# Fact Sheet

# English Learners in Maryland

## 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 Maryland. 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 Maryland using U.S. Census Bureau 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) data, and EL students as reported by the Maryland State 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 Maryland accountability mechanisms that affect ELs under ESSA.

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

In 2016, approximately 922,000 foreign-born individuals resided in Maryland, accounting for 15 percent of the state population—a slightly higher 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 Maryland increased from 65 percent in the period between 1990 and 2000 to 78 percent between 2000 and 2016, almost double that of the U.S. immigrant population more generally and far outpacing the growth rate of the native-born population. Age group trends in Maryland 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 roughly the same in Maryland (27 percent) as in the United States overall (26 percent), as shown in Table 2. Additionally, about 82 percent of children of immigrants in Maryland were native born, compared to 86 percent nationwide. In Maryland, 32 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.

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

| | Maryland | | United States | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Foreign Born** | **U.S. Born** | **Foreign Born** | **U.S. Born** |
| Number | 921,870 | 5,094,577 | 43,739,345 | 279,388,170 |
| Share of total population | 15.3% | 84.7% | 13.5% | 86.5% |
| **Population Change over Time** | | | | |
| % change: 2000-16 | 77.9% | 6.6% | 40.6% | 11.6% |
| % change: 1990-2000 | 65.3% | 6.9% | 57.4% | 9.3% |
| **Age Group** | | | | |
| Share under age 5 | 0.9% | 7.0% | 0.7% | 7.0% |
| Share ages 5-17 | 5.9% | 18.2% | 5.1% | 18.5% |
| Share ages 18+ | 93.2% | 74.8% | 94.2% | 74.5% |

*Source:* Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, "State Immigration Data Profiles: Demographics & Social," accessed May 16, 2018, www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/MD/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 4 percent of Maryland children ages 5 to 17 are LEP.[3] In contrast, the most recent data from the Maryland State Department of Education, from school year (SY) 2016–17, indicate ELs represented 9 percent of the state K-12 student population, or 75,852 students.[4]

Although ACS data seem to undercount EL children, they can be used to examine (with due caution) the nativity of ELs, a variable

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

| | Maryland | | United States | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Share of Population (%)** | **Number** | **Share of Population (%)** |
| **Children between ages 6 and 17 with** | **865,998** | **100.0** | **47,090,847** | **100.0** |
| Only native-born parents | 629,485 | 72.7 | 34,838,528 | 74.0 |
| One or more foreign-born parents | 236,513 | 27.3 | 12,252,319 | 26.0 |
| Child is native born | 193,955 | 22.4 | 10,501,024 | 22.3 |
| Child is foreign born | 42,558 | 4.9 | 1,751,295 | 3.7 |
| **Children in low-income families** | **360,816** | **100.0** | **28,363,805** | **100.0** |
| Only native-born parents | 243,786 | 67.6 | 19,216,957 | 67.8 |
| One or more foreign-born parents | 117,030 | 32.4 | 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."

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**Table 3. Nativity of Maryland 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 |
| Maryland | 71.8 | 42.8 | 58.1 |
| 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/.

school data systems do not capture. Table 3 shows that in Maryland, 58 percent 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.

Turning now to data collected by the Maryland State Department of Education, Table 4 shows the most commonly spoken home languages among ELs in the state. Three-quarters of Maryland ELs speak Spanish, with French, Chinese, Amharic, Creole, and Arabic with

the next highest shares of speakers. In total, Maryland ELs speak over 200 languages other than English.

Finally, Table 5 shows that as grade level increases, the share of ELs in Maryland K-12 schools generally decreases. Whereas 12 percent of elementary school students were ELs in SY 2016–17, that number was 6 percent among high school students. This reflects the trend that more students achieve English proficiency (and thus exit EL status) over time than immigrate to the United States as adolescents or remain ELs beyond the typical five- to seven-year time frame.

**Table 4. Home Languages Spoken by Maryland ELs, SY 2016–17**

| | Share of EL Students with a Home Language Other than English (%) |
|---|---|
| Spanish | 75.0 |
| French | 2.5 |
| Chinese | 2.1 |
| Amharic | 1.7 |
| Creole | 1.6 |
| Arabic | 1.6 |
| All Other Languages | 11.0 |

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.
*Note:* A total of 69,079 English Learners in Maryland speak 203 languages.
*Source:* Maryland State Department of Education, "2016–2017 Total Languages Spoken By English Learners: 203," accessed May 8, 2018, http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Documents/English-Learners/ELsGlanceMaryland.pdf.

