MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE
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Fact Sheet

August 2018

English Learners in Texas

Demographics, Outcomes, and State Accountability Policies

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EL Population Facts

This fact sheet provides an overview of key characteristics of the foreign-born and English Learner (EL) populations in Texas. 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 Texas using U.S. Census Bureau 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) data, and EL students as reported by the Texas Education Agency. A discussion of EL student outcomes as measured by standardized tests follows, and the fact sheet concludes with a brief overview of Texas accountability mechanisms that affect ELs under ESSA.

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

In 2016, approximately 4,730,000 foreign-born individuals resided in Texas, accounting for 17 percent of the state population—higher than the immigrant share of the overall U.S. population (14 percent), as seen in Table 1. Historically, Texas has been a destination for substantial numbers of immigrants, with the state home to about 11 percent of the U.S. foreign-born population. The growth rate of the immigrant population in Texas slowed from 90 percent in the period between 1990 and 2000 to 63 percent between 2000 and 2016. Nevertheless, this growth rate is higher than that of the U.S. immigrant population more generally, and it far outpaces the growth rate of the native-born population. Age group trends in Texas 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 large population of immigrants, it follows that the share of school-age children with one or more foreign-born parents is larger in Texas (36 percent) than in the United States overall (26 percent), as shown in Table 2. Additionally, about 86 percent of children of immigrants in Texas were native born, equal to the nationwide figure. In Texas, 44 percent of children in low-income families had one or more foreign-born parents, which is higher than the share of low-income children nationally (32 percent).

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

	Texas		United States	
	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born
Number	4,729,920	23,132,676	43,739,345	279,388,170
Share of total population	17.0%	83.0%	13.5%	86.5%
Population Change over Time				
% change: 2000-16	63.1%	28.9%	40.6%	11.6%
% change: 1990-2000	90.2%	16.1%	57.4%	9.3%
Age Group				
Share under age 5	0.8%	8.5%	0.7%	7.0%
Share ages 5-17	5.6%	21.7%	5.1%	18.5%
Share ages 18+	93.5%	69.8%	94.2%	74.5%

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, "State Immigration Data Profiles: Demographics & Social," accessed May 15, 2018, www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/TX/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 9 percent of Texas children ages 5 to 17 are LEP.[3] In contrast, the most recent data from the Texas Education Agency, from school year (SY) 2017–18, indicate ELs represented 19 percent of the state preK-12 student population, or 1,015,182 students.[4]

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

Table 2. Nativity and Low-Income Status in Texas and the United States, 2016

	Texas		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
Children between ages 6 and 17 with	**4,635,161**	**100.0**	**47,090,847**	**100.0**
Only native-born parents	2,989,495	64.5	34,838,528	74.0
One or more foreign-born parents	1,654,666	35.5	12,252,319	26.0
Child is native born	1,421,993	30.7	10,501,024	22.3
Child is foreign born	223,673	4.8	1,751,295	3.7
Children in low-income families	**3,210,860**	**100.0**	**28,363,805**	**100.0**
Only native-born parents	1,788,927	55.7	19,216,957	67.8
One or more foreign-born parents	1,421,933	44.3	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 Texas 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
Texas	87.5	65.0	78.5
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/.

caution) the nativity of ELs, a variable school data systems do not capture. Table 3 shows that in Texas, more than three-quarters 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 share of native-born LEP children in the United States overall was somewhat lower, at 71 percent.

Turning now to data collected by the Texas Education Agency, Table 4 shows the most commonly spoken home languages among Texas ELs in SY 2017–18. Spanish leads the list at 90 percent of ELs, with Vietnamese, Arabic, Urdu, and Mandarin Chinese rounding out the top five non-English languages. ELs with a home language listed as English are likely living in a home where English and one or more other languages are spoken. Altogether, more than 90 languages other than English are spoken in the homes of Texas ELs.

Among Texas school districts with enrollment of more than 15,000 ELs, the five districts with the largest number of ELs in SY 2017–18 were Dallas, Houston, Fort Worth, Aldine, and Austin. As Table 5 shows, in the districts with the largest numbers of ELs, these students made up between 15 percent (Cypress-Fairbanks ISD) and 54 percent (La Joya ISD) of total enrollment.

Table 4. Home Languages Spoken by Texas ELs, SY 2017–18

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs with a Home Language Other Than English (%)
Spanish	908,131	89.5
Vietnamese	16,181	1.6
Arabic	12,605	1.2
Other (not specified)	7,460	0.7
English	7,068	0.7
Urdu	5,222	0.5
Mandarin (Chinese)	4,972	0.5
Other (85 languages)	52,561	5.2

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.
Note: The figures in this table were calculated based on 1,014,200 ELs for whom a language was reported.
Source: Texas Education Agency, "ELL Student Reports by Language and Grade," updated April 4, 2018, https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/adhocrpt/adleplg.html.

