



English Learners in Georgia

Demographics, Outcomes, and State Accountability Policies

By Julie Sugarman and Courtney Geary

This fact sheet provides an overview of key characteristics of the foreign-born and English Learner (EL) populations in Georgia. It aims to build understanding of the state demographic context, how ELs are performing in K-12 schools, and the basics of state policies for EL education under the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), enacted in December 2015. The transition to ESSA is ongoing, with states slated to update their data reporting systems by December 2018. As a result, the data this fact sheet uses to describe student outcomes primarily reflect systems and accountability policies developed under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, in effect from 2002 through 2015). Many of the changes expected as ESSA is implemented will improve the accuracy and availability of these data.

The first section examines the demographics of Georgia using U.S. Census Bureau 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) data, and EL students as reported by the Georgia Department of Education. A discussion of EL student outcomes as measured by standardized tests follows, and the fact sheet concludes with a brief overview of Georgia accountability mechanisms that affect ELs under ESSA.

I. Demographic Overview of Foreign-Born and EL Populations in Georgia

In 2016, approximately 1,038,000 foreign-born individuals resided in Georgia, accounting for 10 percent of the state population—a smaller share compared to immigrants in the United States overall (14 percent), as seen in Table 1. The growth rate of the foreign-born population in Georgia slowed considerably from 233 percent in the period between 1990 and 2000 to 80 percent between 2000 and 2016. Nevertheless, this growth rate is about double that of the U.S. immigrant population more generally, and it far outpaces the growth rate of the native-born population. Age group trends in Georgia mirror broader national trends, with disproportionately smaller shares of foreign-born individuals in the birth-to-age-17 brackets compared to the native born.

The share of school-age children with one or more foreign-born parents is smaller in Georgia (21 percent) than in the United States overall (26 percent), as shown in Table 2. Additionally, about 85 percent of children of immigrants in Georgia were native born, compared to 86 percent nationwide. In Georgia, 24 percent of children in low-income families had one or more foreign-born parents, compared to 32 percent of low-income children nationally.

Table 1. Foreign- and U.S.-Born Populations of Georgia and the United States, 2016

	Georgia		United States	
	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born
Number	1,038,312	9,272,059	43,739,345	279,388,170
Share of total population	10.1%	89.9%	13.5%	86.5%
Population Change over Time				
% change: 2000-16	79.9%	21.9%	40.6%	11.6%
% change: 1990-2000	233.4%	20.7%	57.4%	9.3%
Age Group				
Share under age 5	0.9%	7.0%	0.7%	7.0%
Share ages 5-17	5.6%	19.4%	5.1%	18.5%
Share ages 18+	93.4%	73.7%	94.2%	74.5%

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, “State Immigration Data Profiles: Demographics & Social,” accessed May 15, 2018, www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/GA/US/.

Number of ELs. ACS data on the Limited English Proficient (LEP) population rely on self-reporting of English proficiency, with LEP individuals counted as those who speak English less than “very well.” At the national level, ACS data indicate that 5 percent of U.S. children ages 5 to 17 are LEP,¹ while data the states submitted to the federal government put the EL share of the total K-12 population at 10 percent in Fall 2015.²

At the state level, ACS data indicate that 3 percent of Georgia children ages 5 to 17 are LEP.³ In contrast, the most recent data from the Georgia Department of Education, from school year (SY) 2017–18, indicate ELs represented 8 percent of the state preK-12 student population, or 155,761 students.⁴

Table 2. Nativity and Low-Income Status of Children in Georgia and the United States, 2016

	Georgia		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
Children between ages 6 and 17 with	1,625,000	100.0	47,090,847	100.0
Only native-born parents	1,289,774	79.4	34,838,528	74.0
One or more foreign-born parents	335,226	20.6	12,252,319	26.0
Child is native born	286,448	17.6	10,501,024	22.3
Child is foreign born	48,778	3.0	1,751,295	3.7
Children in low-income families	1,070,705	100.0	28,363,805	100.0
Only native-born parents	809,721	75.6	19,216,957	67.8
One or more foreign-born parents	260,984	24.4	9,146,848	32.2

Note: The definition of children in low-income families includes children under age 18 who resided with at least one parent and in families with annual incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold.

Source: MPI Data Hub, “State Immigration Data Profiles: Demographics & Social.”

Table 3. Nativity of Georgia and U.S. LEP Students, 2012–16

	Share of K-12 LEP Children Born in the United States (%)		
	Grades K-5	Grades 6–12	Total
Georgia	82.2	51.7	68.6
United States	82.3	56.5	70.6

Note: Analysis based on Limited English Proficient (LEP) children ages 5 and older enrolled in grades K-12.

