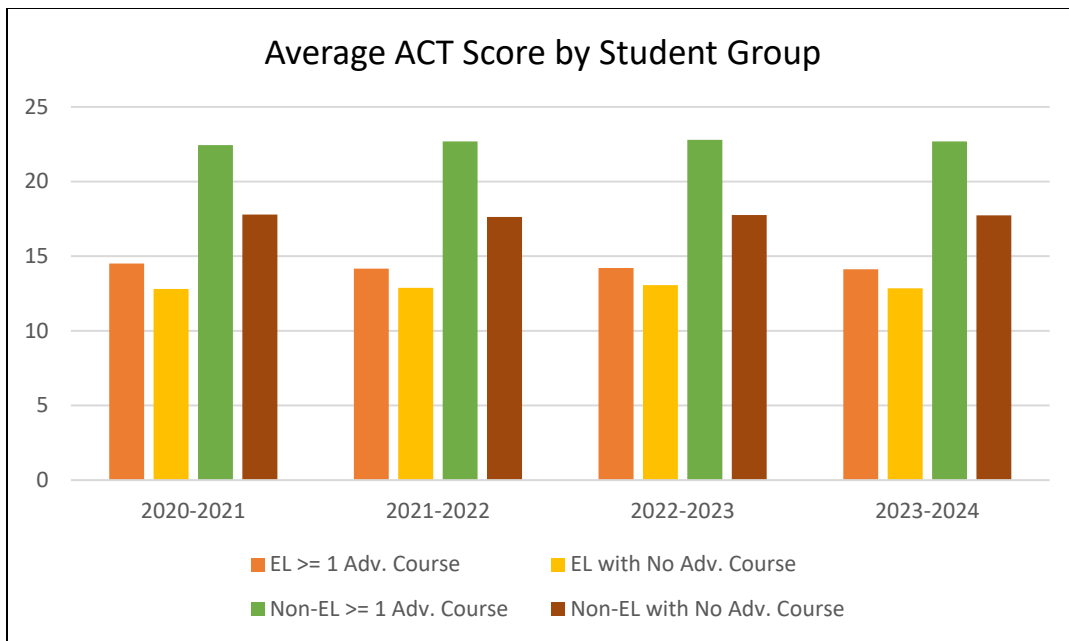


Figure 3. Mean ACT composite scores by student groups from 2020 to 2024.

- The general relationship between mean ACT composite scores and numbers of advanced courses taken by students is displayed in Figures 4 and 5. Table A1 through A4 in Appendix also show students' performance based on EL status and numbers of advanced course in ACT scores.

