



English Learners in New Jersey

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

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

In 2016, approximately 2,016,000 foreign-born individuals resided in New Jersey, accounting for 23 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 New Jersey slowed from 53 percent in the period between 1990 and 2000 to 37 percent between 2000 and 2016, leaving it slightly lower than that of the U.S. immigrant population more generally. Nevertheless, the growth rate of the immigrant population in New Jersey far outpaces that of the native-born population. Age group trends in New Jersey 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 larger in New Jersey (39 percent) than in the United States overall (26 percent), as shown in Table 2. Additionally, about 84 percent of children of immigrants in New Jersey were native born, comparable to the 86 percent nationwide. In New Jersey, 48 percent of children in low-income families had one or more foreign-born parents, which is considerably larger than the share of low-income children nationally (32 percent).

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

	New Jersey		United States	
	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born
Number	2,016,085	6,928,384	43,739,345	279,388,170
Share of total population	22.5%	77.5%	13.5%	86.5%
Population Change over Time				
% change: 2000-16	36.6%	-0.1%	40.6%	11.6%
% change: 1990-2000	52.7%	2.6%	57.4%	9.3%
Age Group				
Share under age 5	0.6%	7.3%	0.7%	7.0%
Share ages 5-17	4.7%	19.8%	5.1%	18.5%
Share ages 18+	94.6%	73.0%	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/NJ/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 5 percent of New Jersey children ages 5 to 17 are LEP.³ Similarly, state data submitted to the federal government put the EL share of the K-12 population in New Jersey at 5 percent in Fall 2015, or 68,725 students.⁴

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

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

	New Jersey		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
Children between ages 6 and 17 with	1,302,524	100.0	47,090,847	100.0
Only native-born parents	801,088	61.5	34,838,528	74.0
One or more foreign-born parents	501,436	38.5	12,252,319	26.0
Child is native born	423,278	32.5	10,501,024	22.3
Child is foreign born	78,158	6.0	1,751,295	3.7
Children in low-income families	589,933	100.0	28,363,805	100.0
Only native-born parents	308,949	52.4	19,216,957	67.8
One or more foreign-born parents	280,984	47.6	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 New Jersey 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
New Jersey	73.4	47.9	61.0
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/>.

a variable school data systems do not capture. Table 3 shows that in New Jersey, 61 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.

The most recent data on the top languages spoken by ELs in New Jersey come from the Consolidated State Performance Reports submitted by each state to the federal government. Table 4 shows data for school year (SY) 2015–16 that indicate Spanish was spoken by 70 percent of New Jersey ELs, with Arabic,

Chinese, Portuguese, and Korean rounding out the top five.

While New Jersey does not publish how many ELs are enrolled in each school districts, the state does offer total enrollment counts and data on the share of students in each district who are ELs. Taken together, it can be estimated that Elizabeth, Newark, and Paterson Public Schools have the most ELs of districts in the state—each with more than 5,000 ELs. Among all New Jersey districts estimated to enroll more than 2,000 ELs, shown in Table 5, the two in which ELs make up the largest share of students are the Plainfield Public School District and Union City Public Schools.

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

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs with a Home Language Other Than English (%)
Spanish; Castilian	48,021	69.9
Arabic	2,354	3.4
Chinese	1,177	1.7
Portuguese	1,131	1.6
Korean	943	1.4

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Note: Shares were calculated based on 68,656 Limited English Proficient (LEP) students reported by the state in SY 2015–16.

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

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

	EL Share of Students in District (%)	Total Enrollment
Plainfield Public School District	31	9,508
Union City Public Schools	30	13,937
New Brunswick Public Schools	25	10,208
Perth Amboy Public Schools	24	11,019
Passaic Public Schools	23	14,623
Paterson Public Schools	22	28,400
Elizabeth Public Schools	19	27,502
Trenton Public Schools	18	13,082
Newark Public Schools	13	40,802
Jersey City Public Schools	11	29,325

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Note: New Jersey publishes total enrollment counts and data on what share of students were ELs, not counts of ELs specifically. The authors used the two available types of data to estimate which districts have more than 2,000 ELs.

Source: New Jersey Department of Education, “NJ School Performance Report—2016-17 Performance Reports Database—District/State,” accessed Jun 5, 2018, <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/ReportsDatabase.aspx>.

II. EL Student Outcomes in New Jersey

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 New Jersey 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).

New Jersey administers the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) 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 In SY 2016–17, New Jersey administered the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) in science to students in grades 4 and 8, and to students enrolled in high school biology. Results from NJASK tests are reported in three

Table 6. Share of New Jersey 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	11	11	12	7	8	7	3	3	6
Share of all students who met or exceed expectations	50	56	59	53	59	59	52	46	38

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: New Jersey Department of Education, “New Jersey Statewide Assessment Reports,” accessed July 5, 2018, www.state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/17/parcc/spring.htm.

levels: partially proficient, proficient, and advanced proficient.⁶ In Spring 2018 the state field tested a new science assessment, the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment – Science (NJSLSA-S).

