



English Learners in Wisconsin

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

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

In 2016, approximately 289,000 foreign-born individuals resided in Wisconsin, accounting for 5 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 Wisconsin slowed from 59 percent in the period between 1990 and 2000 to 50 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 Wisconsin 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 Wisconsin (11 percent) than in the United States overall (26 percent), as shown in Table 2. Additionally, about 86 percent of children of immigrants in both Wisconsin and the United States overall were native born. In Wisconsin, 16 percent of children in low-income families had one or more foreign-born parents, which is half the size of the share of low-income children nationally.

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

	Wisconsin		United States	
	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born
Number	288,544	5,490,165	43,739,345	279,388,170
Share of total population	5.0%	95.0%	13.5%	86.5%
Population Change over Time				
% change: 2000-16	48.9%	6.2%	40.6%	11.6%
% change: 1990-2000	59.4%	8.4%	57.4%	9.3%
Age Group				
Share under age 5	0.8%	6.0%	0.7%	7.0%
Share ages 5-17	7.4%	16.9%	5.1%	18.5%
Share ages 18+	91.8%	77.1%	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/WI/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 3 percent of Wisconsin children ages 5 to 17 are LEP.³ In contrast, the most recent data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, from school year (SY) 2017–18, indicate ELs represented 6 percent of the state preK-12 student population, or 50,848 students.⁴

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

	Wisconsin		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
Children between ages 6 and 17 with	841,960	100.0	47,090,847	100.0
Only native-born parents	747,820	88.8	34,838,528	74.0
One or more foreign-born parents	94,140	11.2	12,252,319	26.0
Child is native born	81,105	9.6	10,501,024	22.3
Child is foreign born	13,035	1.5	1,751,295	3.7
Children in low-income families	427,488	100.0	28,363,805	100.0
Only native-born parents	357,307	83.6	19,216,957	67.8
One or more foreign-born parents	70,181	16.4	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 Wisconsin 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
Wisconsin	81.7	64.6	73.1
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/>.

Although ACS data seem to undercount EL children, they can be used to examine (with due caution) the nativity of ELs, a variable school data systems do not capture. Table 3 shows that in Wisconsin, 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.

The most recent data available that show the top languages spoken by ELs in Wisconsin come from the Consolidated State Performance Reports submitted by each state to the federal

government. Table 4 shows that in SY 2016-16, Spanish was spoken by two-thirds of Wisconsin ELs, with Hmong, Arabic, Chinese, and Somali rounding out the top five.

Among Wisconsin school districts with enrollment of more than 1,000 ELs, the two districts with the largest number of ELs are Milwaukee Public Schools and Madison Metropolitan School District, the two largest cities in the state. Table 5 also shows that in the districts with the largest number of ELs, these students made up between 9 percent (Appleton and Waukesha) and 22 percent (Green Bay) of total enrollment.

Table 4. Top Home Languages Spoken by Wisconsin ELs, SY 2015–2016

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs with a Home Language Other Than English (%)
Spanish; Castilian	30,375	66.6
Hmong	6,838	15.0
Arabic	815	1.8
Chinese	644	1.4
Somali	558	1.2

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Note: Shares were calculated based on 45,592 Limited English Proficient (LEP) students reported by the state in 2015-2016.

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

Table 5. Number of ELs and EL Share of Students in Wisconsin School Districts with More Than 1,000 ELs, SY 2017–18

	Number of ELs	EL Share of Students in District (%)
Milwaukee Public Schools	8,552	11.3
Madison Metropolitan School District	5,427	20.1
Green Bay Area Public School District	4,623	22.4
Racine Unified School District	2,298	12.7
Kenosha Unified School District	2,256	10.4
Sheboygan Area School District	1,691	16.6
Appleton Area School District	1,481	9.1
School District of Waukesha	1,169	9.1
School District of Beloit	1,066	15.6
Wausau School District	1,019	12.2

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Note: These data include prekindergarten students as well as K-12 students.

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), “WISEdash Data Files by Topic—enrollment_certified_2017-18.zip,” accessed June 1, 2018, https://dpi.wi.gov/wisedash/download-files/type?field_wisedash_upload_type_value=Enrollment&field_wisedash_data_view_value=Certified.

Finally, Table 6 shows that as grade level increases, the population and share of ELs in Wisconsin K-12 schools generally decrease. Whereas 9 percent of elementary students were ELs in SY 2017–18, that number dropped to 4 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 Wisconsin

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

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

	Grades K-2	Grades 3–5	Grades 6–8	Grades 9–12
EL share of students in grade band	8.9%	8.6%	4.9%	3.6%
Number of ELs	15,329	15,950	9,083	9,527

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: DPI, “WISEdash—Enrollment (Single Year),” accessed July 9, 2018, [http://wisedash.dpi.wi.gov/Dashboard/Page/Home/Topic%20Area/Enrollment/Enrollment%20\(Single%20Year\)?filtersetid=78014472-5163-45b3-ae89-6077a48cc7d4](http://wisedash.dpi.wi.gov/Dashboard/Page/Home/Topic%20Area/Enrollment/Enrollment%20(Single%20Year)?filtersetid=78014472-5163-45b3-ae89-6077a48cc7d4).