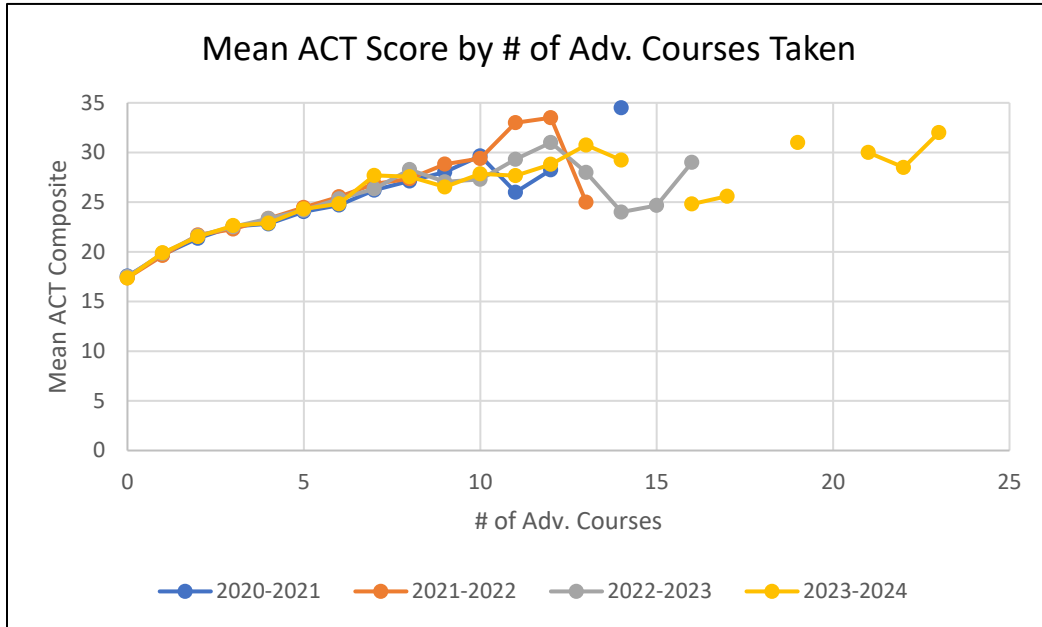


Figure 4. Mean ACT composite scores by number of advanced course taken by student from 2020 to 2024 (All students).

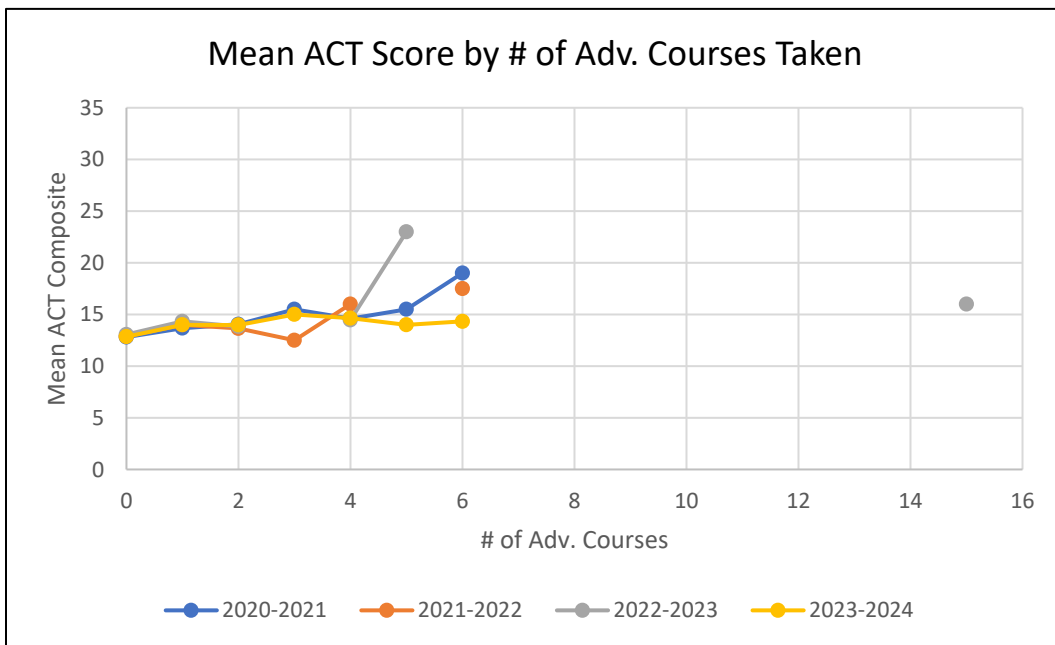


Figure 5. Mean ACT composite scores by number of advanced course taken by student from 2020 to 2024 (EL students).

- ELPA21 scores are examined by the student’s enrollment status in advanced courses. As shown in relationship with ACT scores, students who took advanced courses show better performance in ELPA21. Table 3 shows students’ information about enrollment in advanced courses by grade across academic years. Tables B1 and B2 in Appendix also show detailed information about enrollment of EL students in advanced courses across years and performance difference in ELPA21 overall scale scores.

Table 3. Counts and Proportions of the EL students enrolled in advanced courses by grade from 2020 to 2024.

