



Facts about English Learners and the NCLB/ESSA Transition in Illinois

By Julie Sugarman and Kevin Lee

This fact sheet provides a sketch of key characteristics of the foreign-born and English Learner (EL) populations in Illinois. It is intended to equip community organizations with an understanding of the state demographic context and some of the basics of EL policies under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, in effect from 2002 through December 2015) and its successor, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), enacted in December 2015.

The first section looks at the demographics of Illinois, including the entire state population using U.S. Census Bureau 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) data, and EL students as reported by the Illinois State Board of Education. A discussion of EL student outcomes as measured by standardized tests follows, and the fact sheet concludes with a brief overview of Illinois accountability mechanisms that affected ELs under NCLB and relevant provisions of ESSA.

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

In 2014, approximately 1,784,403 foreign-born individuals resided in Illinois, accounting for 14 percent of the state population—comparable to the share of immigrants in the United States overall (13 percent), as seen in Table 1. Historically, Illinois has been a destination for substantial numbers of immigrants in the United States.

Table 1. Foreign- and U.S.-Born Populations of Illinois and United States, 2014

	Illinois		United States	
	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born
Number	1,784,403	11,096,177	42,391,794	276,465,262
Share of total population	13.9%	86.1%	13.3%	86.7%
Population Change over Time				
% change: 2000-14	16.7%	1.9%	36.3%	10.4%
% change: 1990-2000	60.6%	3.9%	57.4%	9.3%
Age Group				
Share under age 5	0.5%	7.0%	0.6%	7.1%
Share ages 5-17	4.1%	19.1%	5.3%	18.6%
Share ages 18+	95.5%	73.8%	94.0%	74.3%

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, "State Immigration Data Profiles: Demographics & Social," accessed September 8, 2016, www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/IL/US/.

Table 2. Children (ages 17 and younger) in Illinois and the United States, 2014

	Illinois		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
Children between ages 6 and 17 with	1,932,340	100	46,968,394	100
Only native parent(s)	1,419,833	73.5	35,171,703	74.9
One or more foreign-born parents	512,507	26.5	11,796,691	25.1
Child is native born	454,398	23.5	10,011,547	21.3
Child is foreign born	58,109	3.0	1,785,144	3.8
Children in low-income families	1,145,420	100	30,272,597	100
Only native parents	752,173	65.7	20,793,941	68.7
One or more foreign-born parents	393,247	34.3	9,478,656	31.3

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.”

However, Table 1 shows that the foreign-born growth rate in Illinois slowed considerably from 61 percent in the period between 1990 and 2000 to 17 percent between 2000 and 2014, less than half the rate of the U.S. foreign born more generally. Nevertheless, immigrant population continues to grow more rapidly than the native-born population. Age group trends in Illinois mirror broader national trends, with disproportionately fewer foreign-born individuals in the birth-to-age-17 brackets compared to the native born.

With an immigrant population comparable to that of the United States more generally, it follows that the share of school-age children

with one or more foreign-born parent in Illinois (27 percent) is similar to the national share (25 percent), as shown in Table 2. Additionally, about 89 percent of children of immigrants in Illinois were native born. In Illinois, 34 percent of children in low-income families had foreign-born parents, which is comparable to the share of low-income children nationally.

Illinois has a diverse immigrant population, with sizeable shares coming from Asia and Latin America, which correspond to the top two regions of birth for the foreign-born population nationwide (see Table 3). The state’s European-born population is nearly twice

Table 3. Regions of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population in Illinois and the United States, 2014

Region of Birth	Illinois		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
Africa	55,864	3.1	1,931,203	4.6
Asia	530,312	29.7	12,750,422	30.1
Europe	368,686	20.7	4,764,822	11.2
Latin America	807,484	45.3	21,890,416	51.6
Northern America	18,622	1.0	812,642	1.9
Oceania	3,435	0.2	241,200	0.6

Notes: Latin America includes South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean; Northern America includes Canada, Bermuda, Greenland, and St. Pierre and Miquelon. The region of birth data exclude those born at sea.

Source: MPI Data Hub, “State Immigration Data Profiles: Demographics & Social.”

Table 4. Nativity of Illinois and U.S. LEP Students, 2014

	Share of K-12 LEP Children Born in the United States (%)		
	Grades K-5	Grades 6-12	Total
Illinois	88	66	79
United States	83	56	71

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 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) data, accessed through Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota, “Integrated Public Use Microdata Series,” accessed September 8, 2016, <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>.

the U.S. share (21 percent versus 11 percent, respectively), and the share of immigrants from Latin America (45 percent) is slightly lower than the national rate (52 percent). The shares of immigrants from Asia and Africa living in Illinois (30 percent and 3 percent, respectively) are comparable to the national shares of Asian and African immigrants (30 percent and 5 percent, respectively).

