

Fact Sheet:

ELL Students and the N or D Context

August 2011

Washington, DC



Introduction

English language learners (ELLs) comprise approximately 10 percent of the United States school-aged population [1]. Although the majority of ELLs are second or third generation and not new to the country, the growing number of foreign-born individuals moving to the United States is rapidly contributing to an increase in this population. During the past three decades, the number of foreign-born individuals in the United States has tripled,¹ and the number of school-aged children of immigrants² in the United States is expected to grow from approximately 12 million to 18 million between 2005 and 2020.³ Though the prevalence of ELL students in neglect, delinquent, or at-risk (N or D) settings is not easily identified, the law and field⁴ acknowledge that ELLs are an important subgroup of students within this context who have specific needs that must be addressed.

“Students with limited English proficiency, or English Language Learners (ELLs), are protected by the Civil Rights Act [of 1964], which requires schools to improve language deficiencies of students so that they may fully participate in the education system.”

—Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups, NCES 2010

This fact sheet presents information on the prevalence, characteristics, and outcomes of ELL students in the United States, as well as data on youth with varying language backgrounds in the juvenile justice system. The information in this fact sheet comes from the following primary three sources, unless otherwise noted:

- [1] Consolidated State Performance Reports (CSPRs) for school years (SYs) 2004–05 through 2007–08.
- [2a–2d] U.S. Census Bureau, based on surveys conducted in 2000 [2c–2d], 2005 [2b], and 2009 [2a].
- [3] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s Survey of Youth in Residential Placement, 2002–2003.

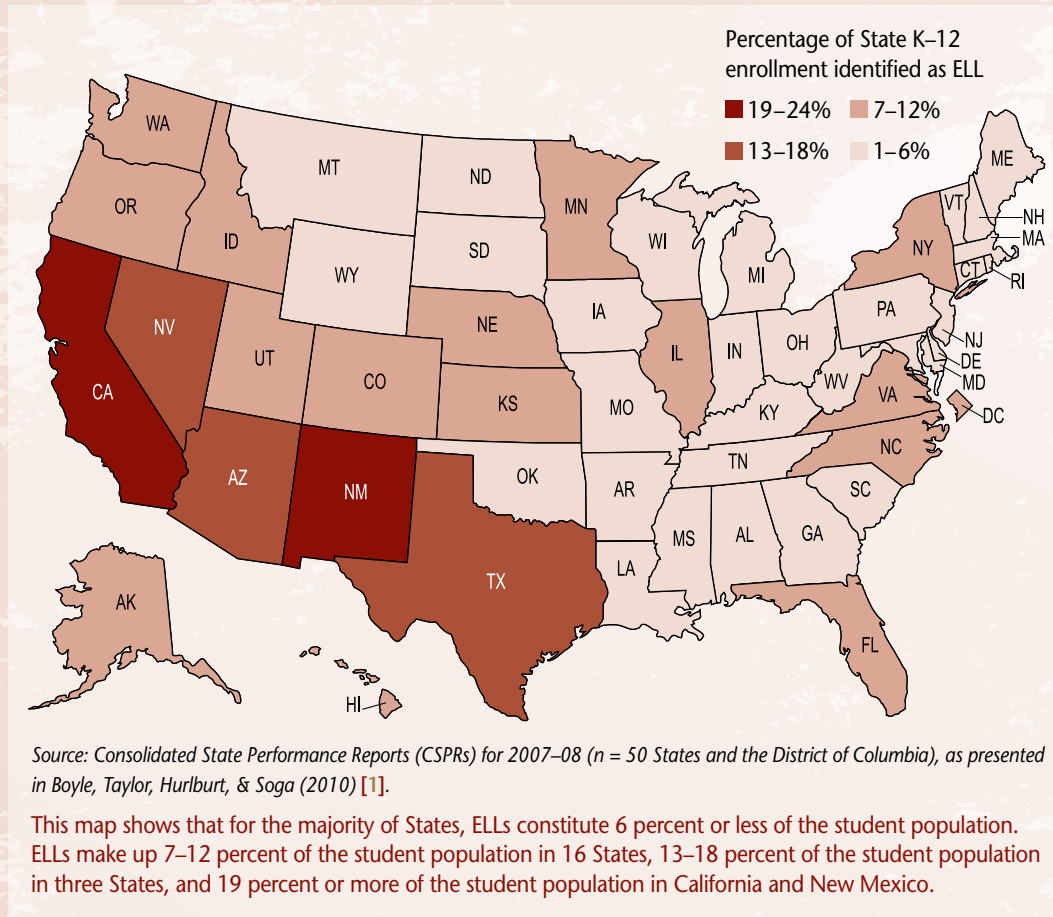
Prevalence of English Language Learners in the United States