Grade	Adv. Course Status	2020-21		2021-22		2022-23		2023-24	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Grade 9	Yes	4	0.3%	2	0.1%	11	0.6%	13	0.6%
	No	1167	99.7%	1729	99.9%	1959	99.4%	2192	99.4%
Grade 10	Yes	20	1.4%	24	1.9%	24	1.3%	42	2.1%
	No	1363	98.6%	1219	98.1%	1773	98.7%	1994	97.9%
Grade 11	Yes	58	5.1%	45	3.7%	74	6%	85	5%
	No	1077	94.9%	1178	96.3%	1167	94%	1610	95%
Grade 12	Yes	62	5.1%	63	5.2%	73	5.5%	81	5.3%
	No	1144	94.9%	1150	94.8%	1266	94.5%	1434	94.7%

- EL students who took at least one advanced course on average had higher ELPA21 overall scale scores than those who did not take any advanced courses.

Table 4. Average ELPA overall scaled scores from 2020 to 2024.

Grade Level	Took At least one Advanced Course	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
9	Yes	5289.2	4357.2	5407.7	5428.2
	No	5338.2	5019.3	5040.6	5059.3
10	Yes	5937.9	5891.7	5859.4	5902.8
	No	5348.9	5356.4	5133.4	5169.8
11	Yes	5922.8	5961.8	5758.3	5924.2
	No	5434.8	5430.2	5396.8	5285.3
12	Yes	5861.3	5916.3	5767.8	5750.8
	No	5455.7	5453.3	5393.2	5419.9

Appendix A – ACT Scores

Table A1. 2020-2021 Mean ACT scores by student group

Group/Category	Count	%	ACT Composite Score	ACT English Score	ACT Math Score	ACT Science Score
Student with >= 1 Advanced Course	5770	25.3%	22.4	21.1	21.6	22
Student with No Advanced Course	17026	74.7%	17.5	15.4	16.8	17
EL Student	910	4%	12.9	9.2	12.8	12.1
Non-EL Student	21886	96%	19	17.2	18.2	18.5
Non-EL with > = 1 Advanced Course	5723	26.1%	22.4	21.2	21.7	22.1
Non-EL with No Advanced Course	16163	73.9%	17.8	15.7	17	17.3
EL with >= 1 Advanced Course	47	5.2%	14.5	12.3	14.4	13.7
EL with No Advanced Course	863	94.8%	12.8	9	12.7	12.1
Non-EL with No advanced courses	16163	73.9%	17.8	15.7	17	17.3
Non-EL with 1 advanced course	673	3.1%	19.8	18.3	19.2	19.5
Non-EL with 2 advanced courses	2286	10.4%	21.4	20.2	20.7	21.2
Non-EL with 3 advanced courses	359	1.6%	22.6	21.1	21.7	22.3
Non-EL with 4 advanced courses	1245	5.7%	22.8	21.7	22	22.5
Non-EL with 5 advanced courses	193	0.9%	24.1	22.7	23.2	23.4
Non-EL with 6 advanced courses	599	2.7%	24.7	23.5	23.6	24
Non-EL with 7 advanced courses	102	0.5%	26.2	24.7	25.8	24.9
Non-EL with 8 advanced courses	182	0.8%	27.1	25.5	26.7	26.4
Non-EL with 9 advanced courses	29	0.1%	28	26.9	27	27.3
Non-EL with 10 advanced courses	41	0.2%	29.7	27.8	29.1	29
Non-EL with 11 advanced courses	4	~0%	26	25	25.5	24.8
Non-EL with 12 advanced courses	8	~0%	28.3	25.5	30.3	28.3
Non-EL with 14 advanced courses	2	~0%	34.5	32	33	34
EL with No advanced courses	863	94.8%	12.8	9	12.7	12.1
EL with 1 advanced course	9	1%	13.7	12.4	15.4	14.1
EL with 2 advanced courses	24	2.6%	14	12	13.7	13.2
EL with 3 advanced courses	3	0.3%	15.5	9.7	11.3	10
EL with 4 advanced courses	5	0.5%	14.6	14.4	15.4	14.2
EL with 5 advanced courses	2	0.2%	15.5	15.5	15.5	17
EL with 6 advanced courses	3	0.3%	19	15.7	22.3	22.3