Number of ELs. ACS Census 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 submitted to the federal government by the states put the share of ELs amongst the total K-12 population at 10 percent in school year (SY) 2013-14.²

At the state level, ACS data indicate that 4 percent of Illinois children ages 5 to 17 are LEP.³ In contrast, the most recent data from the Illinois State Board of Education, from SY 2014-15, indicate EL enrollment represents 11 percent of the total preK-12 student population, or 222,667 students.⁴

Although ACS data seem to vastly undercount EL children, they can be used to examine (with due caution) the nativity of ELs, which is not a variable captured by school data systems. Table 4 shows that in Illinois, almost four out of five 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 was somewhat lower, at 71 percent.

Table 5. Top Ten Native Languages of Illinois PreK-12 Students, SY 2013-14

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs (%)
Spanish	166,974	80.7
Polish	5,858	2.8
Arabic	5,854	2.8
Urdu	2,827	1.4
Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin)	2,622	1.3
Pilipino (Tagalog)	1,842	0.9
Gujarati	1,690	0.8
Vietnamese	1,330	0.6
Russian	1,279	0.6
Korean	1,166	0.6

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Note: Share calculated from the total number of ELs reported in 2013-14 (206,922); see Illinois State Board of Education, “EL Counts by Language (Spanish vs. Non Spanish) in IL Districts (2011 - 2014),” accessed December 5, 2016, www.isbe.net/layouts/Download.aspx?SourceUrl=/Documents/el-lang-counts-dist-sp-vs-nonsp-11-14.xlsx.

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, “Top 10 languages Spoken by EL Students in IL (2013 - 2014),” accessed December 5, 2016, www.isbe.net/Documents/top-10-lang-IL-13-14.pdf.

Table 6. Number and Share of PreK-12 ELs in Illinois School Districts with More Than 2,000 ELs, SY 2013-14

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs in District (%)
Chicago Public Schools	70,426	17.8
SD U-46	10,453	25.9
Cicero SD 99	6,830	52.0
East Aurora SD 131	5,226	35.6
Waukegan CUSD 60	5,096	31.2
Rockford Public Schools	3,604	13.1
Schaumburg CCSD 54	2,998	20.8
Palatine CCSD 15	2,707	21.1
Wheeling CCSD 21	2,475	35.5
CUSD 300	2,440	11.9
Joliet Public Schools District 86	2,390	20.5
West Chicago Elementary School District 33	2,388	57.1
CCSD 59	2,373	34.7
Valley View CUSD 365U	2,310	13.2
West Aurora School District 129	2,177	17.4

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year; SD = School District; CUSD = Community Unit School District; CCSD = Community Consolidated School District.

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, “EL Counts by Language”; Illinois State Board of Education, “Illinois State Report Card—Find Your School,” accessed December 5, 2016, www.illinoisreportcard.com.

Turning now to data collected by the Illinois State Board of Education, Table 5 shows the most commonly spoken home languages among identified ELs. Spanish tops the list at 81 percent, with Polish, Arabic, Urdu, and Chinese rounding out the top five. In 2013-14, the state listed 145 native languages other than English spoken by Illinois ELs.⁵

Among Illinois school districts with enrollment of more than 2,000 ELs, the two districts with the largest number of ELs are the City of Chicago (SD 299) and School District U-46 (Elgin, IL). Table 6 also shows that the districts with the largest numbers of ELs have shares between 12 percent (Community Unit School District 300, Algonquin) and 57 percent (West Chicago Elementary School District).

II. EL Student Outcomes in Illinois

Illinois uses the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs for annual assessment of students’ English language proficiency, which is scored on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest). Table 7 shows the number of ELs scoring at each level, by grade band.

Across the state, 28 percent of K-12 ELs scored at the lowest proficiency levels (levels 1 and 2) and 69 percent at the upper levels (levels 3, 4, and 5) in SY 2013-14. Only 3 percent scored at level 6, likely because students in Illinois may exit EL status once they have reached a composite score of 5.0 with minimum composite reading and writing scores of 4.2.⁶

Table 7. Share of ELs at Each ACCESS Composite Level (%), SY 2013-14

	Kindergarten (%)	Grades 1-2 (%)	Grades 3-5 (%)	Grades 6-8 (%)	Grades 9-12 (%)	All Students (%)
Level 1	61.8	4.9	3.1	5.2	7.9	14.6
Level 2	13.6	21.1	5.9	11.5	12.0	13.8
Level 3	11.8	46.4	20.7	39.7	23.6	30.7
Level 4	7.5	19.5	34.6	35.3	30.1	24.4
Level 5	4.6	7.2	27.8	7.6	21.3	13.5
Level 6	0.6	1.0	7.8	0.7	5.2	3.1

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, *Bilingual Education Programs and English Learners in Illinois, SY 2014 (2013-2014 School Year) Statistical Report* (Malden, MA: Illinois State Board of Education, 2016), www.isbe.net/Documents/el-program-stat-rpt14.pdf.

