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Fact Sheet

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English Learners in Washington State

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 Washington State. 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 Washington State using U.S. Census Bureau 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) data, and EL students as reported by the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). A discussion of EL student outcomes as measured by standardized tests follows, and the fact sheet concludes with a brief overview of Washington accountability mechanisms that affect ELs under ESSA.

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

In 2016, approximately 1,020,000 foreign-born individuals resided in Washington, accounting for 14 percent of the state population—comparable to the immigrant share of the U.S. population overall, as seen in Table 1. The growth rate of the foreign-born population in Washington slowed from 91 percent in the period between 1990 and 2000 to 66 percent between 2000 and 2016. Nevertheless, the immigrant population in Washington State is growing at a somewhat higher rate than the U.S. immigrant population more generally, and it far outpaces the growth rate of the native-born population. Age group trends in Washington mirror broader national trends, with disproportionately smaller shares of foreign-born individuals in the birth-to-age-17 brackets compared to the native born.

Given that immigrants make up a similar share of the population in Washington State as they do in the United States overall, it follows that the share of school-age children with one or more foreign-born parents in Washington (29 percent) is similar to that of the United States overall (26 percent), as shown in Table 2. Additionally, about 84 percent of children of immigrants in Washington State were native born, compared to 86 percent nationwide. In Washington, 38 percent of children in low-income families had one or more foreign-born parents, which is slightly higher than the share of low-income children nationally (32 percent).

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

	Washington State		United States	
	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born
Number	1,020,394	6,267,606	43,739,345	279,388,170
Share of total population	14.0%	86.0%	13.5%	86.5%
Population Change over Time				
% change: 2000-16	66.1%	18.7%	40.6%	11.6%
% change: 1990-2000	90.7%	16.2%	57.4%	9.3%
Age Group				
Share under age 5	0.7%	7.1%	0.7%	7.0%
Share ages 5-17	5.9%	17.8%	5.1%	18.5%
Share ages 18+	93.4%	75.1%	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/WA/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 Washington children ages 5 to 17 are LEP.[3] In contrast, the most recent data from the Washington OSPI, from the October 1, 2016 student count, indicate ELs represented 11 percent of the state K-12 student population, or 121,347 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 of Children in Washington State and the United States, 2016

	Washington State		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
Children between ages 6 and 17 with	**1,039,863**	**100.0**	**47,090,847**	**100.0**
Only native-born parents	735,286	70.7	34,838,528	74.0
One or more foreign-born parents	304,577	29.3	12,252,319	26.0
Child is native born	256,622	24.7	10,501,024	22.3
Child is foreign born	47,955	4.6	1,751,295	3.7
Children in low-income families	**523,531**	**100.0**	**28,363,805**	**100.0**
Only native-born parents	324,266	61.9	19,216,957	67.8
One or more foreign-born parents	199,265	38.1	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 Washington State 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
Washington State	80.0	53.1	68.4
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 Washington State, more than two-thirds of school-aged children who were reported as LEP in census data were born in the United States, with a larger share among elementary school children than older students. The rate of native-born LEP children in the United States overall was somewhat higher, at 71 percent.

Turning now to data collected by Washington OSPI, Tables 4 through 6 describe students enrolled in the Transitional Bilingual Instruction Program (TBIP), which includes both bilingual and nonbilingual program models and serves all ELs. Table 4 shows the most commonly spoken home languages among students served in TBIP. Spanish leads the list at 65 percent, with Russian, Vietnamese, Somali, and Arabic rounding out the top five. Altogether, TBIP students spoke 224 languages.

Among Washington State school districts with enrollment of more than 2,000 ELs, the districts

Table 4. Home Languages Spoken by Washington State ELs Served in TBIP, SY 2016–17

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs with a Home Language Other Than English (%)
Spanish	85,655	65.1
Russian	5,377	4.1
Vietnamese	3,983	3.0
Somali	3,300	2.5
Arabic	2,852	2.2
Ukrainian	2,410	1.8
Marshallese	1,669	1.3
Tagalog	1,550	1.2
Korean	1,454	1.1
Chinese-Mandarin	1,272	1.0
Other (214 languages, plus unknown)	22,132	16.8

EL = English Learner; TBIP = Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program; SY = School Year.
Note: Figures are based on 131,654 students enrolled at any point in SY 2016–17 for whom a language was reported.
Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), "Report to the Legislature. Update: Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program—Appendices" (dataset, OSPI, 2018), Appendix B, www.k12.wa.us/LegisGov/2018documents/TBIPLegislativeUpdateAppendices2016-17.xlsx.

