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English Learners in Nevada

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

Demgraphic Overview of Foreign-Born and EL Populations in Nevada

In 2016, approximately 587,000 foreign-born individuals resided in Nevada, accounting for 20 percent of the state population—a larger 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 Nevada slowed considerably from 202 percent in the period between 1990 and 2000 to 85 percent between 2000 and 2016. Nevertheless, this growth rate is more than double that of the U.S. immigrant population more generally, and it far outpaces the growth of the native-born population. Age group trends in Nevada mirror broader national trends, with disproportionately smaller shares of foreign-born individuals in the birth-to-age-17 brackets compared to the native born.

With a relatively large population of immigrants, it follows that the share of school-age children with one or more foreign-born parents is higher in Nevada (42 percent) than in the United States overall (26 percent), as shown in Table 2. Additionally, about 88 percent of children of immigrants in Nevada were native born, which is roughly comparable to the 86 percent nationwide. In Nevada, 48 percent of children in low-income families had one or more foreign-born parents, which is considerably higher than the share of low-income children nationally (32 percent).



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

	Nev	ada	United	States					
	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born					
Number	586,799	2,353,359	43,739,345	279,388,170					
Share of total population	20.0%	80.0%	13.5%	86.5%					
	Population Change over Time								
% change: 2000-16	85.3%	39.9%	40.6%	11.6%					
% change: 1990-2000	202.0%	53.3%	57.4%	9.3%					
	,	Age Group							
Share under age 5	0.5%	7.7%	0.7%	7.0%					
Share ages 5-17	4.2%	19.9%	5.1%	18.5%					
Share ages 18+	95.3%	72.4%	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/NV/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, 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 5 percent of Nevada children ages 5 to 17 are LEP.³ In contrast, the most recent data from the State of Nevada Department of Education, from school year (SY) 2017–18, indicate ELs represented 17 percent of the state K-12 student population, or 81,494 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 Nevada and the United States, 2016

	Nev	ada	United States		
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)	
Children between ages 6 and 17 with	431,376	100.0	47,090,847	100.0	
Only native-born parents	252,477	58.5	34,838,528	74.0	
One or more foreign-born parents	178,899	41.5	12,252,319	26.0	
Child is native born	156,708	36.3	10,501,024	22.3	
Child is foreign born	22,191	5.1	1,751,295	3.7	
Children in low-income families	291,404	100.0	28,363,805	100.0	
Only native-born parents	151,721	52.1	19,216,957	67.8	
One or more foreign-born parents	139,683	47.9	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 Nevada 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							
Nevada	87.1	51.7	71.0					
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 Nevada—as in the United States more generally—71 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 most recent data available that show the top languages spoken by ELs in Nevada come from the Consolidated State Performance Reports submitted by each state to the federal government. Table 4 shows data from SY 2015–16 that indicate Spanish was spoken by two-thirds of Nevada ELs, with Filipino, Tagalog, Chinese, and Vietnamese rounding out the top five.

Among Nevada school districts with enrollment of more than 1,000 ELs, the two districts with

the largest number of ELs are Clark County and Washoe County—home to Las Vegas and Reno, respectively. Table 5 also shows that in the district with the largest number of ELs, these students made up between 5 percent (State Public Charter Schools) and 18 percent (Clark County) of total enrollment.

Finally, Table 6 shows that as grade level increases, the share of ELs in Nevada K-12 schools generally decreases. Whereas 21 percent of early-elementary students were ELs in SY 2017–18, that figure was 12 percent for grades 9 through 12. 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. Top Home Languages Spoken by Nevada ELs, SY 2015-16

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs with a Home Language Other Than English (%)
Spanish; Castilian	52,898	67.5
Filipino; Pilipino	2,002	2.6
Tagalog	998	1.3
Chinese	695	0.9
Vietnamese	664	0.8

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year

Note: Shares were calculated using a total 78,416 LEP students in Nevada.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, "SY 2015-2016 Consolidated State Performance Reports Part I—Nevada," 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 Nevada School Districts with More Than 1,000 ELs, SY 2016–17

	Number of ELs	EL Share of Students in District (%)
Clark County	58,607	18.3
Washoe County	9,835	15.4
State Public Charter Schools	1,531	5.0
Carson City	1,179	15.1
Elko County	1,173	11.8

EL = English Learner; SY= School Year

Source: State of Nevada Department of Education (NDE), "Nevada Accountability Portal—District or School Data," accessed May 9, 2018, http://nevadareportcard.com/di/.