Table A2. 2021-2022 Mean ACT scores by student group

Group/Category	Count	%	ACT Composite Score	ACT English Score	ACT Math Score	ACT Science Score
Student with >= 1 Advanced Course	5459	23.4%	22.6	21.5	21.8	22
Student with No Advanced Course	17902	76.6%	17.4	15.2	16.5	16.9
EL Student	1018	4.4%	12.9	9.4	12.8	12.5
Non-EL Student	22343	95.6%	18.9	17	18	18.3
Non-EL with > = 1 Advanced Course	5421	24.3%	22.7	21.6	21.8	22.1
Non-EL with No Advanced Course	16922	75.7%	17.6	15.5	16.7	17.1
EL with >= 1 Advanced Course	38	3.7%	14.2	11.9	14.2	14.2
EL with No Advanced Course	980	96.3%	12.9	9.3	12.7	12.5
Non-EL with No advanced courses	16922	75.7%	17.6	15.5	16.7	17.1
Non-EL with 1 advanced course	668	3%	19.7	18.4	18.7	19.2
Non-EL with 2 advanced courses	2237	10%	21.8	20.7	20.9	21.3
Non-EL with 3 advanced courses	369	1.7%	22.3	21.1	21.6	21.7
Non-EL with 4 advanced courses	1156	5.2%	23.4	22.6	22.4	22.7
Non-EL with 5 advanced courses	188	0.8%	24.5	23.3	23.6	23.9
Non-EL with 6 advanced courses	498	2.2%	25.6	24.4	24.7	24.8
Non-EL with 7 advanced courses	95	0.4%	26.8	25.4	26.6	26.3
Non-EL with 8 advanced courses	123	0.6%	27.4	25.5	27.3	26.3
Non-EL with 9 advanced courses	35	0.2%	28.8	27.4	28.1	28.1
Non-EL with 10 advanced courses	42	0.2%	29.4	27.8	29.1	27.9
Non-EL with 11 advanced courses	7	~0%	33	25.4	27.6	27.4
Non-EL with 12 advanced courses	2	~0%	33.5	33	32.5	30
Non-EL with 13 advanced courses	1	~0%	25	24	29	19
EL with No advanced courses	980	96.3%	12.9	9.3	12.7	12.5
EL with 1 advanced course	10	1%	14	13.2	15.1	15
EL with 2 advanced courses	19	1.9%	13.6	10.9	13.5	13
EL with 3 advanced courses	3	0.3%	12.5	6.3	9	9.3
EL with 4 advanced courses	4	0.4%	16	15	17.25	19
EL with 6 advanced courses	2	0.2%	17.5	16.5	17.5	19

Table A3. 2022-2023 Mean ACT scores by student group

Group/Category	Count	%	ACT Composite Score	ACT English Score	ACT Math Score	ACT Science Score
Student with >= 1 Advanced Course	5231	22.4%	22.7	21.4	21.8	22.4
Student with No Advanced Course	18152	77.6%	17.5	15.4	16.8	17.2
EL Student	1073	4.6%	13.1	10	13.6	13.3
Non-EL Student	22310	95.4%	19	17.1	18.1	18.6
Non-EL with > = 1 Advanced Course	5158	23.1%	22.8	21.5	21.9	22.5
Non-EL with No Advanced Course	17152	76.9%	17.8	15.7	17	17.4
EL with >= 1 Advanced Course	73	6.8%	14.2	12.7	14.9	14.9
EL with No Advanced Course	1000	93.2%	13.1	9.8	13.5	13.2
Non-EL with No advanced courses	17152	76.9%	17.8	15.7	17	17.4
Non-EL with 1 advanced course	641	2.9%	20	18.3	19	19.5
Non-EL with 2 advanced courses	2069	9.3%	21.8	20.8	20.9	21.7
Non-EL with 3 advanced courses	355	1.6%	22.5	21.2	21.8	22
Non-EL with 4 advanced courses	1086	4.9%	23.5	22.4	22.3	23
Non-EL with 5 advanced courses	187	0.8%	24.2	22.7	23.8	23.9
Non-EL with 6 advanced courses	451	2%	25.3	23.9	24.6	24.9
Non-EL with 7 advanced courses	105	0.5%	26.3	24.7	25.7	25.7
Non-EL with 8 advanced courses	156	0.7%	28.3	26.3	27.3	27.8
Non-EL with 9 advanced courses	38	0.2%	27.1	25.8	26.3	26.6
Non-EL with 10 advanced courses	27	0.1%	27.3	25.8	26.5	26.9
Non-EL with 11 advanced courses	23	0.1%	29.3	25.9	28.1	27.8
Non-EL with 12 advanced courses	11	~0%	31	29.8	29.5	29
Non-EL with 13 advanced courses	4	~0%	28	24.3	28.5	26.8
Non-EL with 14 advanced courses	2	~0%	24	21	27	25
Non-EL with 15 advanced courses	2	~0%	29	26.5	30	28
Non-EL with 16 advanced courses	1	~0%	29	25	31	29
EL with No advanced courses	1000	93.2%	13.1	9.8	13.5	13.2
EL with 1 advanced course	12	1.1%	14.3	11.3	14.8	14.4
EL with 2 advanced courses	44	4.1%	13.8	12.3	14.8	14.5