**Table 5. Number of ELs and EL Share of Students in Maryland, by Grade, SY 2016–17**

|  | Elementary | Middle | High |
|---|---|---|---|
| Share of ELs | 11.6% | 5.0% | 5.8% |
| Number of ELs | 51,147 | 9,803 | 14,902 |

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.
*Source:* Maryland State Department of Education, "2017 Maryland Report Card—Students Receiving Special Services," accessed July 3, 2018, http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Entity.aspx?WDATA=State.

## II. EL Student Outcomes in Maryland

This section examines 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 Maryland 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).

Maryland administers the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) tests for accountability purposes. PARCC assessments are given for ELA in grades 3 to 11; for math in grades 3 to 8; and to students enrolled in Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry. For PARCC tests, there are five achievement levels: did not meet, partially met, approached, met, and exceeded expectations.[5]

Table 6 shows considerable achievement gaps between the share of ELs and of all students who met or exceeded the standard in ELA, with the size of the gap varying across grade levels. Gaps in grades 3 to 9 ranged from 33 to 41 points. In high school, the variation was more dramatic: there was a 47-point gap in grade 10, but a much smaller 23-point gap in grade 11.

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**Table 6. Share of Maryland ELs and All Students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations in English Language Arts (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17**

|  | Grade 3 (%) | Grade 4 (%) | Grade 5 (%) | Grade 6 (%) | Grade 7 (%) | Grade 8 (%) | Grade 9 (%) | Grade 10 (%) | Grade 11 (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Share of ELs who met or exceeded expectations | 6.5 | 3.1 | 1.6 | 1.5 | 2.5 | 1.5 | 3.1 | 2.7 | 1.5 |
| Share of all students who met or exceed expectations | 39.8 | 41.9 | 41.4 | 38.4 | 43.1 | 38.9 | 38.9 | 49.3 | 24.6 |

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.
*Note:* To generate the data used to create this table, use the navigation tabs "Results Grades 3 – 8" and "Results High School" and the "Expand Data Navigation" button to select the grade and subject or course.
*Source:* Maryland State Department of Education, "2017 Maryland Report Card—PARCC Results," accessed June 1, 2017, http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/ParccTrends.aspx?PV=71:3:99:AAAA:1:N:0:13:1:1:0:1:1:1:3.

As with ELA, there are considerable gaps between ELs and all students on the PARCC math assessment (see Table 7). These gaps again vary across grade levels, ranging from 15 points (grade 8) to 46 points (Geometry).

In SY 2015–16, the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) science exams were given for the last time before the state transitioned to the Maryland Integrated Science Assessment, which will be used to test students in grades 5 and 8 and once in high school. Because the new test was piloted in SY 2016–17 and no results were released, this section uses data from the 2015–16 MSA to examine student outcomes in science.[6] MSA results are reported as three levels: basic, proficient, and advanced. Based on these data, Table 8 shows that considerable gaps exist between ELs and all students in science, increasing from 49 points (grade 5) to 58 points (Biology).

**Table 7. Share of Maryland ELs and All Students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations in Math (%), by Grade or Course, SY 2016–17**

|  | Grade 3 (%) | Grade 4 (%) | Grade 5 (%) | Grade 6 (%) | Grade 7 (%) | Grade 8 (%) | Alg. I (%) | Alg. II (%) | Geo. (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Share of ELs who met or exceeded expectations | 14.9 | 5.5 | 3.7 | 2.4 | 2.7 | 1.8 | 5.6 | 3.5 | 1.7 |
| Share of all students who met or exceed expectations | 43.0 | 37.4 | 35.5 | 32.2 | 25.3 | 16.8 | 36.5 | 27.3 | 47.9 |

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year; Alg. I = Algebra I; Alg. II = Algebra II; Geo. = Geometry.
*Note:* To generate the data used to create this table, use the navigation tabs "Results Grades 3 – 8" and "Results High School" and the "Expand Data Navigation" button to select the grade and subject or course.
*Source:* Maryland State Department of Education, "2017 Maryland Report Card—PARCC Results."