II. EL Student Outcomes in Nevada

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 Nevada 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).

Nevada administers annual assessments developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) for accountability purposes (these are referred to as criterion-referenced tests, or CRT, on the Nevada report card website). The SBAC exams for ELA and math are given in grades 3 through 8, and outcomes are reported at four levels: minimal understanding, partial understanding, proficient, and advanced, with the latter two considered meeting or exceeding standards.⁵ High school students take end-of-

Table 6. Number of ELs and EL Share of Students in Nevada, by Grade, SY 2017-18

	Grades K-2	Grades 3–5	Grades 6–8	Grades 9–12
Share of ELs	20.9%	22.1%	14.6%	12.2%
Number of ELs	22,509	25,362	16,272	17,351

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: NDE, "Enrollment for Nevada Public Schools—2017-2018 School Year Student Counts as of 10.02.2017," accessed June 5, 2018, www.doe.nv.gov/DataCenter/Enrollment/.

Table 7. Share of Nevada ELs and Non-ELs Meeting or Exceeding Standards in English Language Arts (%), by Grade or Course, SY 2016–17

	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	English I	English II
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Share of ELs meeting or exceeding standards	22.3	12.7	12.9	4.9	9.2	9.0	27.3	34.4
Share of non-ELs meeting or exceeding standards	52.2	53.4	57.1	48.4	53.2	52.7	73.4	76.6

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Note: To access the data used in this table, for grades 3–8, select "Group Summary Report" under "Select Report," and "CRT (New NV Standards)" under "Exam." For English I and II, select "Group Summary Report EOC" under "Select Report," and "ELA I" or "ELA II" under "Content Area."

Source: NDE, "Data Interaction for Nevada Accountability Portal," accessed June 5, 2018, www.nevadareportcard.com/di/main/assessment.

course assessments for English I and II and for Math I and II. These are also reported at four achievement levels, but the top three levels are considered meeting or exceeding standards. Students also take state science tests in grades 5 and 8 and once in high school (most in grade 9 or 10). As with the SBAC, scores on these science tests are reported at four levels, with levels 3 and 4 considered meeting or exceeding standards

Table 7 shows considerable achievement gaps between the share of ELs and non-ELs who met or exceeded the standard in ELA. The gap was smallest in 3rd grade (30 points) and increased to between 41 and 46 points for grades 4 through 8 and the end-of-course exams.

As with ELA, there are considerable gaps between ELs and non-ELs on math assessments (see Table 8). There was considerable variation in the size of the gap over the years, ranging from 16 points (grade 8) to 34 points (Math II).

Science test scores also show gaps between ELs and non-ELs of around 25 to 35 points at all grade levels (see Table 9).

Finally, graduation rates in Nevada have been increasing over the last five years for students overall. However, it is difficult to assess whether ELs have made similar progress because the four-year cohort graduation rate for this group seems to be inconsistently reported on the online Nevada Accountability Portal.⁶ Using the

Table 8. Share of Nevada ELs and Non-ELs Meeting or Exceeding Standards in Math (%), by Grade or Course, SY 2016–17

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Math I (%)	Math II (%)
Share of ELs meeting or exceeding standards	29.6	13.7	7.1	3.9	5.1	4.0	58.0	10.0
Share of non-ELs meeting or exceeding standards	53.5	46.4	38.8	34.4	33.1	20.3	76.5	43.8

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Note: To access the data used in this table, for grades 3–8, select "Group Summary Report" under "Select Report," and "CRT (New NV Standards)" under "Exam." For Math I and II, select "Group Summary Report EOC" under "Select Report," and "Math I" or "Math II" under "Content Area."