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) defines ELL/limited English proficient (LEP)⁵ students as individuals aged 3 to 21 years, enrolled or preparing to enroll in elementary or secondary education, often born outside the United States or speaking a language other than English in their homes, and not having adequate mastery of English to meet State education standards and succeed in an English-speaking classroom.⁶ The specific criteria used by States and researchers to identify and report on ELLs vary, however, making it difficult to fully understand the needs of the population or make direct comparisons across datasets.

- In SY 2007–08, 4.7 million students were identified by States to be ELLs under the Federal Title III⁷ program; this represented approximately 10 percent of the United States’ K–12 student enrollment [1].
 - Household surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau estimate the prevalence of school-aged ELL youth (defined as youth who “do not speak English very well”) to be about half of that size, or approximately 5 percent of the population [2a, 2b]. The difference between the two estimates may reflect the difference in definition of ELL, and the self-reporting method used by the Census Bureau.⁸
- Of the 4.7 million students identified by States as ELLs, more than 68 percent of the total student population resided in seven States: California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, Arizona, and North Carolina [1].
- The ELL student population is growing most rapidly in grades 7–12; between 1992 and 2002, the ELL population in these grades grew by approximately 70 percent.¹
- From SY 2002–03 to SY 2007–08, New York and South Carolina reported more than 200 percent growth in their Title III ELL student population. Arkansas, Delaware, Indiana, Maine, Montana, and Tennessee reported more than 100 percent growth [1].



Figure 1. Percentage of States' Student Population Designated as ELL in SY 2007–08, Based on Title III Data [1]

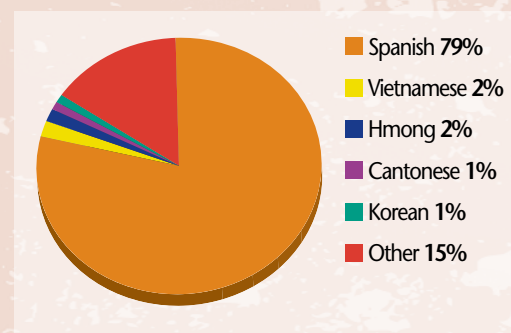


Characteristics of ELL Students

Language, Race, and Ethnicity

- ELLs across the United States speak more than 400 different languages. In SY 2007–08, in most States (49) and the District of Columbia, Spanish was the language most widely spoken by ELLs, or was one of the five most common languages spoken at home by ELL students [1].
- Other languages identified by States as prominent among their ELL student populations include Vietnamese, Hmong, Cantonese, and Korean (see figure 2).⁹
- Of youth aged 5–17 years, two-thirds of Hispanic youth and just under two-thirds (64 percent) of Asian youth spoke a language other than English at home. In comparison, youth of other races/ethnicities were more likely to speak English at home.¹⁰
- Sixty-nine percent of school-aged youth identified as having difficulty speaking English were Hispanic, 13 percent were White, 13 percent were Asian, 4 percent were Black, and less than 1 percent were Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or two or more races [2a].