**Table 8. Share of Maryland ELs and All Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Science (%), by Grade or Course, SY 2015–16**

| | Grade 5 (%) | Grade 8 (%) | Biology (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Share of ELs who scored proficient or advanced | 11.2 | 12.3 | 26.0 |
| Share of all students who scored proficient or advanced | 60.2 | 65.0 | 83.5 |

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.
*Note:* To generate the data used to create this table, use the navigation tabs "Results Grades 5 and 8" and "Results High School" and the "Expand Data Navigation" button to select the grade and subject or course.
*Source*: Maryland State Department of Education, "2017 Maryland Report Card—MSA Results," accessed June 1, 2018, http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/MsaTrends.aspx?PV=1:5:99:AAAA:1:N:0:13:3:1:0:1:1:1:3.

Finally, graduation rates in Maryland have held steady for all students over the last five years, but have gone down for ELs—thus increasing the gap between ELs and all students. For the class of 2017, the share of ELs to graduate within four years was 45 percent, compared to a four-year graduation rate of 88 percent for all students.[7] While the graduation rate for all Maryland students was comparable to the national rate (84 percent) for the most recent year available (SY 2015–16), Maryland's EL graduation rate was considerably lower than the national rate (67 percent).[8]

## 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).[9]

In Maryland, 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). Once identified, ELs are given the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0[10] annually until they score highly enough to be reclassified as English proficient. In an amendment to their state ESSA plan that was approved in April 2018, Maryland set the criteria to exit EL status as a score of 4.5 out of 6.0 on the ACCESS test (lowering it from the previous level of 5.0).[11]

## 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.[12]

Maryland students are expected to take a maximum of six 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 meet their personalized growth targets from one year to the next. These targets are set based on the expectation that students who start with an ACCESS composite score of between 1.0 and 1.9 will increase this score by one full point in the first year, with more modest increases in subsequent years (as they improve in proficiency); students who start at a higher English proficiency level are also expected to make more limited year-to-year increases. Students will also get credit for growth based on their total increase since being identified as an EL, even if they do not meet their target in one particular year.[13]

About 48 percent of Maryland ELs made enough progress in 2017 to achieve proficiency within the given timeline. Using this baseline, the state aims to increase the share of ELs making the expected amount of progress by about 2 percent each year with a goal of reaching 74 percent by SY 2029–30 (i.e., closing half of the gap between 48 percent and 100 percent). In line with ESSA guidance, Maryland 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.[14]

## 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. Maryland will include former ELs in their calculation of academic achievement and academic progress indicators, but it is unclear from the state ESSA plan whether this will be done for two or four years.[15]

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.[16] Maryland's ESSA plan indicates it will use option 1 for its recently arrived ELs.[17]

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.[18]

## 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/MD/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       Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), "2017 Maryland Report Card—Students Receiving Special Services," accessed July 3, 2018, http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Entity.aspx?WDATA=State.

5       MSDE, "2017 Maryland Report Card—Assessments," accessed July 13, 2018, http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Assessments.aspx?K=99AAAA.

6       MSDE, "Maryland Assessments—MISA 2017–18," accessed July 13, 2018, https://marylandassessments.org/misa-2016-17/.

7       MSDE, "2017 Maryland Report Card—Graduation Rate—4-Year Adjusted Cohort," accessed July 3, 2018, http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/CohortGradRate.aspx?PV=160:12:99:AAAA:1:N:0:13:1:2:1:1:1:1:3.

8       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.

9       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.

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.

11      MSDE, *Maryland Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated State Plan* (Annapolis, MD: Maryland Department of Education, 2018), http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/ESSA/MarylandSubmissionConsolidatedStatePlan052318rev.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.

13      For example, if a student is expected to grow by 1.0 in the first year, 0.9 in the second, and 0.7 in the third (which add up to 2.6), and their actual growth is 1.4, 1.2, and 0.4 (which add up to 3.0), the student would get credit for growth even in the third year when their score was lower than the expected 0.7 because their cumulative growth was still more than the expected cumulative growth after three years.

14      MSDE, *Maryland Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated State Plan*.

15      Ibid.

16      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/.

17      MSDE, *Maryland Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated State Plan.*

18      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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## About the Authors

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The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. The Institute provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national, and international levels. It aims to meet the rising demand for pragmatic responses to the challenges and opportunities that migration presents in an ever more integrated world.

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