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.

Second, under NCLB, states were allowed to exempt EL students from taking the English

language arts (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 Illinois ELs.

For the last two years, Illinois has administered the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) for accountability purposes. The PARCC for ELA and math is given in grades 3 to 8 and in high school.⁷

Table 8 shows considerable achievement gaps between the share of ELs and of all students who met or exceeded the standard in reading. The gap was 17 points in 3rd grade and then held steady across the older grade levels at 31 to 34 points.

Table 8. Share of Illinois ELs and All Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard on the PARCC English Language Arts (ELA), by Grade (%), SY 2015-16

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	High School (%)
Share of ELs who met or exceeded standard	18.7	6.2	3.0	2.2	3.0	3.5	3.2
Share of all students who met or exceeded standard	35.4	36.9	35.3	34.9	37.3	39.1	34.1

EL = English Learner; PARCC = the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers; SY = School Year.

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, "Illinois Report Card: PARCC," accessed December 5, 2016, www.illinoisreportcard.com/State.aspx?source=trends&source2=parcc.details&Stateid=IL.

Table 9. Share of Illinois ELs and All Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard on the PARCC Math, by Grade (%), SY 2015-16

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	High School (%)
Share of ELs who met or exceeded standard	25.7	6.8	5.4	3.8	3.3	4.9	6.0
Share of all students who met or exceeded standard	39.6	30.5	31.7	28.7	27.3	31.8	21.8

EL = English Learner; PARCC = the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers; SY = School Year.

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, “Illinois Report Card: PARCC.”

As with reading, there are considerable gaps between ELs and all students on the PARCC math assessment (see Table 9). The gap was smallest at 3rd grade (14 points) and grew to 27 points in 8th grade, before narrowing slightly to 16 points in high school.

Finally, graduation rates in Illinois have been increasing over the last five years for students overall and for subgroups such as ELs, but wide gaps remain between ELs and all students. For the class of 2015, the four-year high school graduation rate for ELs was 72 percent, compared to a rate of 86 percent for all students.⁸ These rates are slightly higher than the national rates for that year, which were 65 percent for ELs and 83 percent for all students.⁹

III. Accountability under NCLB and ESSA

Although many mechanisms within Illinois’s accountability system are in the process of changing, it is important to have a sense of the tests, benchmarks, and accommodations for ELs that have been implemented for the last 15 years in preparation for ESSA accountability planning.

A. Identification and Reclassification of ELs

As in most states, the EL identification process in Illinois begins with the administration of a home-language survey, which is distributed to all parents when their child enters an Illinois school. These surveys ask whether a language other than English is spoken in the home and if the child speaks a language other than English.¹⁰

If students are identified as potential ELs, they are administered the WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT). As per NCLB guidelines, WIDA tests proficiency levels in the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. State guidelines indicate the cut-off points that districts use to determine eligibility for EL status.

ELs are given the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs annually until they meet reclassification requirements. To be reclassified, students must score a 5.0 out of 6.0 composite score on the WIDA ACCESS and a 4.2 score on each of the reading and writing components.¹¹

B. Accountability for EL Performance

Under Title III of NCLB, EL performance was monitored at the district and state level

through Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs). Although these are no longer part of Title III of ESSA, states will include a measure of English proficiency and include EL subgroup scores on state grade-level assessments in their new accountability plans.

Under NCLB, states set ever-increasing targets for the number of students achieving benchmarks for the three AMAOs:

- 1) Progress (improving English proficiency from year to year)
- 2) Proficiency (exiting EL status)
- 3) Adequate yearly progress (AYP) in academic achievement for the EL subgroup (indicators included state standardized tests in reading and math, participation in assessments, and graduation rate).¹²

Originally, NCLB called for parental notification if districts missed AMAO targets, and the development of a school improvement plan (involving program and/or staffing changes) for schools that missed AYP targets for any subgroup (including ELs) over multiple years. The AYP benchmarks and rules for developing school improvement plans were significantly changed in many states with the NCLB waiver program instituted in 2012, and will be revised again as states create accountability plans under ESSA.

C. Changes under ESSA

The following are some of the changes in federal law under ESSA, enacted in 2015, which affect EL students:¹³

- **EL accountability moved from Title III to Title I.** EL subgroup accountability for measures such as reading, math, and high school graduation rates

continues to be included in district accountability under Title I, and a measure of progress in English language proficiency moved from Title III to Title I, thus giving it more weight.

