



# English Learners in Illinois

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

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

In 2016, approximately 1,783,000 foreign-born individuals resided in Illinois, accounting for 14 percent of the state population—comparable to the immigrant share of the U.S. population overall (14 percent), as seen in Table 1. The growth rate of the foreign-born population in Illinois slowed considerably from 61 percent in the period between 1990 and 2000 to 17 percent between 2000 and 2016, a growth rate less than half that of the U.S. foreign born more generally. Nevertheless, Illinois's immigrant population continues to grow more rapidly than the native-born population. Age group trends in Illinois mirror broader national trends, with disproportionately smaller shares of foreign-born individuals in the birth-to-age-17 brackets compared to the native born.

Given that immigrants make up a similar share of the population in Illinois as they do in the United States more generally, it follows that the share of school-age children with one or more foreign-born parents in Illinois (27 percent) is also similar to the national share (26 percent), as shown in Table 2. Additionally, about 89 percent of children of immigrants in Illinois were native born, compared to 86 nationwide. In Illinois, 34 percent of children in low-income families had one or more foreign-born parents, which is comparable to the share of low-income children nationally (32 percent).

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

	Illinois		United States	
	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born
Number	1,783,474	11,018,065	43,739,345	279,388,170
Share of total population	13.9%	86.1%	13.5%	86.5%
<b>Population Change over Time</b>				
% change: 2000-16	16.6%	1.2%	40.6%	11.6%
% change: 1990-2000	60.6%	3.9%	57.4%	9.3%
<b>Age Group</b>				
Share under age 5	0.6%	6.9%	0.7%	7.0%
Share ages 5-17	4.2%	18.9%	5.1%	18.5%
Share ages 18+	95.2%	74.2%	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/IL/US/](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/IL/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,<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

At the state level, ACS data indicate that 4 percent of Illinois children ages 5 to 17 are LEP.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, data submitted by state of Illinois to the federal government indicates that for school year (SY) 2015-16, ELs represented 10 percent of the state student population, or 194,040 students.<sup>4</sup>

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

	Illinois		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
<b>Children between ages 6 and 17 with</b>	<b>1,911,288</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>47,090,847</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Only native-born parents	1,401,577	73.3	34,838,528	74.0
One or more foreign-born parents	509,711	26.7	12,252,319	26.0
Child is native born	452,545	23.7	10,501,024	22.3
Child is foreign born	57,166	3.0	1,751,295	3.7
<b>Children in low-income families</b>	<b>1,058,476</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>28,363,805</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Only native-born parents	703,998	66.5	19,216,957	67.8
One or more foreign-born parents	354,478	33.5	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 Illinois 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
Illinois	86.8	65.2	78.3
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 Illinois, more than three-fourths 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 lower, at 71 percent.

The most recent data available that show the top languages spoken by ELs in Illinois 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 Illinois ELs, with Arabic, Polish, and Urdu the languages with the next largest groups of speakers.

Among Illinois school districts estimated to enroll more than 2,000 ELs, shown in Table 5, these students made up between 8 percent (Indian Prairie) and 52 percent (West Chicago Elementary School District) of total enrollment.

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

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs with a Home Language Other Than English (%)
Spanish; Castilian	151,262	78.0
Arabic	6,137	3.2
Polish	6,007	3.1
Undetermined	2,810	1.4
Urdu	2,749	1.4

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

*Note:* Share calculated based on 193,879 Limited English Proficient (LEP) students reported by the state in 2015–16.

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

**Table 5. EL Share of Students in Illinois School Districts Estimated to Have More Than 2,000 ELs, SY 2016–17**

	EL Share of Students in District (%)	Total Enrollment of All Students
Chicago Public Schools	17.7	382,929
SD U-46	28.7	39,377
Rockford Public Schools	13.9	28,370
Indian Prairie CUSD 204	8.0	27,899
CUSD 300	14.7	20,708
Valley View CUSD 365U	13.9	16,661
Waukegan CUSD 60	32.0	16,478
Schaumburg CCSD 54	21.6	14,781
East Aurora SD 131	36.4	14,317
Palatine CCSD 15	24.0	12,482
West Aurora School District 129	20.6	12,414
Cicero SD 99	49.6	12,075
Joliet Public Schools District 86	21.6	11,500
CCSD 59	35.5	6,866
Wheeling CCSD 21	39.4	6,693
West Chicago Elementary School District 33	52.4	4,530

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year; SD = School District; CUSD = Community Unit School District; CCSD = Community Consolidated School District.

*Notes:* These data include prekindergarten students as well as K-12 students. Illinois data only provided shares of ELs, not EL student counts. To find districts with more than 2,000 ELs, the number of ELs was estimated based on the EL share of students in the district and total enrollment count.

*Source:* Illinois State Board of Education, “Illinois Report Card Data—2016-17—Data Files—2016-2017 Report Card Data,” accessed July 11, 2018, [www.isbe.net/pages/illinois-state-report-card-data.aspx](http://www.isbe.net/pages/illinois-state-report-card-data.aspx).

## II. EL Student Outcomes in Illinois

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

**Table 6. Share of Illinois ELs and All Students Meeting or Exceeding Standards on the PARCC English Language Arts and SAT Reading (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17**

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	SAT Reading (%)
Share of ELs who met or exceeded standards	20	6	2	2	3	4	2
Share of all students who met or exceeded standards	36	37	37	35	40	37	40

EL = English Learner; PARCC = the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers; SY = School Year.