Figure 2. Languages Spoken by ELL Students in the United States, as Reported by States in SY 2001–02



Source: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2002.⁹

This chart shows the five different languages spoken by at least 1 percent or more of ELL students in the United States. Almost four times as many ELL students speak Spanish than all other languages combined.



Background and Family/Culture/Experience of ELL Students

- A larger proportion of adolescent students (i.e., students enrolled in grades 6–12) who did not speak English very well were born within the United States (57 percent) than outside of the United States (43 percent). Of those born within the United States, 54 percent were second generation, and 46 percent were third generation [2c].
- Nearly 60 percent of adolescent students who did not speak English very well qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, compared with 31 percent of adolescent English-proficient students [2c]. Approximately 36 percent of all school-aged youth who did not speak English very well had families whose incomes were below the poverty threshold [2a].
- In comparison to their English-speaking peers, elementary school students who did not speak English very well were more than four times more likely to have parents without a high school education (48 percent vs. 11 percent) and more than 12 times more likely to have parents with less than a ninth-grade education (25 percent vs. 2 percent) [2d].

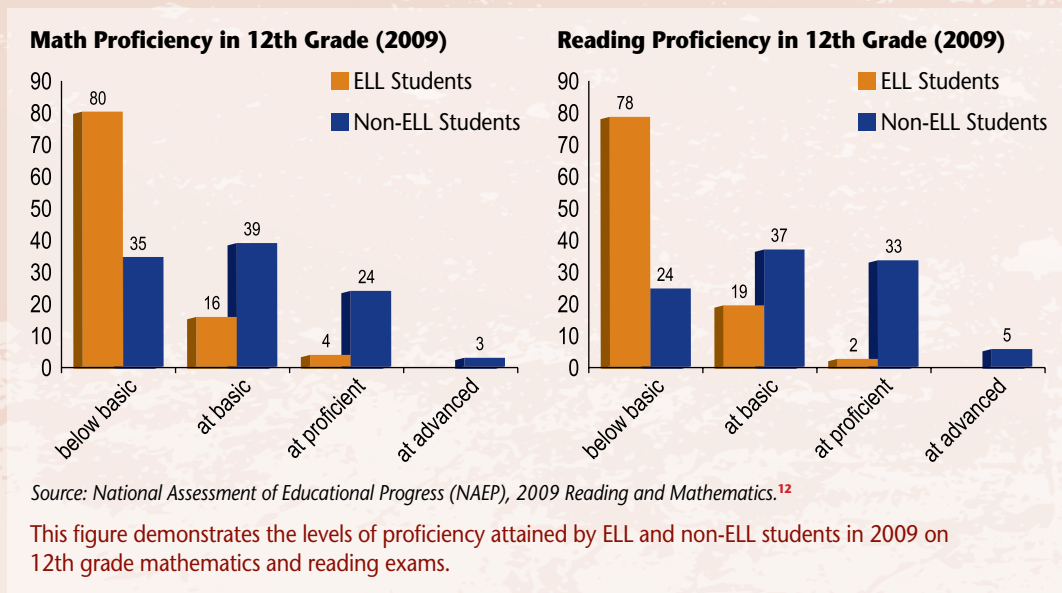
ELL Education and Programming

Student Performance and Outcomes

For the purposes of Title I, Part D, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), students having limited English proficiency are included in the definition of students who may be at-risk of dropping out of school, and thus eligible for supplemental education funds under Subpart 2.