EL with 4 advanced courses	15	1.4%	14.5	14.4	14.5	15.7
EL with 5 advanced courses	1	0.1%	23	20	26	27
EL with 15 advanced courses	1	0.1%	16	16	15	11

Table A4. 2023-2024 Mean ACT scores by student group

Group/Category	Count	%	ACT Composite Score	ACT English Score	ACT Math Score	ACT Science Score
Student with >= 1 Advanced Course	5586	24.8%	22.6	21.2	21.9	22.3
Student with No Advanced Course	17295	75.2%	17.4	15.2	16.7	17.1
EL Student	1419	6.2%	12.9	9.4	13.2	13
Non-EL Student	21462	93.8%	19	17.2	18.3	18.8
Non-EL with > = 1 Advanced Course	5501	25.6%	22.7	21.4	22	22.4
Non-EL with No Advanced Course	15961	74.4%	17.7	15.7	17.1	17.5
EL with >= 1 Advanced Course	85	6%	14.1	12.6	14.8	14.5
EL with No Advanced Course	1334	94%	12.8	9.2	13.1	12.9
Non-EL with No advanced courses	15961	74.4%	17.7	15.7	17.1	17.5
Non-EL with 1 advanced course	681	3.2%	20	18.5	19.2	19.8
Non-EL with 2 advanced courses	2149	10%	21.7	20.5	21	21.5
Non-EL with 3 advanced courses	321	1.5%	22.7	21.4	21.9	22.3
Non-EL with 4 advanced courses	1211	5.6%	23	21.9	22.1	22.8
Non-EL with 5 advanced courses	211	0.9%	24.4	22.9	23.6	24
Non-EL with 6 advanced courses	514	2.4%	24.9	23.5	24.3	24.7
Non-EL with 7 advanced courses	90	0.4%	27.7	25.5	27.6	27.5
Non-EL with 8 advanced courses	165	0.8%	27.6	25.4	27.3	27.6
Non-EL with 9 advanced courses	44	0.2%	26.5	24.8	26.9	25.9
Non-EL with 10 advanced courses	41	0.2%	27.9	25.6	27	26.5
Non-EL with 11 advanced courses	6	~0%	27.7	27.2	26.7	26.3
Non-EL with 12 advanced courses	27	0.1%	28.8	27.7	28.4	27.6
Non-EL with 13 advanced courses	4	~0%	30.8	28.3	30.3	30.3
Non-EL with 14 advanced courses	13	~0%	29.2	28	29.1	27.9
Non-EL with 16 advanced courses	11	~0%	24.8	24.2	25.4	23.9
Non-EL with 17 advanced courses	5	~0%	25.6	25.2	25.6	25
Non-EL with 19 advanced courses	2	~0%	31	29	29	30.5
Non-EL with 21 advanced courses	3	~0%	30	28.7	28.7	30
Non-EL with 22 advanced courses	2	~0%	28.5	27.5	30	25
Non-EL with 23 advanced courses	1	~0%	32	29	32	28
EL with No advanced courses	1334	94%	12.8	9.2	13.1	12.9