Table 5. Number of ELs and EL Share of Students in Texas School Districts with More Than 15,000 ELs, SY 2017–18

	Number of ELs	EL Share of Students in District (%)
Dallas ISD	69,311	44.2
Houston ISD	67,393	31.5
Fort Worth ISD	26,532	30.8
Aldine ISD	23,138	34.4
Austin ISD	22,428	27.5
Alief ISD	20,147	43.5
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	16,925	14.5
El Paso ISD	16,345	28.0
Garland ISD	16,181	28.6
Arlington ISD	16,132	26.4
Pasadena ISD	15,644	28.6
United ISD	15,580	36.0
La Joya ISD	15,406	53.5

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year; ISD = Independent School District.
Note: The figures in this table were calculated based on 1,015,102 ELs in districts with at least five ELs.
Source: Texas Education Agency, "Student Program Reports—Statewide District Totals," updated April 4, 2018, https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/adhocrpt/adspr.html.

Finally, Table 6 shows that as grade level increases, the population and share of ELs in Texas preK-12 schools decrease. Whereas 38 percent of prekindergarten and 27 percent of early-elementary students were ELs in SY 2017–18, that number dropped to 9 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.

II. EL Student Outcomes in Texas

Texas uses the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) for annual assessment of EL students' English language proficiency. Table 7 shows the share of ELs scoring at each level, by grade band.

For SY 2016–17, students in kindergarten through 2nd grade were evenly distributed between beginning, intermediate, and the two advanced levels. In contrast, among those in

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

	Prekindergarten	Grades K-2	Grades 3–5	Grades 6–8	Grades 9–12
EL share of students in grade band	38.3%	26.7%	23.3%	15.5%	9.2%
Number of ELs	88,932	308,521	288,745	186,453	142,531

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.
Sources: Texas Education Agency, "ELL Student Reports by Category and Grade," updated April 4, 2018, https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/adhocrpt/adlepcg.html; Texas Education Agency, "Student Enrollment Reports," updated April 4, 2018, https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/adhocrpt/adste.html.

Table 7. Share of Texas ELs at Each TELPAS Composite Rating (%), by Grade SY 2016–17

	Grades K-2 (%)	Grades 3–12 (%)
Beginning	32	6
Intermediate	31	19
Advanced	22	41
Advanced High	14	34

EL = English Learner; TELPAS = Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System; SY = School Year.
Source: Texas Education Agency, "TELPAS Statewide Summary Reports—Spring 2017," accessed April 20, 2018, http://tea.texas.gov/student.assessment/ell/telpas/rpt/sum/.

grades 3 through 12, three-quarters were at one of the two most advanced levels.

Next, the fact sheet looks at outcomes of the EL subgroup on state standardized assessments. It is important to note two things about the participation of ELs on these assessments. First, compared to other student subgroups based on ethnicity, poverty, gender, and special education status, ELs are a much more dynamic population: as students gain proficiency, they exit the EL subgroup and new ELs are identified as they enter the U.S. school system. By definition, students who remain in the EL subgroup are not performing at a level where their achievement on mainstream assessments is comparable to that of their English-proficient peers. Whereas this lag is expected for students in their first several years of learning English, concerns about the significant numbers of long-term ELs—those identified as ELs for six or more years—not scoring proficient in English language arts (ELA) and math have driven policymakers to strengthen the ways they hold schools accountable for EL outcomes on academic assessments.

Second, under NCLB, states were allowed to exempt newly arrived EL students from taking the ELA test for one year and to exclude the math scores of those newcomers from accountability reports. For that reason, the results below do not include all Texas 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).

Texas administers the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) for accountability purposes. STAAR assessments are given in reading and math in grades 3 to 8, writing in grades 4 and 7, science in grades 5 and 8, and social studies in grade 8. End-of-course assessments are also given for English I, English II, Algebra I, Biology, and U.S. History. Students may take the STAAR assessments in Spanish in reading, math, writing, and science in grades 3, 4, and 5. There are four academic performance levels for STAAR tests: did not meet, approaches, meets, and masters grade level. Students at the top three levels are considered to have passed the exams.[5]

Table 8 shows moderate achievement gaps between the share of ELs and of all students on the STARR reading tests, with smaller achievement gaps in grades 3 through 5 (8 to 13 points) and larger gaps in the older grades (26 to 29 points). Similarly, the achievement gap in writing was lower in grade 4 (10 points) than in grade 7 (29 points).