- ELLs graduate from high school at lower rates than native English-speaking students—according to a 2004 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report, 31 percent of ELLs failed to complete high school, in comparison to only 10 percent of students who spoke English at home.¹¹
- In 2009, 80 percent of 12th grade students identified as ELL scored below basic for mathematics and 78 percent scored below basic in reading; fewer than 1 percent of students identified as ELL scored at the advanced level in either subject area (see figure 3).¹²
- Under Title III, 11 States and 59 percent of subgrantees (districts and consortia of districts) met all three of the accountability goals¹³ they had set for their ELL populations in 2007–08 [1].
 - Seventy percent of Title III subgrantees met their goal to increase the percentage of students making adequate yearly progress (AYP); 80 percent of subgrantees met the goal of increasing the percentage of students who were proficient in English; and 85 percent of subgrantees met the goal of increasing the percentage of students making progress in learning English [1].
- According to a 12-year study tracking eighth grade students through the year 2000, 26 and 32 percent of English proficient and native English students, respectively, had obtained a bachelor's degree by 2008, while only 13 percent of ELL students had done so.¹⁴

Figure 3. Percent of ELL and Non-ELL Students Attaining 12th Grade Math and Reading Proficiency





ELL Education Programs

As States seek to provide educational services for ELL students, they may choose from a variety of programs. Common ELL instructional models include:¹⁵

Program Type	Program Approach
English-only programs develop literacy and fluency in English	Offer instruction to ELL students in English only, with little to no consideration of a student's native language.
Bilingual programs develop literacy and fluency in two languages simultaneously	Offer instruction in English and the student's native language.
Bilingual programs with transitional support help students acquire English and transition to English only	Begin with inclusion of instruction in native language, and taper off as student becomes more proficient.

Students With Varying Language Backgrounds in Juvenile Justice Programs

The Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (2002–03) provides data on youth in the juvenile justice system who reported that the adults in their families spoke a language other than English at home, though it does not indicate the language proficiency of the students themselves [3].

- About 13 percent of youth in residential placement reported having families with adults who spoke Spanish, and about 3 percent reported having families with adults who spoke a language other than English or Spanish.
- Approximately 15 percent of youth whose families spoke another language (not including Spanish), 9 percent of youth whose families spoke English, and 6 percent of youth whose families spoke Spanish reported having contact with a foster agency growing up.
- Overall, only a small percentage (8 percent) of youth in residential placement reported having no contact with their families since entering the facility. The two most common reasons reported by youth for not having family contact were “other” reasons not identified on the survey or facility policies.
 - About 15 percent of youth whose families spoke another (non-Spanish) language, 8 percent of youth whose families spoke English, and 7 percent of youth whose families spoke Spanish reported having no contact with their families since entering the facility.
- All youth in residential placement, regardless of language spoken at home, reported at similar rates (46–48 percent) that they aspire to complete some, or graduate from, college.
- Most youth reported not having good grades the year before custody; this was reported by 67 percent of youth from Spanish-speaking families, 57 percent of youth from English-speaking families, and 55 percent of youth from families who spoke another (non-Spanish) language.
- More than half of the youth in residential placement (64 percent of youth from families who spoke another (non-Spanish) language, 62 percent of youth from families who spoke English, and 57 percent of youth from families who spoke Spanish) reported having been suspended or expelled.



Primary Sources

- [1] Consolidated State Performance Reports (CSPRs) for 2004–05 through 2007–08, as presented in: Boyle, A., Taylor, J., Hurlburt, S., & Soga, K. (2010). Title III accountability: Behind the numbers. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-iii/behind-numbers.pdf>
- [2] U.S. Census Bureau data as presented in:
 - [2a] National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2011). Table A-6-2. Number and percentage of children ages 5–17 who spoke a language other than English at home and who spoke English with difficulty, by age and selected characteristics: 2009. In *The condition of education 2011*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-lsm-2.asp>
 - [2b] National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2007). Table 8.2a. Number and percentage of elementary and secondary school students who spoke a language other than English at home and percentage who spoke English with difficulty, by grade level and race/ethnicity: 2005. In *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic minorities*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/tables/table_8_2a.asp?referrer=report
 - [2c] Batalova, J., Fix, M., & Murray, J. (2005). *English language learner adolescents: Demographics and literacy achievements*. Report to the Center for Applied Linguistics. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved from http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/Measures_of_Change.pdf
 - [2d] Capps, R., Fix, M., Murray, J., Ost, J., Passel, J. S., & Herwanto, S. (2005). *The new demography of America's schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311230_new_demography.pdf
- [3] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (n.d.). *Survey of youth in residential placement (2002–2003)*. Retrieved from <https://symp.org/default.asp>