EL with 1 advanced course	10	0.7%	14	12.6	15.6	15.5
EL with 2 advanced courses	57	4%	14	12.1	14.4	14.1
EL with 3 advanced courses	3	0.2%	15	15	15.3	16.3
EL with 4 advanced courses	11	0.8%	14.6	14.7	15	15.3
EL with 5 advanced courses	1	~0%	14	16	17	12
EL with 6 advanced courses	3	0.2%	14.3	12	16.7	15

Appendix B – ELPA21 Scores

Table B1. Proportion of EL students enrolled in Advanced course by grade across years

Grade	Academic Year			
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Grade 9	0.3%	0.1%	0.6%	0.6%
Grade 10	1.4%	1.9%	1.3%	2.1%
Grade 11	5.1%	3.7%	6%	5%
Grade 12	5.1%	5.2%	5.5%	5.3%

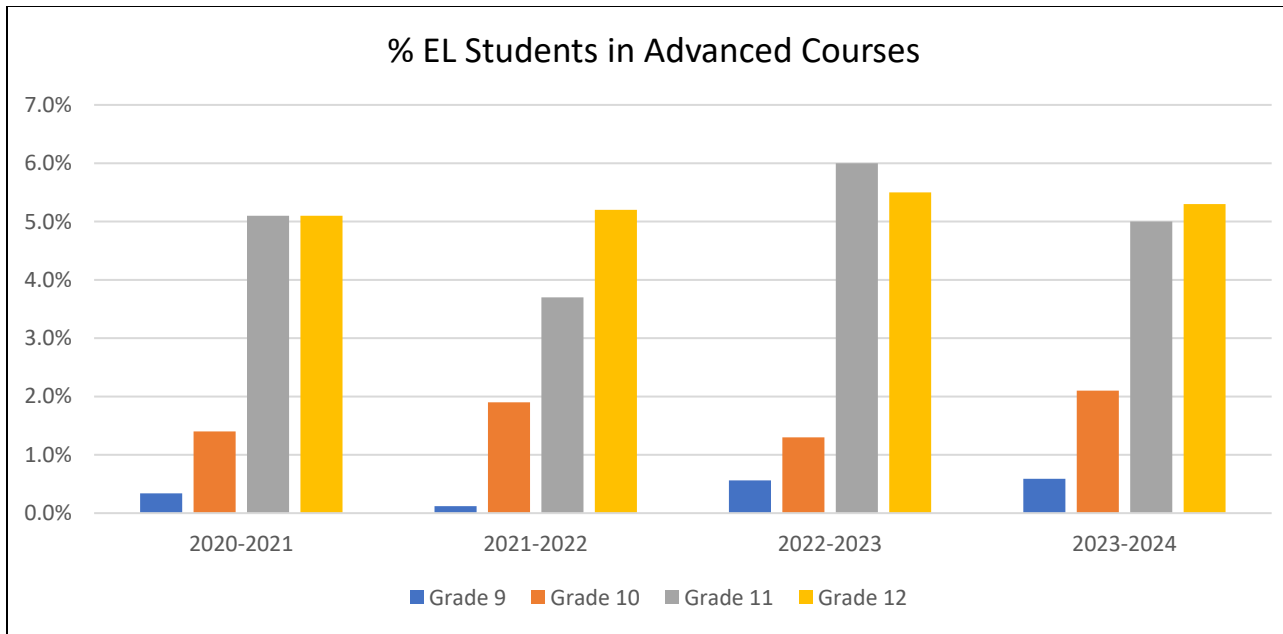


Figure B1. Proportion of EL students enrolled in Advanced course by grade across years

