



# English Learners in Oregon

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

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

In 2016, approximately 394,000 foreign-born individuals resided in Oregon, accounting for 10 percent of the state population—a smaller share compared to immigrants in the United States overall (14 percent), as seen in Table 1. The growth rate of the foreign-born population in Oregon slowed considerably from 108 percent in the period between 1990 and 2000 to 36 percent between 2000 and 2016, a rate slightly lower than that of the U.S. immigrant population more generally. Nevertheless, the growth rate of Oregon's foreign-born population far outpaces that of the native-born population. Age group trends in Oregon 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 small population of immigrants, it follows that the share of school-age children with one or more foreign-born parents is smaller in Oregon (23 percent) than in the United States overall (26 percent), as shown in Table 2. Additionally, about 90 percent of children of immigrants in Oregon were native born, compared to 86 percent nationwide. In Oregon, 33 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 Oregon and the United States, 2016**

	Oregon		United States	
	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born
Number	394,217	3,699,248	43,739,345	279,388,170
Share of total population	9.6%	90.4%	13.5%	86.5%
<b>Population Change over Time</b>				
% change: 2000-16	36.1%	18.1%	40.6%	11.6%
% change: 1990-2000	108.0%	15.9%	57.4%	9.3%
<b>Age Group</b>				
Share under age 5	0.7%	6.3%	0.7%	7.0%
Share ages 5-17	4.3%	16.7%	5.1%	18.5%
Share ages 18+	94.9%	77.0%	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/OR/US/](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/OR/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 5 percent of Oregon children ages 5 to 17 are LEP.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the most recent data from the Oregon Department of Education, from school year (SY) 2016–17, indicate ELs represented 11 percent of the state K-12 student population, or 60,676 students.<sup>4</sup>

Although ACS data seem to undercount EL children, they can be used to examine (with

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

	Oregon		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
<b>Children between ages 6 and 17 with</b>	<b>552,395</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>47,090,847</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Only native-born parents	426,035	77.1	34,838,528	74.0
One or more foreign-born parents	126,360	22.9	12,252,319	26.0
Child is native born	113,354	20.5	10,501,024	22.3
Child is foreign born	13,006	2.4	1,751,295	3.7
<b>Children in low-income families</b>	<b>317,895</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>28,363,805</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Only native-born parents	214,626	67.5	19,216,957	67.8
One or more foreign-born parents	103,269	32.5	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 Oregon 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
Oregon	83.4	58.9	73.9
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/>.

due caution) the nativity of ELs, a variable school data systems do not capture. Table 3 shows that in Oregon, almost 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 slightly lower, at 71 percent.

Turning now to data collected by the Oregon Department of Education, Table 4 shows the most commonly spoken home languages among

Oregon ELs. Spanish leads the list at 75 percent, with Russian, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Chinese rounding out the top five.

Among Oregon school districts with enrollment of more than 1,500 ELs, four of the five districts with the largest number of ELs are located in the Portland area; the one exception is Salem-Keizer Public Schools. Table 5 also shows that in the districts with the most ELs, these students made up between 9 percent (Medford and Portland) and 35 percent (Woodburn) of total enrollment.

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

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs with a Home Language Other Than English (%)
Spanish	45,712	75.3
Russian	1,959	3.2
Vietnamese	1,503	2.5
Arabic	1,235	2.0
Chinese	1,154	1.9
Somali	893	1.5
English	853	1.4
Chuukese	641	1.1
Ukrainian	463	0.8
Other	6,263	10.3

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

*Source:* Oregon Department of Education, *Statewide Report Card* (Salem, OR: Oregon Department of Education, 2017), [www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/reportcards/Documents/rptcard2017.pdf](http://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/reportcards/Documents/rptcard2017.pdf).

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

	Number of ELs	EL Share of Students in District (%)
Salem-Keizer Public Schools	8,709	21.2
Beaverton School District	5,944	14.7
Portland Public Schools	4,297	9.0
Hillsboro School District	3,618	17.7
Reynolds School District	3,479	30.9
David Douglas School District	2,540	24.6
Woodburn School District	1,941	34.7
North Clackamas School District	1,699	9.9
Gresham-Barlow School District	1,589	13.3
Tigard-Tualatin School District	1,497	11.8
Centennial School District	1,349	21.8
Medford School District	1,179	8.5
Hermiston School District	1,102	19.7
Forest Grove School District	1,048	17.2

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: Oregon Department of Education, “Reports Prepared for the Oregon Legislature—2016-17 Oregon English Language Learner Report: District Comparison Tool – English,” accessed July 9, 2018, [www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/LegReports/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/LegReports/Pages/default.aspx).

## II. EL Student Outcomes in Oregon

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 Oregon 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).

The Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) is the statewide assessment system used for accountability purposes. Students take the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) tests for ELA and math in grades 3 through 8 and in grade 11, as well as the OAKS science assessment in grades 5, 8, and 11.<sup>5</sup> Scores are reported at four achievement levels, and students scoring at levels 3 and 4 are considered to be meeting or exceeding standards, respectively.