Source: MPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau pooled 2012–16 American Community Survey (ACS) data, accessed through Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota, “Integrated Public Use Microdata Series,” accessed April 25, 2018, <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>.

Although ACS data seem to undercount EL children, they can be used to examine (with due caution) the nativity of ELs, a variable school data systems do not capture. Table 3 shows that in Georgia, more than two-thirds of school-aged children who were reported as LEP in census data were born in the United States, with a larger share among elementary school children than older students. The rate of native-born LEP children in the United States overall was somewhat higher, at 71 percent.

The most recent data available that shows the top languages spoken by ELs in Georgia come from the Consolidated State Performance

Reports submitted by each state to the federal government. Table 4 shows data from SY 2015–16, which indicate Spanish was spoken by more than three-quarters of Georgia ELs, with Vietnamese, Chinese, and Arabic the languages with the next largest groups of speakers.

Among Georgia school districts with enrollment of more than 1,500 ELs, the five districts with the largest number of ELs for SY 2016–17 were in the metro Atlanta area (see Table 5). In the districts with the largest numbers of ELs, these students made up between 4 percent (Atlanta Public Schools) and 34 percent (Gainesville City) of total enrollment.

Table 4. Top Home Languages Spoken by Georgia ELs, SY 2015–16

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs with a Home Language Other Than English (%)
Spanish; Castilian	86,297	78.4
No linguistic content; Not applicable	6,997	6.4
Vietnamese	2,389	2.2
Chinese	1,847	1.7
Arabic	1,395	1.3

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Notes: Share calculated based on 110,035 Limited English Proficient (LEP) students reported by the state in 2015–16. The category “No linguistic content” represents Georgia ELs who speak languages that state data group together in the following categories: Other African, Other Asian, Other Indian, or Other European.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, “SY 2015-2016 Consolidated State Performance Reports Part I— Georgia,” updated October 18, 2017, www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/consolidated/sy15-16part1/index.html.

Table 5. Number of ELs and EL Share of Students in Georgia School Districts with More Than 1,500 ELs, SY 2016–17

	Number of ELs	EL Share of Students in District (%)
Gwinnett County	34,091	17.6
DeKalb County	19,173	16.7
Cobb County	15,684	12.8
Fulton County	9,200	8.9
Hall County	6,920	23.8
Clayton County	6,732	10.6
Forsyth County	3,746	7.8
Cherokee County	3,589	8.2
Gainesville City	2,897	34.3
Whitfield County	2,524	18.1
Atlanta Public Schools	2,487	4.2
Douglas County	2,223	7.6
Marietta City	1,948	19.4
Clarke County	1,934	13.8
Dalton City	1,868	22.5
Colquitt County	1,780	17.7

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Note: These data include prekindergarten students as well as K-12 students.

Source: State of Georgia, Governor’s Office of School Achievement, “Downloadable Data—Attendance—2016-17,” accessed April 17, 2018, <https://gosa.georgia.gov/downloadable-data>.

II. EL Student Outcomes in Georgia

This section looks at outcomes of the EL subgroup on state standardized assessments. It is important to note two things about the participation of ELs on these assessments. First, compared to other student subgroups based on ethnicity, poverty, gender, and special education status, ELs are a much more dynamic population: as students gain proficiency, they exit the EL subgroup and new ELs are identified as they enter the U.S. school system. By definition, students who remain in the EL subgroup are not performing at a level where their achievement on mainstream assessments is comparable to that of their English-proficient peers. Whereas this lag is expected for students in their first

several years of learning English, concerns about the significant numbers of long-term ELs—those identified as ELs for six or more years—not scoring proficient in English language arts (ELA) and math have driven policymakers to strengthen the ways they hold schools accountable for EL outcomes on academic assessments.

Second, under NCLB, states were allowed to exempt newly arrived EL students from taking the ELA test for one year and to exclude the math scores of those newcomers from accountability reports. For that reason, the results below do not include all Georgia ELs. The rules for including newly arrived ELs in reports on subgroup outcomes will change as ESSA provisions go into effect in 2018 (see “Accountability for EL Academic Achievement” below).