Table 5. Number of ELs in TBIP and EL Share of Students in Washington State Districts with More Than 2,000 ELs, SY 2016–17

	Number of ELs	EL Share of Students in District (%)
Seattle	6,621	12.3
Pasco	6,423	36.1
Yakima	5,505	34.4
Kent	5,387	19.6
Highline	5,271	27.2
Federal Way	4,318	19.0
Evergreen (Clark)	3,463	13.3
Vancouver	3,051	12.9
Mukilteo	3,005	19.5
Auburn	2,845	17.8
Bellevue	2,835	13.9
Lake Washington	2,819	9.7
Tacoma	2,787	9.6
Edmonds	2,741	13.0
Renton	2,679	17.2
Kennewick	2,533	14.0
Everett	2,520	12.6
Sunnyside	2,098	31.0

EL = English Learner; TBIP = Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program; SY = School Year.
Note: Figures are based on October 1, 2016 counts of all TBIP-identified students and all students in each district.
Source: OSPI, "Report to the Legislature," Appendix D.

with the largest number of students enrolled in TBIP for school year (SY) 2016–17 were Seattle, Pasco, Yakima, Kent, and Highline. Table 5 also shows that in the districts with the largest numbers of TBIP students, these ELs made up between 10 percent (Lake Washington and Tacoma) and 36 percent (Pasco) of the student population.

Finally, Table 6 shows that as grade level increases, the population and share of ELs in Washington K-12 schools decrease. Whereas 22 percent of early-elementary students were ELs in SY 2016–17, that number dropped to 6 percent for grades 9 through 12. This reflects the trend that more students achieve English proficiency (and thus exit EL status) over

Table 6. Number of ELs Served in TBIP and EL Share of Students in Washington State, by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Grades K-2	Grades 3–5	Grades 6–8	Grades 9–12
EL share of students in grade band	21.7%	14.3%	9.3%	6.4%
Number of ELs	53,882	36,709	22,721	21,654

EL = English Learner; TBIP = Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program; SY = School Year.
Note: Shares were calculated based on 134,957 ELs enrolled at any time during the year and 1,089,066 K-12 students enrolled on October 1, 2016.
Sources: OSPI, "Report to the Legislature," Figure 5; OSPI, "Enrollment—2016-17—State Level," accessed July 3, 2018, www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/enrollment.aspx.

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 Washington State

Since SY 2015–16, Washington State has used the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) for annual assessment of students' English language proficiency. Table 7 shows the share of ELs scoring at each level, by grade band, in 2016–17.

Across the state, 12 percent of K-12 ELs scored at the lowest proficiency level (emerging) and 14 percent scored at the highest level (proficient). Once ELs reach this highest level, they can be considered for reclassification as English proficient and exit EL status.

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 Washington State 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).

Since Spring 2015, Washington State has administered the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) for accountability purposes. The SBA for ELA and mathematics are administered in grades 3 through 8 and in grade 11. In SY 2016–17, Washington used the Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) for science in grades 5 and 8 and the 10th grade end-of-course exam in biology for the final time. The following year, the state transitioned to the Washington Comprehensive Assessment of Science for 5th, 8th, and 11th grade testing; data from the first year of assessment with this new test are not yet available. For each of the assessments

Table 7. Share of Washington State ELs at Each ELPA21 Overall Performance Level (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Grades K-2 (%)	Grades 3–5 (%)	Grades 6–8 (%)	Grades 10–12 (%)	All Students (%)
Emerging	12.1	7.0	10.9	19.4	11.8
Progressing	74.0	73.2	77.9	73.6	74.3
Proficient	13.9	19.8	11.2	7.0	14.0

EL = English Learner; ELPA21 = English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century; SY = School Year.
Note: OSPI withheld the exact figures for 9th grade scores in SY 2016–17—something the agency does in its reports due to privacy concerns whenever a percentage is less than 5 or greater than 95.
Source: OSPI, "2017 Data Files—ELPA21 State," accessed July 3, 2018, http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/DataDownload.aspx.

Table 8. Share of Washington State ELs and All Students Meeting 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 standards	16.9	15.5	12.8	10.8	9.9	9.5	18.4
Share of all students who met standards	52.6	55.2	58.6	55.5	60.1	58.5	73.6

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.
Source: OSPI, "Washington State Report Card," accessed April 23, 2018, http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/.

described in Tables 8 through 10, there are four achievement levels, and a score at either of the two highest levels indicates the student has met the academic standard.[5]

Table 8 shows considerable achievement gaps between the share of ELs and of all students who met the standard in ELA, with that gap growing larger at older grade levels. The gap was smallest in 3rd grade (36 points) and largest in 11th grade (55 points).