Table 6 shows considerable achievement gaps between the share of ELs and of all students who met or exceeded expectations in ELA. The largest gaps were in grades 7 and 8, at 51 and 52 points respectively, and the smallest in grade 3 (39 points) and grade 11 (32 points).

As with ELA, there are considerable gaps between ELs and all students on math assessments (see Table 7). The gaps varied considerably, with the smallest in 8th grade (20 points) and the largest in Algebra I (36 points).

Table 8 shows that there are also substantial gaps in science test scores between ELs and all students. These increased from 36 points for grade 4 students to 50 points for those in grade 8 before decreasing again slightly in biology (48 points).

Table 7. Share of New Jersey 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 (%)	Geo. (%)	Alg. II (%)
Share of ELs who met or exceeded expectations	21	12	12	10	8	8	6	4	6
Share of all students who met or exceed expectations	53	47	46	44	40	28	42	30	27

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year; Alg. = Algebra; Geo. = Geometry.

Source: New Jersey Department of Education, “New Jersey Statewide Assessment Reports.”

Table 8. Share of New Jersey ELs and All Students Who Scored Proficient or Advanced in Science (%), by Grade or Course, SY 2016–17

	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Biology (%)
Share of ELs who reached proficient or advanced	50	23	10
Share of all students who reached proficient or advanced	86	73	58

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: New Jersey Department of Education, “2017 Assessment Reports,” accessed July 5, 2018, www.state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/17/.

Finally, there are wide gaps between ELs and all students in terms of graduation rates in New Jersey. For the class of 2017, the share of ELs to graduate within four years was 76 percent, compared to a four-year graduation rate of 91 percent for all students.⁷ However, both of these rates were considerably higher than those at national level for the most recent year available (SY 2015–16), which were 67 percent for ELs and 84 percent for all students.⁸

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](#).

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

A. Identification and Reclassification of ELs

Following federal guidelines, all states require schools to follow a multistep process for identifying students as ELs. In all states, the first step is for parents or guardians to 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. In New Jersey, where a home language other than English is indicated on the survey, a certified teacher proceeds to a second step in the process. The teacher determines whether students have been attending U.S. schools as a non-EL for three or more years, whether they have recently passed New Jersey ELA and

math tests, and/or whether they have previously exited EL status—all factors that indicate they need not be screened further.

If both steps indicate students are potential ELs, they are given a screening test to gauge their English language ability in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (as required by ESSA). In New Jersey, 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 scoring below proficient are categorized as ELs.⁹ 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).¹⁰

Once identified, ELs are given the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0¹¹ annually until they score highly enough to be reclassified as English proficient. To be reclassified, students must have a composite score of at least 4.5 out of 6.0 on the ACCESS. Further, a school-based team led by a certificated ESL/bilingual teacher will also use an observation form to evaluate the student's listening, speaking, and performance on local tests to confirm the student is able to successfully participate in classrooms where the language of instruction is English.¹²

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.¹³

New Jersey students are expected to take a maximum of five years to achieve English language proficiency, with expectations for individual students set based on their initial English proficiency level. Students are expected to improve one proficiency level each year. About 81 percent of New Jersey ELs made enough progress in SY 2014-15 to achieve proficiency within this timeline. Using this baseline, the state aims to increase the share of ELs making the expected amount of progress to 86 percent by SY 2022-23. In line with ESSA guidance, New Jersey 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. New Jersey will include former ELs for four years in their calculation of academic achievement and academic progress indicators.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 as-

essed 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 New Jersey'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/NJ/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.
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- 4 NCES, “Table 204.20.”
- 5 State of New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), “PARCC Spring State Summary Report,” accessed July 16, 2018, www.state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/17/parcc/spring/Grade0308.pdf.
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- 7 NJDOE, “2017 Graduation Rates—2017 Adjusted Cohort 4 Year Graduation Rates,” accessed July 5, 2018, www.state.nj.us/education/data/grate/2017/
- 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 NJDOE, *Every Student Succeeds Act, New Jersey State Plan* (Trenton, NJ: NJDOE, 2018), www.state.nj.us/education/ESSA/plan/plan.pdf.
- 10 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.
- 11 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.
- 12 NJDOE, *Every Student Succeeds Act, New Jersey State Plan*.
- 13 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.
- 14 NJDOE, *Every Student Succeeds Act, New Jersey 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 NJDOE, *Every Student Succeeds Act, New Jersey 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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