Additional References and Notes

- ¹ National Council of Teachers of English. (2008). *English language learners: A policy research brief*. Urbana, IL: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/PolicyResearch/ELLResearchBrief.pdf>
- ² Children of immigrants refers to the foreign or U.S.-born children of immigrants.
- ³ Fry, R., for Pew Hispanic Center. (2008). Explaining the English language learner achievement gap [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://essentialeducator.org/?p=449>
- ⁴ See inclusion of ELL in definition of “at-risk students” under Title I, Part D, of ESEA, as amended in 2002.
- ⁵ The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) uses the term Limited English Proficient (LEP), and more broadly, the U. S. Department of Education uses the term English Learner (EL). To be consistent with the language most widely used in the field, we have used the term English Language Learner (ELL) in this fact sheet.
- ⁶ Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title IX, Section 9101(25). Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg107.html>
- ⁷ Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended, provides Federal financial support to State and local education agencies to supplement English language instruction in order ensure that ELL students, including immigrant students, attain English proficiency and meet the same academic content and academic achievement standards that all students are expected to meet.
- ⁸ Under ESEA, States have discretion as to how they define English language “proficiency” (which must be determined in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Screening methods for LEP students vary by State, including proficiency assessments, home surveys, teacher judgment, student grades, interviews, or other methods. Targets and cutoffs used to determine “proficiency” also vary. As such, the determination of youth who are ELL/LEP by States for Title III may be broader than that used by the U.S. Census Bureau, which considers only those youth who are reported as not “speaking English very well” as ELL (see *State of The States*: <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-iii/state-of-states.pdf> and Federal Register Notice of Final Interpretations <http://www2.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/other/2008-4/101708a.html>).
- ⁹ Kindler, A. (2002). *Survey of the States' limited English proficient students and available educational programming and services, 2000–01 summary report*. Prepared for the Office of English Language Acquisition. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Education Programs. Retrieved from http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/rcd/BE021853/Survey_of_the_States.pdf
- ¹⁰ Aud, S., Hussar, W., Planty, M., Snyder, T., Bianco, K., Fox, M., . . . Drake, L. (2010). *The condition of education 2010* (NCES 2010-028). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/tables/table-lsm-2.asp>



- ¹¹ National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2004). *Language minorities and their educational and labor market indicators—Recent trends, NCES 2004–09*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- As reported in: Short, D. J., & Fitzsimmons, S. (2007). *Double the work: Challenges and solutions to acquiring language and academic literacy for adolescent English language learners. Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. New York: Alliance for Excellent Education.
- ¹² U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading and Mathematics (data retrieved online June 7, 2011).
- ¹³ Title III accountability occurs through three Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) focused on increases in the number/percentage of children (1) *making progress in learning English*, (2) *attaining English proficiency*, and (3) *making academic yearly progress (AYP)* for ELL/LEP children, as described in Title I of ESEA. States have discretion to define “making progress” and “attaining proficiency” and establish annual targets for each AMAO [1].
- ¹⁴ Kanno, Y., & Cromley, J. G. (2010). *English language learners’ access to and attainment in postsecondary education*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University. Retrieved from http://airweb.org/images/Grants2009/Kanno_Final.pdf
- ¹⁵ Moughamian, A. C., Rivera, M. O., & Francis, D. J. (2009). *Instructional models and strategies for teaching English language learners*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction. Retrieved from <http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Instructional%20Models%20for%20ELLs.pdf>

Suggested Citation:

Sidana, A., Lampron, S., & O’Cummings, M. (2011). *ELL Students and the N or D Context*. Washington, DC: National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At Risk (NDTAC). Online at <http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/nd/docs/ELLFactSheet.pdf>