As with ELA, there are considerable gaps between ELs and all students on the SBA math assessment (see Table 9). In grades 3 to 8, the gap ranged from 29 points (grade 3) to 40 points (grade 7). The gap decreased considerably in grade 11 to between 21 and 26 points, although that can be attributed to overall poor performance on the exam by all students.

Science test scores also show considerable gaps between ELs and all students (see Table 10),

Table 9. Share of Washington State ELs and All Students Meeting Standards in Mathematics (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 11 (%)
Share of ELs who met standards	29.3	21.3	12.2	11.5	9.6	10.6	≤ 5.0*
Share of all students who met standards	57.8	54.3	48.6	48.2	49.9	47.6	25.9

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.
* OSPI does not provide an exact percentage when the figure is less than 5 percent.
Source: OSPI, "Washington State Report Card."

Table 10. Share of Washington State ELs and All Students Meeting Standards in Science (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	MSP Science Grade 5 (%)	MSP Science Grade 8 (%)	Biology Grade 10 (%)
Share of ELs who met standards	18.8	15.2	19.8
Share of all students who met standards	63.4	65.9	71.6

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.
Source: OSPI, "Washington State Report Card."

with the smallest gap in grade 5 (45 points) and increasing to 51 and 52 points in grade 8 and biology, respectively.

Finally, there are wide gaps between ELs and all students in terms of graduation rates in Washington State. For the class of 2017, the share of ELs to graduate within four years was 58 percent, compared to a four-year graduation rate of 80 percent for all students.[6] These rates are 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.[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]

Washington State is a member of the ELPA21 Consortium, and it uses the ELPA21 screener for initial EL identification. Students are identified as ELs if they score as emerging or progressing (the two lowest of three proficiency levels). Once identified, ELs are given the ELPA21 assessment annually. Students are considered emerging if they score 1 or 2 out of 5 on all four language domains, progressing if they score at least 3 on at least one domain, and proficient if they have a score of at 4 or more on all four domains.[9]

For accountability purposes, student scores that fall into the progressing category are broken into three bands based on the student's lowest domain score. Students whose lowest domain score is a 1 are considered to be in band P1; those with a lowest domain score of 2, in P2; and those with a lowest domain score of 3, in P3. These P levels factor into the state English language proficiency indicator, discussed in the next section.[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 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.[11]

Washington State 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. There are two considerations that determine whether students are considered on track. First, they must maintain or improve their score on each of the four language domains. Second, students must move through four overall performance levels according to a table published in the state ESSA plan. This table allots one year for students to move from emerging to P1, one year for P1 to P2, one year for P2 to P3, and two years for students to spend at P3 before exiting EL status in the final year. A student would be expected to take fewer than six years to exit EL status if their English proficiency level when initially tested was higher than emerging.

About 67 percent of Washington State ELs made enough progress in 2017 to achieve proficiency within the given timeline. Using this baseline, the state aims to increase the share of ELs making the expected amount of progress by about 1 percent each year with a goal of reaching 77 percent by 2027. In line with ESSA guidance, Washington 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.[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. Washington State will not include former ELs 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:

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.[14] Washington State's ESSA plan indicates it will use option 1 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

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/WA/US/.

2 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), "Table 204.20: English Language Learner (ELL) Students Enrolled in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by State: Selected Years, Fall 2000 through Fall 2015," updated October 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_204.20.asp?current=yes.

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

4 Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), "Report to the Legislature. Update: Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program—Appendices" (dataset, OSPI, 2018), Appendix D, www.k12.wa.us/LegisGov/2018documents/TBIPLegislativeUpdateAppendices2016-17.xlsx

5 OSPI, "State Testing—Frequently Asked Questions about State Testing," updated September 29, 2017, www.k12.wa.us/assessment/StateTesting/FAQ.aspx; OSPI, "State Testing—Overview," updated March 23, 2018, www.k12.wa.us/assessment/StateTesting/default.aspx.

6 Katie Weaver-Randall and Lisa Ireland, *Report to the Legislature: Graduation and Dropout Statistics* (Olympia, WA: OSPI, 2018), www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/pubdocs/GradDropout/16-17/2016-17GraduationDropoutStatisticsAnnualReport.pdf.

7 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.

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.

9 OSPI, "ELPA21 Score Reports," accessed July 19, 2018, www.k12.wa.us/MigrantBilingual/pubdocs/ELPA21/English-ELPA21ScoreReportOverview.pdf.

10 OSPI, *Washington's ESSA Consolidated Plan* (Olympia, WA: OSPI, 2018), www.k12.wa.us/ESEA/ESSA/pubdocs/ESSAConsolidatedPlan-Final.pdf.

11 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.

12 OSPI, *Washington's ESSA Consolidated 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 OSPI, *Washington's ESSA Consolidated 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.

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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.

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