Table B2. Mean ELPA21 scores by student grade across years

Grade	Adv. Course	Academic Year			
		2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Grade 9	Yes	5289.2	4357.2	5407.7	5428.2
	No	5338.2	5019.3	5040.6	5059.3
Grade 10	Yes	5937.9	5891.7	5859.3	5902.8
	No	5348.8	5356.4	5133.4	5169.8
Grade 11	Yes	5922.8	5961.8	5758.3	5924.2
	No	5434.8	5430.1	5396.8	5285.3
Grade 12	Yes	5861.3	5916.3	5767.8	5750.8
	No	5455.7	5453.3	5393.2	5419.9

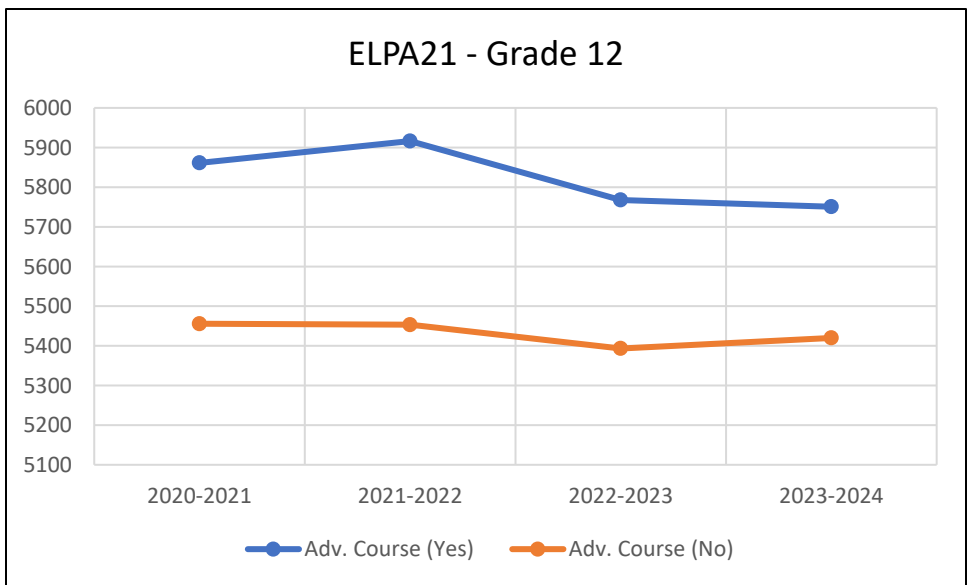
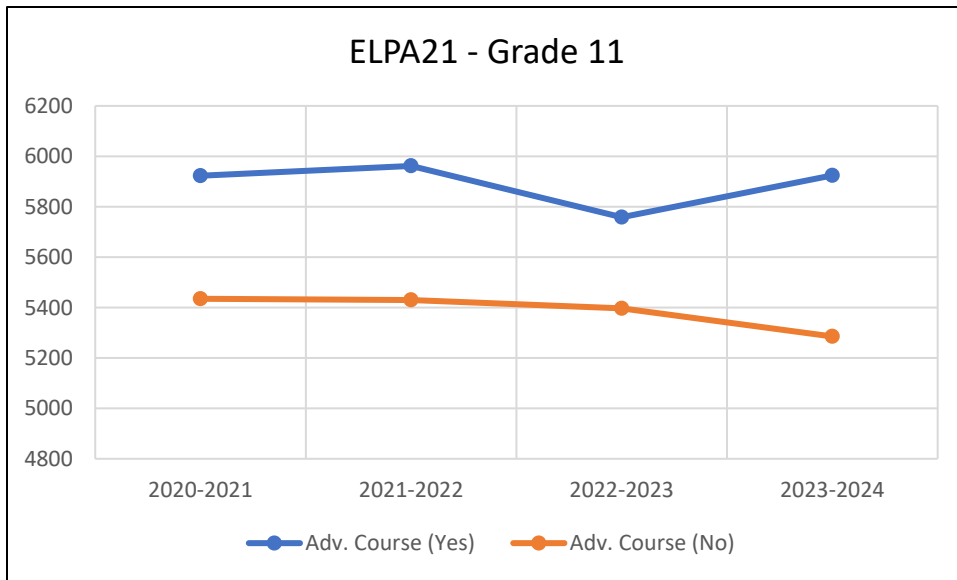
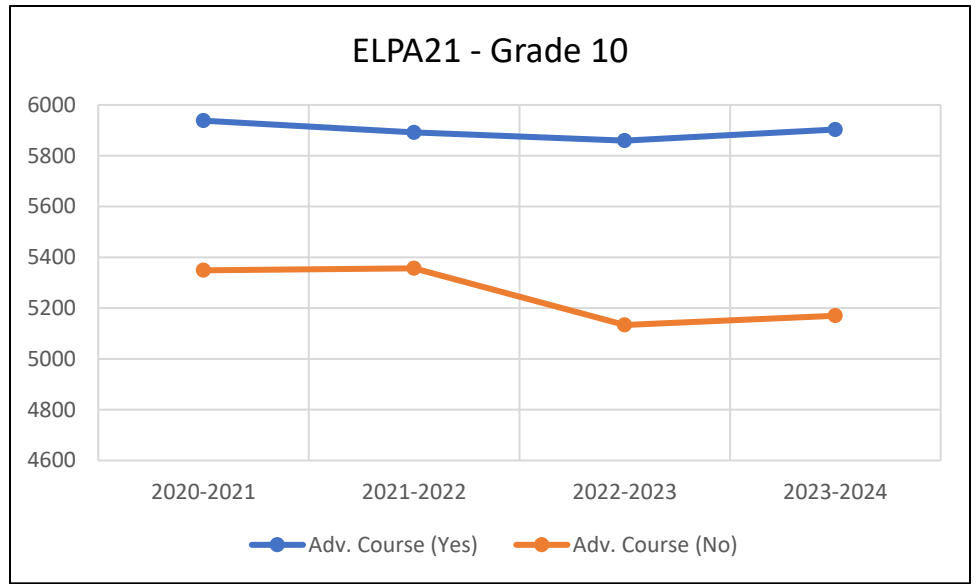
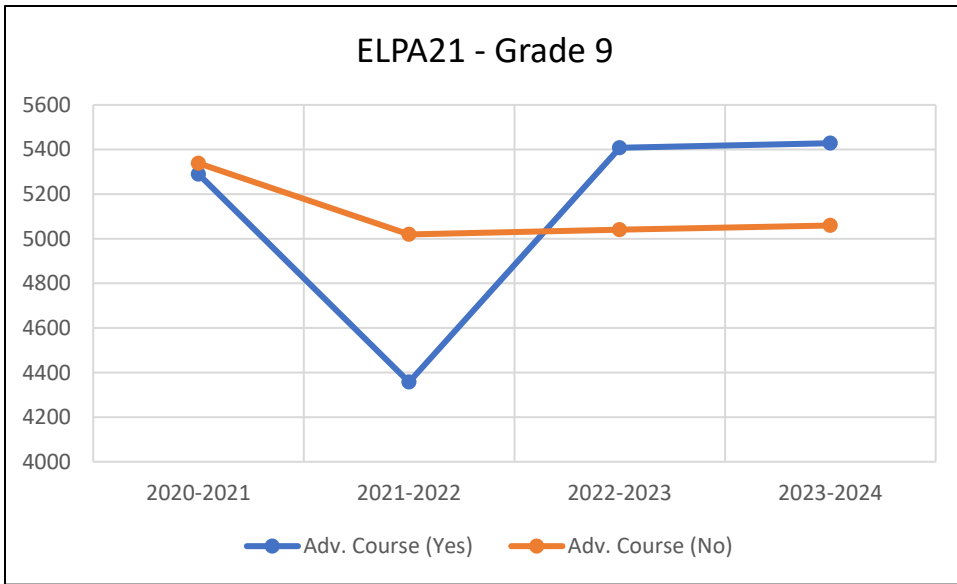


Figure B2. Mean ELPA21 scores by enrollment in Advanced courses across years (Grades 9-12)