Table 6. Share of Georgia ELs and Non-ELs Who Scored Proficient or Distinguished in English Language Arts (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)
Share of ELs who scored proficient or distinguished	21.8	24.4	15.4	11.1	5.3	5.5
Share of non-ELs who scored proficient or distinguished	38.5	44.0	41.6	42.2	38.1	44.0

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: State of Georgia, Governor’s Office of School Achievement, “Downloadable Data—Georgia Milestones End-of-Grade (EOG) Assessments (by grade)—2016-17,” accessed April 17, 2018, <https://gosa.georgia.gov/downloadable-data>.

Georgia administers the Georgia Milestones for accountability purposes. Milestones assessments are given for ELA and math in grades 3 through 8, and for science and social studies in grades 5 and 8. Additionally, Georgia administers ten end-of-course tests to high school students, split across the four content areas. Student achievement is reported in four achievement levels: beginning, developing, proficient, and distinguished.⁵

Table 6 shows considerable achievement gaps between the share of ELs and non-ELs who scored proficient or distinguished, with that gap growing larger at successively older grade

levels. The gap was smallest in 3rd grade (17 points) and largest in 8th grade (39 points).

As with ELA, gaps between ELs and non-ELs on end-of-grade math tests generally were larger in the older grades (see Table 7). The gap was smallest at 3rd grade (12 points) and largest in 7th grade (30 points).

Science and social studies test scores also show considerable gaps between ELs and non-ELs (Table 8). The gap for science remained consistent between 5th grade (24 points) and 8th grade (23 points), while the gap for social studies increased from 5th grade (20 points) to 8th grade (32 points).

Table 7. Share of Georgia ELs and Non-ELs Who Scored Proficient or Distinguished in Math (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)
Share of ELs who scored proficient or distinguished	32.4	32.5	20.7	15.1	13.0	13.7
Share of non-ELs who scored proficient or distinguished	44.0	46.5	39.2	39.9	43.1	35.4

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: State of Georgia, Governor’s Office of School Achievement, “Downloadable Data—Georgia Milestones End-of-Grade (EOG) Assessments.”

Table 8. Share of Georgia ELs and Non-ELs Who Scored Proficient or Distinguished in Science and Social Studies (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Science		Social Studies	
	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 8 (%)
Share of ELs who scored proficient or distinguished	18.5	7.1	12.0	7.9
Share of non-ELs who scored proficient or distinguished	42.0	30.3	31.6	40.3

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: State of Georgia, Governor’s Office of School Achievement, “Downloadable Data—Georgia Milestones End-of-Grade (EOG) Assessments.”

As Table 9 shows, achievement gaps between ELs and non-ELs in high school were largest for the two literature and composition classes: 9th Grade Literature (41 points) and American Literature (39 points). Gaps for all other content areas ranged from 17 points (Analytic Geometry) to 33 points (Biology).

Finally, graduation rates in Georgia have been increasing over the last five years for

students overall and for subgroups such as ELs, but wide gaps remain between ELs and all students. For the class of 2017, the share of ELs to graduate within four years was 59 percent, compared to a four-year graduation rate of 81 percent for all students.⁶ These rates are lower than those at the national level for the most recent year available (SY 2015–16), which were 67 percent for ELs and 84 percent for all students.⁷

Table 9. Share of Georgia ELs and Non-ELs Who Scored Proficient or Distinguished in High School End-of-Course Tests (%), SY 2016–17

	9th Grade Lit. (%)	Amer. Lit. (%)	Alg. 1 (%)	Coord. Alg. (%)	Geom. (%)	Anlt. Geom. (%)	Bio. (%)	Phys. Sci. (%)	U.S. Hist. (%)	Econ. (%)
Share of ELs who scored proficient or distinguished	11.1	9.0	13.6	8.3	17.9	15.9	12.6	11.1	14.6	14.3
Share of non-ELs who scored proficient or distinguished	52.1	47.6	35.9	32.3	44.0	32.9	45.9	37.7	45.3	45.4

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Note: Tests are given to high school students in four domains: English (9th Grade Literature and Composition, American Literature and Composition); math (Algebra I, Coordinate Algebra, Geometry, Analytic Geometry); science (Biology, Physical Science); and social studies (U.S. History, Economics/Business/Free Enterprise).

Source: State of Georgia, Governor’s Office of School Achievement, “Downloadable Data—Georgia Milestones End-of-Course (EOC) Assessments—2016-17,” accessed April 17, 2018, <https://gosa.georgia.gov/downloadable-data>.