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 Wisconsin 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 Wisconsin Student Assessment System includes several tests given for accountability purposes. Students take Wisconsin Forward Exams in grades 3 through 8 for ELA and math, in grades 4 and 8 for science, and in grades 4, 8, and 10 for social studies. Students also take the ACT in ELA, math, and science in grade 11.⁵ Scores for both test types are reported in four achievement levels: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced.

Table 7 shows considerable achievement gaps between the share of ELs and non-ELs who scored proficient or advanced in ELA. The gap was smallest in 3rd grade (28 points) and rose to between 37 and 43 points in all subsequent grade levels.

There are also considerable gaps between ELs and non-ELs in math (see Table 8). As with ELA scores, the gap was smallest in 3rd grade (28 points) and then increased to between 33 and 40 points for the remaining grade levels.

Table 7. Share of Wisconsin ELs and Non-ELs Scoring Proficient or Advanced in English Language Arts (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Wisconsin Forward Exams						ACT
	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 11 (%)
Share of ELs who scored proficient or advanced	17.4	12.9	7.4	4.9	3.8	3.5	1.0
Share of non-ELs who scored proficient or advanced	44.9	50.0	49.2	47.6	45.4	42.5	40.5

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Sources: DPI, “WISEdash Data Files by Topic—Forward Certified 2016-17,” accessed June 4, 2018, https://dpi.wi.gov/wisedash/download-files/type?field_wisedash_upload_type_value=Forward&field_wisedash_data_view_value=Certified; DPI, “WISEdash Data files by Topic—ACT Statewide Certified, 2016-17,” accessed June 4, 2018, https://dpi.wi.gov/wisedash/download-files/type?field_wisedash_upload_type_value=ACT11&field_wisedash_data_view_value=Certified.

Table 8. Share of Wisconsin ELs and Non-ELs Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Math (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Wisconsin Forward Exams						ACT
	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 11 (%)
Share of ELs who scored proficient or advanced	23.3	12.2	10.1	6.4	4.2	3.7	2.2
Share of non-ELs who scored proficient or advanced	51.3	46.9	47.3	46.0	41.2	36.2	36.6

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: DPI, “WISEdash Data Files by Topic—Forward Certified”; DPI, “WISEdash Data files by Topic—ACT Statewide Certified.”

Science test scores, shown in Table 9, also show considerable gaps. These ranged from 32 points (grade 11 ACT) to 44 points (grade 8).

Similarly, there were consistent gaps between ELs and non-ELs on Wisconsin Forward Exams in social studies, ranging from 39 to 45 points

across the three grade levels tested (see Table 10).

Finally, there are considerable gaps between ELs and all students in terms of the state four-year graduation rate. For the class of 2017, the share of ELs to graduate within four years was

Table 9. Share of Wisconsin ELs and Non-ELs Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Science (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Wisconsin Forward Exams		ACT
	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 11 (%)
Share of ELs who scored proficient or advanced	15.1	5.7	0.9
Share of non-ELs who scored proficient or advanced	54.6	49.4	32.5

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: DPI, “WISEdash Data Files by Topic—Forward Certified”; DPI, “WISEdash Data files by Topic—ACT Statewide Certified.”

Table 10. Share of Wisconsin ELs and Non-ELs Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Social Studies (%), by Grade, SY 2016–17

	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 10 (%)
	Share of ELs who scored proficient or advanced	16.5	6.8
Share of non-ELs who scored proficient or advanced	55.4	51.6	48.1

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: DPI, “WISEdash Data Files by Topic—Forward Certified.”

65 percent, compared to a four-year graduation rate of 89 percent for all students.⁶ These rates are roughly comparable to 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 Wisconsin, 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 are identified as ELs if they score below a designated level for each test. Schools may also use a state-developed Multiple Indicator Protocol if they need more information to make a determination. Once identified, ELs are given the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0⁹ annually until they score highly enough to be reclassified as English proficient. Students with a composite score of at least 5.0 out of 6.0 on the ACCESS must be reclassified, and students with a composite score between 4.5 and 4.9 may be reclassified. For the latter group of students, schools use the Multiple Indicator Protocol to examine a portfolio of student work or conduct classroom observations to make a

decision about whether to exit a student from EL services.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

Wisconsin students are expected to take a maximum of eight years to achieve English language proficiency, with expectations for individual students set based on their initial English proficiency level and the grade in which they were identified as an EL. Students will be considered on track if they meet their personalized growth targets each year. These targets are set by subtracting the student's current scale score from the target score of 385 (corresponding to a 5.0 on the ACCESS), then dividing that figure by the number of years remaining to make that growth. Running this calculation each year accounts for the fact that students will likely make more growth at lower proficiency levels and less growth at successively higher proficiency levels.

About 61 percent of Wisconsin ELs made enough progress in SY 2014–15 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 3 percent each year with a

goal of reaching 79 percent by SY 2022–23. This goal is similar to other goals the state set in its ESSA plan for improving academic achievement and graduation rates for all students. In line with ESSA guidance, Wisconsin 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. Wisconsin 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.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 Wisconsin'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

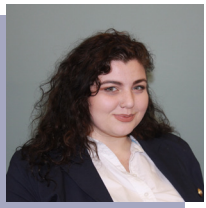
Endnotes

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- 9 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.
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- 15 DPI, *Revised State Template for the Consolidated State Plan*.
- 16 For additional information on accessing and understanding state EL demographic and outcome data, see Julie Sugarman, *A Guide to Finding and Understanding English Learner Data* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/guide-finding-understanding-english-learner-data.

About the Authors



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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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