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

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 11 (%)
Share of ELs who met or exceeded standards	14.5	16.1	14.9	8.8	6.8	5.1	6.9
Share of all students who met or exceeded standards	45.2	47.7	52.9	51.8	55.6	54.7	69.4

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: Oregon Department of Education, “Assessment Results—State and National—State Smarter Balanced and OAKS Results,” accessed June 1, 2018, [www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/assessment/Pages/Assessment-Results.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/assessment/Pages/Assessment-Results.aspx).

Table 6 shows considerable achievement gaps between the share of ELs and of all students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, with that gap growing larger at older grade levels. The gap was smallest in 3rd grade (31 points) and largest in 11th grade (63 points).

As with ELA, there are considerable gaps between ELs and all students in math (see

Table 7). The gap was smallest in 3rd grade (27 points) and increased with each successive grade level until 7th grade (37 points) before decreasing in 8th and 11th grade (36 points and 29 points, respectively).

Science test scores also show gaps between ELs and all students of between 43 and 54 points at all three grade levels tested (see Table 8).

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

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 11 (%)
Share of ELs who met or exceeded standards	19.2	15.3	9.3	5.4	5.1	5.3	5.3
Share of all students who met or exceeded standards	45.8	43.3	39.0	39.5	42.4	40.8	33.9

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: Oregon Department of Education, “Assessment Results—State and National—State Smarter Balanced and OAKS Results.”

**Table 8. Share of Oregon ELs and All Students Meeting or Exceeding Standards in Science (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17**

	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 11 (%)
Share of ELs who met or exceeded standards	22.4	7.5	4.7
Share of all students who met or exceeded standards	65.1	61.8	56.0

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: Oregon Department of Education, “Assessment Results—State and National—State Smarter Balanced and OAKS Results.”

Finally, there are considerable gaps between ELs and all students in terms of high school graduation rates. For the class of 2017, 55 percent of Oregon students who were ELs at any point in high school graduated within four years, compared to 77 percent for all students.<sup>6</sup> These rates are considerably lower than those at the national level for the most recent year available (SY 2015–16), which were 67 percent for ELs and 84 percent for all students.<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. Oregon is in the process of introducing a common form statewide, to be fully implemented by SY 2018–19.

If students with a home language other than English 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>

Up until SY 2017–18, Oregon districts could choose from among several approved language tests to screen students for initial EL identification. The state provided guidance for each test on the score below which students would be designated as ELs. Beginning in SY 2018–19, all districts will use the screener developed by the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) consortium. Because this transition is not yet complete, Oregon has not yet announced the score students must achieve to be considered English proficient and what additional criteria must be met, if any.<sup>9</sup>

The state is also working to develop new procedures for deciding when students should exit EL status. At present, a school-based team

of teachers and administrators uses multiple types of evidence—including classroom work samples and parent input—to determine if a student is ready to be reclassified. The state provides guidance on how standardized test scores and classroom performance could be used to demonstrate that a student has met state English language proficiency standards. However, schools are expected to develop a set of criteria relevant to the locality for the evidence they choose to use.<sup>10</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>11</sup>

Oregon plans to create two different English language proficiency indicators and—in line with ESSA guidance—to use those indicators in their criteria for identifying schools in need of comprehensive support and improvement. The first indicator is whether students are making progress toward English proficiency. Most Oregon ELs are expected to take a maximum of seven years to achieve English language proficiency, with expectations for individual students set based on their initial English proficiency level. ELs who have had interrupted formal education and/or have disabilities are expected to take no more than eight years. 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 it takes one year to move from level 1 to level 2, between one and three years to move from level 2 to level 3, and that students will spend three years at level 3 prior to exiting EL status. Students attain each level if they score at that level on the ELPA21 test on all four domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The second indicator is a growth model that compares how a student performed in a given year to the average performance of students with a similar profile.

The Oregon ESSA plan does not explicitly state which indicator the state used to set its long-term goal for improving the share of ELs making the expected amount of progress toward proficiency, though it was likely the first of the two, as the plan describes it as a way to calculate which students are on track to English proficiency. Oregon set a long-term goal that by SY 2024–25, 90 percent of ELs will be making the expected annual progress—double the estimated share in SY 2017–18. Oregon used a combination of data from the last time it administered its old English language proficiency test and preliminary results from the first administration of the new test (ELPA21) to make these calculations. In the coming years, as more data from the new assessment become available, Oregon has stated it may revise the pace at which schools will need to make progress by SY 2024–25.<sup>12</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. Oregon will include former ELs for four years in their calculation of academic achievement and academic progress indicators.<sup>13</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>14</sup> Oregon's ESSA plan indicates it will use option 1 for its recently arrived ELs.<sup>15</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>16</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/OR/US/](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/OR/US/).
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- 12 ODE, *Oregon’s Consolidated State Plan*.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 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 ODE, *Oregon’s Consolidated State Plan*.
- 16 For additional information on accessing and understanding state English Learner 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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