Table 8. Share of Texas ELs and All Students with a Passing Score in Reading and Writing (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Reading						Writing	
	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 7 (%)
Share of ELs passing	65	58	69	40	44	60	55	41
Share of all students passing	73	70	82	69	73	86	65	70

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.
Source: Texas Education Agency, "Texas Academic Performance Report, 2016-17 State Performance," accessed April 20, 2018, https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tapr/2017/state.pdf.

As in reading and writing, there are modest gaps between ELs and all students on the STARR Mathematics assessment in grades 3 through 5 (3 to 6 points), which widen to between 11 and 21 points in the older grades (See Table 9).

In science, ELs scored on average 16 points lower than all students in grade 5 and 28 points lower in grade 8 (see Table 10). For the 8th grade social studies test, the gap between ELs and all students was 32 points.

Table 11 shows gaps of more than 30 points between ELs and all students on the high school end-of-course exams for English I (35 points) and English II (38 points). Among these exams, the narrowest gap, at 16 points, was for Algebra I.

Table 9. Share of Texas ELs and All Students with a Passing Score in Mathematics (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)
Share of ELs passing	75	70	81	60	49	74
Share of all students passing	78	76	87	76	70	85

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.
Source: Texas Education Agency, "Texas Academic Performance Report."

Table 10. Share of Texas ELs and All Students with a Passing Score in Science and Social Studies (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Science		Social Studies
	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 8 (%)
Share of ELs passing	58	48	31
Share of all students passing	74	76	63

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.
Source: Texas Education Agency, "Texas Academic Performance Report."

Table 11. Share of Texas ELs and All Students Passing End-of-Course Exams (%), by Subject, SY 2016–17

	English I (%)	English II (%)	Algebra I (%)	Biology (%)	U.S. History (%)
Share of ELs passing	29	28	67	64	72
Share of all students passing	64	66	83	86	91

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: Texas Education Agency, "Texas Academic Performance Report."

Finally, there are wide gaps between ELs and all students in high school graduation rates in Texas. For the class of 2017, the share of ELs to graduate within four years was 71 percent, compared to a four-year graduation rate of 89 percent for all students.[6] These rates are just above 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.[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 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).[8]

In Texas, each district convenes a language proficiency assessment committee—which includes parent representatives—to review EL classification criteria for each student and assign a language proficiency level and placement in a program of instruction. For initial classification, students who are identified as potential ELs through the home-language survey are given oral and reading/ELA assessments (the latter only in grades 2–12), which the district must select from a list of approved tests that is updated each year by the Texas Education Agency. The state agency also provides guidelines for each test on what scores should result in the designation of a student as an EL. Students may not be exited from EL status in kindergarten, but in 1st through 12th grade, students may be reclassified based on their scores on a state-approved oral and written language proficiency test (usually the TELPAS), the STAAR or other state-approved standardized reading test, and a teacher evaluation.[9]

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.[10]

Texas does not provide information in its ESSA plan about the maximum number of years students are expected to take to achieve English language proficiency, nor how progress is calculated for individual students. However, it does state that about 41 percent of ELs made progress toward proficiency in 2016. Using this baseline, the state aims to increase the share of ELs making the expected amount of progress by about 5 percent with a goal of reaching 46 percent by 2032. In line with ESSA guidance, Texas 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.[11]

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. Texas 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.[12]

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.[13] On its ESSA plan, Texas checked the box indicating it will use option 2 for its recently arrived ELs. However, Appendix C of the plan suggests that Texas intends to calculate the growth score that option 2 allows in the second year for an additional three to five years for some students—an approach ESSA does not offer states.[14]

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.[15]

Endnotes

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3 MPI Data Hub, "State Immigration Data Profiles: Language & Education."

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12 Ibid.

13 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/.

14 TEA, "Every Student Succeeds Act."

15 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.

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Acknowledgments

The authors thank former Migration Policy Institute (MPI) interns Kevin Lee and Abby Scott for their research assistance, and colleagues Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova for their compilation of the U.S. Census Bureau data used throughout this fact sheet. They also gratefully acknowledge the support of colleagues Leslie Villegas, Lauren Shaw, Margie McHugh, Delia Pompa, and Michelle Mittelstadt.

This fact sheet was developed for the National Partnership to Improve PreK-12 Success for Immigrant Children and Youth, a collaboration of state-level immigrant policy organizations working with MPI's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy to improve the quality of education provided to English Learner (EL) children and youth. Support for this series of fact sheets was provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation supported an earlier project upon which this series builds.

For more information on the impact of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* on EL and immigrant students, visit: www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/nciip-english-learners-and-every-student-succeeds-act.

Cover Design: April Siruno, MPI
Layout: Sara Staedicke, MPI

Suggested citation: Sugarman, Julie and Courtney Geary. 2018. *English Learners in Texas: Demographics, Outcomes, and State Accountability Policies*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

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