III. Accountability under ESSA

In 2017, all 50 states (plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) submitted plans to the U.S. Department of Education that outline their approach to complying with new accountability regulations under ESSA. Among the new requirements are provisions requiring states to standardize how they identify students for and exit them from EL status, extending the number of years schools can include former ELs' scores in reporting on the outcomes of the EL subgroup, and allowing states to develop their own English language proficiency indicator (replacing the three required Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives in NCLB). Implementation of the new policies began in SY 2017–18. However, as many states have adopted new or significantly revised English language proficiency assessments over the last few years, some intend to wait to update their English language proficiency benchmarks until they have collected sufficient data from the new assessments.

Learn More about ELs and ESSA

For additional analysis, maps, and state-level data on English Learner education in the United States, check out the [MPI ELL Information Center](#) and its [ESSA resources](#).

A. Identification and Reclassification of ELs

Following federal guidelines, all states require schools to follow a two-step process for identifying students as ELs. First, parents or guardians complete a home-language survey when they enroll their child in a new school district. The survey generally includes one to four questions to identify students whose first language is not English or who live in households where a language other than English is spoken.

If students in such circumstances do not already have scores from a state-approved English

language proficiency test on file, they are given a screening test to gauge their English language ability in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (as required by ESSA). Students scoring below proficient are categorized as ELs. Schools must inform parents in a timely manner of their child's English language proficiency level and of the types of support the school can provide, including the right to opt out of services (but not the right to decline EL status and subsequent annual testing).⁸

In Georgia, students are screened for initial EL identification using one of the WIDA Consortium's assessments (the WIDA Screener, the Kindergarten W-APT, or the Kindergarten MODEL). Students are identified as ELs if they score below a designated level for each test. Once identified, ELs are given the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0⁹ annually until they score highly enough to be reclassified as English proficient. To be reclassified, kindergarten students must have an overall score of at least 5.0 with at least a 4.5 in writing, and in all other grades, students must be reclassified if they achieve an overall composite score of 5.0. If the composite score is between 4.3 and 4.9, an internal reclassification review team makes the determination using evidence from teacher observation and assessments of student performance.¹⁰

B. Accountability for English Language Proficiency

Whereas parents and teachers are primarily interested in the progress of individual students toward English language proficiency, state accountability systems track whether the ELs in entire schools and districts are progressing to and achieving proficiency within the state-determined timeline. States include English language proficiency in their accountability systems in two ways. First, they set a long-term goal for increasing the percent of students making progress toward proficiency (with interim goals along the way), and, second, they include an annual indicator of progress toward English language proficiency in the calculation they use to identify schools in need of improvement.¹¹

Georgia students are expected to take a maximum of eight years to achieve English language proficiency, with expectations for individual students set based on their initial English proficiency level. Students will be considered on track if they advance from one performance band to the next every year. The eight performance bands are structured in such a way that moving from one band to the next requires greater growth at lower proficiency levels and less growth as the student attains higher proficiency levels. About 89 percent of ELs in elementary school, 55 percent of those in middle school, and 67 percent of those in secondary school made enough progress in 2016 to meet their annual targets. Georgia has set a goal of reducing the gap between these baseline progress rates and 100 percent by 45 percent by 2031.¹² That would increase the share of ELs making the expected amount of progress to 94 percent for elementary, 75 percent for middle school, and 82 percent for secondary students. In line with ESSA guidance, Georgia plans to factor in whether schools are making relatively less progress in moving students toward English proficiency in their criteria for identifying schools in need of comprehensive support and improvement.¹³

C. Accountability for EL Academic Achievement

In addition to progress toward English proficiency, ESSA requires states to report and include in their accountability systems data on how well ELs, as a subgroup, are performing on the indicators that apply to all students (including ELA, math, and science tests; graduation rates; and a school-quality or student-success indicator such as attendance). Using this information, ESSA calls for states to identify schools for comprehensive support and improvement based on the performance of all students, including subgroups of students, and for targeted support and improvement for schools that have one or more underperforming subgroups such as ELs.

As noted earlier, the EL subgroup is unique in that students exit the subgroup once they reach a level at which their English proficiency is no longer keeping them from general academic

achievement similar to that of their English-proficient peers. Because of this, ESSA allows states to include former ELs within the EL subgroup for up to four years after they have exited EL status. Former EL students' scores in math and reading can thus be used in accountability measures as a way to give schools credit for the progress those students have made. Georgia will include former ELs in their calculation of academic achievement and academic progress indicators, though the state ESSA plan does not specify for how long.¹⁴

Unlike for other subgroups, ESSA also provides two types of exemption states may choose to apply to recently arrived ELs on state standardized tests:

1. In their first year in the United States, ELs can be exempt from taking the ELA test. They must be tested in math that year, but their scores will not be included in accountability calculations. Regular test-taking and accountability procedures will apply thereafter.
2. ELs take ELA and math tests in their first year, but their scores can be excluded from accountability measures. In the second year, outcomes on both tests are reported as a growth score from year one to year two. From their third year on, students are assessed and their scores included in accountability measures as is done for all students.