Source: NDE, "Data Interaction for Nevada Accountability Portal."



Table 9. Share of Nevada ELs and Non-ELs Meeting or Exceeding Standards in Science (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 9 (%)	Grade 10 (%)
Share of ELs meeting or exceeding standards	3.5	3.6	7.3	2.8
Share of non-ELs meeting or exceeding standards	30.5	37.6	42.7	28.2

EL = English Learner; SY= School Year

Note: To access the data used in this table, select "Group Summary Report" under "Select Report." Then, under "Exam," select "CRT Science (New NV Standards)" to show grades 5 and 8 or "EOC Science (New NV Standards)" to show grades 9 and 10.

Source: NDE, "Data Interaction for Nevada Accountability Portal."

class of 2016 figures reported to the federal government, Nevada's rates of 43 percent for ELs and 74 percent for all students are considerably lower than the national rates of 67 percent for ELs and 84 percent for all students.⁷

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 statelevel 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 Nevada, students are screened for initial EL identification using one of the WIDA Consortium's assessments (the WIDA Screener or the Kindergarten W-APT). 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, students must have an overall composite score of at least 5.0 out of 6.0 on the ACCESS, with a score of at least 5.0 on the literacy composite (which includes reading and writing).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 statedetermined 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

Nevada 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 it takes one year each to move from

level one to two, level two to three, and level three to four; the step from level four to five is expected to take two years.

Nevada set two long-term goals with respect to English language proficiency. The first is that 90 percent of ELs will meet the six-year maximum timeline to proficiency by 2022 (only 25 percent of ELs did so in 2016). The second is that 80 percent of ELs will make adequate annual growth toward proficiency by 2022 (which only 47 percent of ELs did in 2016). In line with ESSA guidance, Nevada plans to use achievement of the second goal in their criteria for identifying schools in need of comprehensive support and improvement.¹²

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. Nevada will include former ELs



for four years in their calculation of academic achievement and academic progress indicators.¹³

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

- 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. Nevada's ESSA plan indicates it will use option 2 for its recently arrived ELs. 15

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.¹⁶

Endnotes

- Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, "State Immigration Data Profiles: Language & Education," accessed April 25, 2018, www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/NV/US/.
- 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 Nevada Department of Education (NDE), "Enrollment for Nevada Public Schools—2017-2018 School Year Student Counts as of 10.02.2017," accessed July 5, 2018, www.doe.nv.gov/DataCenter/Enrollment/.
- NDE, "The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium," accessed July 16, 2018, https://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Assessments/All%20About_SBAC_Online_ADArev.pdf.
- The Nevada Accountability Portal only lists an option for students who were "ever ELs"—which includes those who have exited EL status—not just current ELs. Further, the four-year graduation rate for this ever-EL category jumped from 43 percent for the class of 2016 to 82 percent for the class of 2017. The 43 percent figure is consistent with what the state reported for its EL population to the federal government in 2016, whereas 82 percent is more likely to be a rate that includes reclassified ELs. It remains to be seen what figure the state reported for ELs in the class of 2017, as federal government reports for that cohort have not yet been released. See 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; NDE, "Cohort Graduation Rates," accessed July 5, 2018, www.nevadareportcard.com/di/main/cohort.
- 7 NCES, "Table 219.46."
- 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.
- 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.
- NDE, Nevada Department of Education Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (Carson City, NV: NDE, 2017), www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Boards_Commissions_Councils/ESSA Adv Group/NevadaSubmittedConsolidatedPlanFinal.pdf.
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- 13 Ibid.
- 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/.
- 15 NDE, Nevada Department of Education Consolidated State Plan.
- 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.



About the Authors



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