- **Additional option for including recently arrived ELs in assessment.** Under NCLB, states could exempt ELs enrolled in U.S. schools for less than 12 months from taking ELA tests and exclude results of their ELA (if taken) and math tests from accountability calculations for that first year. States can continue with this option, or they can assess ELs in ELA and math in the first year but exclude their scores from accountability calculations, use a measure of growth in reading and math in the second year, and then report proficiency levels as for other students in the third year and thereafter.
- **Inclusion of former ELs in subgroup.** Under NCLB, students were included in the EL subgroup for up to two years after they had been reclassified; ESSA extends this period to up to four years.
- **Disaggregation.** States must now report the number of EL students with disabilities who are making progress toward English proficiency and in academic achievement, and report the number of ELs who have not attained English proficiency within five years of identification.
- **Standardization of entrance and exit procedures.** States must develop standardized procedures for identifying and reclassifying EL students.

The U.S. Department of Education issued regulations regarding accountability on November 28, 2016.¹⁴ These regulations also address English learners. The regulations require that states consider at least one unique student

characteristic, including students' initial English language proficiency level, in determining ambitious but achievable targets for English learners' progress toward English language proficiency, within a state-determined maximum number of years. These targets are then used to set state-level, long-term goals and measurements of interim progress, and may also be used in the state's indicator of progress in achieving English language proficiency, which can include all English learners in grades K-12.

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 the 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.

Endnotes

- 1 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, “State Immigration Data Profiles: Language & Education,” accessed September 8, 2016, www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/IL/US/.
- 2 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “Table 204.27: English Language Learner (ELL) Students Enrolled in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Grade and Home Language: Selected Years, 2008-09 through 2013-14,” accessed January 17, 2017, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/xls/tabn204.27.xls>.
- 3 MPI Data Hub, “State Immigration Data Profiles: Language & Education.”
- 4 Illinois State Board of Education, “EL Counts by All Languages in IL Districts; 2015,” accessed December 5, 2016, www.isbe.net/_layouts/Download.aspx?SourceUrl=/Documents/el-lang-counts-by-district-14-15.xlsx; Illinois State Board of Education, “Illinois Report Card—Enrollment,” accessed December 5, 2016, www.illinoisreportcard.com/State.aspx?source=StudentCharacteristics&source2=Enrollment&Stateid=IL.
- 5 Illinois State Board of Education, “EL Counts by All Languages in IL Districts; 2013 - 2014,” accessed December 5, 2016, www.isbe.net/_layouts/Download.aspx?SourceUrl=/Documents/el-lang-counts-by-district-13-14.xlsx.
- 6 Illinois State Board of Education, *Bilingual Education Programs and English Learners in Illinois, SY 2014 (2013-2014 School Year) Statistical Report* (Malden, MA: Illinois State Board of Education, 2016), www.isbe.net/Documents/el-program-stat-rpt14.pdf.
- 7 For the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), there are five achievement levels: did not meet the standards, partially met the standards, approached the standards, met the standards, and exceeded the standards. Students who met or exceeded standards are said to have attained proficiency.
- 8 Illinois State Board of Education, “Illinois Report Card: Graduation Rate,” accessed December 5, 2016, www.illinoisreportcard.com/State.aspx?source=trends&source2=graduationrate&Stateid=IL.
- 9 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), “Common Core of Data (CCD),” updated September 15, 2016, http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2014-15.asp.
- 10 Illinois State Board of Education, “English Learners: Forms and Notifications—Home Language Surveys,” accessed February 6, 2017, www.isbe.net/Pages/English-Learners-Forms-and-Notifications.aspx.
- 11 Illinois State Board of Education, “English Learners: Screening for English Language Proficiency,” accessed February 6, 2017, www.isbe.net/Pages/Screening-for-English-Language-Proficiency.aspx.
- 12 Andrea Boyle, James Taylor, Steven Hurlburt, and Kay Soga, *Title III Accountability: Behind the Numbers. ESEA Evaluation Brief: The English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2010), www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-iii/behind-numbers.pdf.

- 13 Delia Pompa, “New Education Legislation Includes Important Policies for English Learners, Potential Pitfalls for their Advocates” (commentary, MPI, December 2015), www.migrationpolicy.org/news/new-education-legislation-includes-important-policies-english-learners-potential-pitfalls-their; Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), *Major Provisions of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Related to the Education of English Learners* (Washington, DC: CCSSO, 2016), www.ccsso.org/Documents/2016/ESSA/CCSSOResourceonESSAELLS02.23.2016.pdf.
- 14 U.S. Department of Education, “Title I—Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged— Academic Assessments,” *Federal Register* 81, no. 236 (December 8, 2016): 88886, www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-12-08/pdf/2016-29128.pdf.

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

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