States also have a third option: they may assign option 1 to some recently arrived ELs and option 2 to others based on characteristics such as their initial English language proficiency level.¹⁵ Georgia's ESSA plan indicates it will use option 2 for its recently arrived ELs.¹⁶

As states move forward with ESSA accountability plans, policymakers are taking the opportunity to revise existing regulations on funding, program requirements, teacher training, and other aspects of school administration. Provisions that affect EL students should be scrutinized closely by stakeholders at all levels, whether parents, teachers, or community organizations. Data on EL demographics and performance, such as those provided in this fact sheet, will prove an important tool in this effort.¹⁷

Endnotes

- 1 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, “State Immigration Data Profiles: Language & Education,” accessed April 25, 2018, www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/GA/US/.
- 2 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), “Table 204.20: English Language Learner (ELL) Students Enrolled in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by State: Selected Years, Fall 2000 through Fall 2015,” updated October 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_204.20.asp?current=yes.
- 3 MPI Data Hub, “State Immigration Data Profiles: Language & Education.”
- 4 State of Georgia, Governor’s Office of School Achievement (GOSA), “Downloadable Data—Attendance—2016-17,” accessed June 27, 2018, <https://gosa.georgia.gov/downloadable-data>.
- 5 GOSA, “Georgia Milestones Assessment System,” accessed January 10, 2017, http://gosa.georgia.gov/sites/gosa.georgia.gov/files/OBIEE-Help/Georgia_Milestones.htm.
- 6 GOSA, “Downloadable Data—Graduation Rate (4-Year Cohort)—2016-17,” accessed June 27, 2018, <https://gosa.georgia.gov/downloadable-data>.
- 7 NCES, “Table 219.46. Public High School 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR), by Selected Student Characteristics and State: 2010-11 through 2015-16,” updated December 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_219.46.asp?current=yes.
- 8 U.S. Department of Education, *Tools and Resources for Identifying all English Learners* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2016), www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/chap1.pdf.
- 9 The ACCESS for ELLs 2.0—which stands for Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners—is an English language proficiency assessment given annually to English Learners (ELs) in the 39 states and U.S. territories that make up the WIDA Consortium. For more information on the consortium, see WIDA, “Home,” accessed July 24, 2018, www.wida.us.
- 10 Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), “English Learner Reclassification Review Form,” accessed July 19, 2018, www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Documents/ESOL/Main%20Page/English%20Learner%20Reclassification%20Review%20Form%20Fillable.pdf; Cori Alston and Jacqueline C. Ellis, *Georgia Department of Education ESOL Resource Guide: 2017-2018* (Atlanta: GaDOE, 2018), www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Documents/ESOL/GaDOE%20Guidance/2017-2018%20ESOL%20Resource%20Guide%20%284.12.18%29.pdf.
- 11 Susan Lyons and Nathan Dadey, *Considering English Language Proficiency within Systems of Educational Accountability under the Every Student Succeeds Act* (Chicago: Latino Policy Forum and Center for Assessment, 2017), www.latinopolicyforum.org/publications/reports/document/Considerations-for-ELP-indicator-in-ESSA_030817.pdf.
- 12 The state does not specify whether the 80 percent figure is a long-term goal beyond the first five years of the plan.
- 13 GaDOE, *Educating Georgia’s Future: Georgia’s State Plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* (Atlanta: GaDOE, 2017), www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/Online%20Post%20Georgia%20State%20ESSA%20Plan%20Final%20Submission%20--%201-10-18%20Redline.pdf.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 EdTrust, “Setting New Accountability for English-Learner Outcomes in ESSA Plans,” accessed April 26, 2018, <https://edtrust.org/setting-new-accountability-english-learner-outcomes-essa-plans/>.
- 16 GaDOE, *Educating Georgia’s Future*.
- 17 For additional information on accessing and understanding state EL demographic and outcome data, see Julie Sugarman, *A Guide to Finding and Understanding English Learner Data* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/guide-finding-understanding-english-learner-data.

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For more information on the impact of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* on EL and immigrant students, visit: www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/nciip-english-learners-and-every-student-succeeds-act.

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