Sources: Illinois State Board of Education, “Illinois Report Card: PARCC,” accessed April 24, 2018, [www.illinoisreportcard.com/State.aspx?source=trends&source2=parcc.details&Stateid=IL](http://www.illinoisreportcard.com/State.aspx?source=trends&source2=parcc.details&Stateid=IL); Illinois State Board of Education, “Illinois Report Card: SAT,” accessed June 27, 2018, [www.illinoisreportcard.com/State.aspx?source=trends&source2=sat&Stateid=IL](http://www.illinoisreportcard.com/State.aspx?source=trends&source2=sat&Stateid=IL).

not include all Illinois 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).

Illinois administers the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the SAT for accountability purposes. The PARCC assessments in ELA and math are given in grades 3–8. For both tests, there are five achievement levels: did not meet the standards, partially meets standards, approaching standards, meets standards, and exceeds standards. In SY 2016–17, Illinois eliminated PARCC testing for high schoolers and replaced it with the SAT for 11th grade students. The state set cut scores

that correspond to four performance levels: partially meets standards, approaching standards, meets standards, and exceeds standards.<sup>5</sup>

Table 6 shows considerable achievement gaps between the share of ELs and of all students who met or exceeded the standards in ELA or reading. The gap was 16 points in 3rd grade and then held steady across the older grade levels at between 31 points and 38 points.

As with ELA and reading, there are considerable gaps between ELs and all students on the PARCC and SAT math assessments (see Table 7). The gap was smallest at 3rd grade (12 points) and increased through to the high school SAT (34 points).

**Table 7. Share of Illinois ELs and All Students Meeting or Exceeding Standards on the PARCC and SAT Math (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17**

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	SAT Math (%)
Share of ELs who met or exceeded standards	27	6	4	3	3	5	3
Share of all students who met or exceeded standards	39	31	30	28	27	33	37

EL = English Learner; PARCC = the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers; SY = School Year.

Sources: Illinois State Board of Education, “Illinois Report Card: PARCC;” Illinois State Board of Education, “Illinois Report Card: SAT.”

Finally, graduation rates in Illinois 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 74 percent, compared to a four-year graduation rate of 87 percent for all students.<sup>6</sup> These rates are higher 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.<sup>7</sup>

### 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).<sup>8</sup>

In Illinois, students are screened for initial EL identification using one of the WIDA Consortium's assessments (the WIDA Screener or the WIDA MODEL). Students are identified as ELs if they score below 5.0 out of 6.0 in oral language proficiency (for students in the first semester of kindergarten), below 5.0 overall with a literacy composite score below 4.2 (for second semester of kindergarten and first semester of 1st grade), and an overall composite score of 5.0 for all other students.<sup>9</sup> Once identified, ELs are given the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0<sup>10</sup> annually until they score highly enough to be reclassified as English proficient. To be reclassified, students must have an overall composite score of at least 4.8.<sup>11</sup>

## 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.<sup>12</sup>

Illinois students are expected to take a maximum of five years to achieve English language proficiency. A student's expected annual growth is calculated by subtracting their initial ACCESS composite score from 4.8 and dividing by 5. About 63 percent of ELs made enough progress in 2016 to achieve proficiency within the given timeline. However, at the time the state ESSA plan was written, Illinois was anticipating far lower outcomes for 2017, the first year in which it planned to administer the more rigorous WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. The state therefore indicated that 22 percent of students would be on track in 2017. Using this baseline, the state aims to increase the share of ELs making the expected amount of progress by between 4 percent and 5 percent each year with a goal of reaching 90 percent by 2032. In line with ESSA guidance, Illinois 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.<sup>13</sup>

## 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. Illinois will not include former ELs in their calculation of academic achievement and academic progress indicators; however, the state will use a separate former EL subgroup for accountability purposes. Students remain in this subgroup through grade 12, regardless of the grade in which they were reclassified as fluent in English.<sup>14</sup>

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.<sup>15</sup> Illinois's ESSA plan indicates it will use option 2 for its recently arrived ELs.<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup>



## 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/IL/US/](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/IL/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](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 NCES, “Table 204.20.”
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- 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](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](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/chap1.pdf).
- 9 ISBE, “Screening for English Language Proficiency & Placement,” accessed July 19, 2018, [www.isbe.net/Pages/Screening-for-English-Language-Proficiency.aspx](http://www.isbe.net/Pages/Screening-for-English-Language-Proficiency.aspx).
- 10 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](http://www.wida.us).
- 11 Letter from Jason Helfer, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning and Libia Gil, Chief Education Officer, ISBE, to state superintendents, *The New “Proficient” Definition Letter to Superintendent*, June 16, 2017, [www.isbe.net/Documents/1\\_ACCESS-%20Superintendent.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/Documents/1_ACCESS-%20Superintendent.pdf).
- 12 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](http://www.latinopolicyforum.org/publications/reports/document/Considerations-for-ELP-indicator-in-ESSA_030817.pdf).
- 13 ISBE, *Illinois State Board of Education State Template for the Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act* (Springfield, IL: ISBE, 2017), [www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.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 ISBE, *Illinois State Board of Education State Template*.
- 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](http://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](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/nciip-english-learners-and-every-student-succeeds-act).

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