



# Facts about English Learners and the NCLB/ESSA Transition in Minnesota

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

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

In 2014, approximately 428,057 foreign-born individuals resided in Minnesota, accounting for 8 percent of the state population—about two-thirds the share of immigrants in the United States (13 percent), as seen in Table 1. The growth rate of the foreign-born population in Minnesota slowed considerably from 130 percent in the period between 1990 and 2000 to 64 percent between 2000 and 2014.

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

	Minnesota		United States	
	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born
Number	428,057	5,029,116	42,391,794	276,465,262
Share of total population	7.8%	92.2%	13.3%	86.7%
<b>Population Change over Time</b>				
% change: 2000-14	64.3%	7.9%	36.3%	10.4%
% change: 1990-2000	130.4%	9.3%	57.4%	9.3%
<b>Age Group</b>				
Share of under age 5	1.1%	6.8%	0.6%	7.1%
Share of ages 5-17	8.9%	17.9%	5.3%	18.6%
Share of ages 18+	90.0%	75.4%	94.0%	74.3%

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, "State Immigration Data Profiles: Demographics & Social," accessed December 1, 2016, [www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/MN/US/](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/MN/US/).

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

	Minnesota		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
<b>Children between ages 6 and 17 with</b>	<b>827,604</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>46,968,394</b>	<b>100</b>
Only native parent(s)	690,040	83.4	35,171,703	74.9
One or more foreign-born parents	137,564	16.6	11,796,691	25.1
Child is native born	112,100	13.5	10,011,547	21.3
Child is foreign born	25,464	3.1	1,785,144	3.8
<b>Children in low-income families</b>	<b>405,640</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30,272,597</b>	<b>100</b>
Only native parents	285,311	70.3	20,793,941	68.7
One or more foreign-born parents	120,329	29.7	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.”

The growth of the immigrant population in Minnesota is about double the rate of the U.S. immigrant population more generally and far outpaces the growth rate of the native-born population. Age group trends in Minnesota mirror broader national trends, with disproportionately fewer 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 less in Minnesota (17 percent) than in the United States (25 percent), as shown in Table 2. Additionally, about 81 percent of

children of immigrants in Minnesota were native born. In Minnesota, 30 percent of children in low-income families had foreign-born parents, which is comparable to the share of low-income children nationally.

Minnesota has a diverse immigrant population, as seen in Table 3. Most notably, the state’s share of immigrants from Africa (22 percent) is more than four times that of the United States (5 percent), and the share of immigrants from Latin America (26 percent) is about half the national rate (52 percent). Minnesota also has a slightly higher share of immigrants from Asia (38 percent) compared to the country as a whole (30 percent).

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

Region of Birth	Minnesota		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
Africa	94,380	22.0	1,931,203	4.6
Asia	162,598	38.0	12,750,422	30.1
Europe	46,440	10.8	4,764,822	11.2
Latin America	109,775	25.6	21,890,416	51.6
Northern America	12,567	2.9	812,642	1.9
Oceania	2,297	0.5	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 Minnesota and U.S. LEP Students, 2014**

	Share of K-12 LEP Children Born in the United States (%)		
	Grades K-5	Grades 6-12	Total
Minnesota	70	47	60
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/>.

**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,<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

At the state level, ACS data indicate that 3 percent of Minnesota children ages 5 to 17 are

LEP.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the most recent data from the Minnesota Department of Education, from SY 2015-16, indicate EL enrollment represents 8 percent of the total K-12 student population, or 71,481 students.<sup>4</sup>

Although ACS data seem to 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 Minnesota, almost two-thirds of school-aged children who were reported as LEP in census data were born in the United

**Table 5. Home Languages Spoken by Minnesota K-12 Students, SY 2015-16**

	Number of Students	Share of Students with Home Language Other Than English (%)
Spanish	45,417	36.3
Somali	21,287	17.0
Hmong	19,869	15.9
Vietnamese	4037	3.2
Karen	3095	2.5
Arabic	2650	2.1
Chinese, Mandarin	2448	2.0
Russian	2396	1.9
Oromo, Afan Oromo, Oromiffa	1661	1.3
Lao, Laotian	1489	1.2
Khmer, Cambodian	1423	1.1
Amharic	1411	1.1
English, Creolized	1200	1.0
Other (236 languages)	16,835	13.4
<b>Total Students with a Home Language Other Than English</b>	<b>125,218</b>	<b>100</b>

SY = School Year.

*Source:* Minnesota Department of Education, “Data Reports and Analytics: Student. 2015-16 Primary Home Language Totals,” accessed December 1, 2016, <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/Data.jsp>.

**Table 6. Number and Share of K-12 ELs in Minnesota School Districts with More Than 1,000 ELs, SY 2015-16**

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs in District (%)
St. Paul	11,738	31.8
Minneapolis	8,705	24.3
Anoka-Hennepin	2,269	6.1
Osseo	2,188	10.9
Rochester	2,122	12.5
St. Cloud	1,984	19.9
Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan	1,766	6.5
Burnsville	1,531	17.0
Richfield	1,427	33.7
Roseville	1,274	17.0
Bloomington	1,257	12.3
Robbinsdale	1,143	9.1
North St Paul-Maplewood Oakdale	1,107	10.7
Willmar	1,049	25.5
Worthington	1,027	32.2

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education, “Data Reports and Analytics: Student. 2015-16 Enrollment by Special Populations,” accessed December 1, 2016, <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/Data.jsp>.

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 higher, at 71 percent.

Turning now to data collected by the Minnesota Department of Education, Table 5 shows the most commonly spoken home language among the 125,218 students with a home language other than English (this group includes, but is not limited to, EL students). Spanish leads the list at 36 percent, with Somali, Hmong, Vietnamese, and Karen rounding out the top five. In total, the state lists 249 home languages other than English spoken by Minnesota students.

Among Minnesota school districts with enrollment of more than 1,000 ELs, the two districts with the largest number of ELs are St. Paul and Minneapolis. Table 6 also shows that the districts with the largest numbers of ELs have shares between 6 percent (Anoka-Hennepin) and 34 percent (Richfield).

Finally, Table 7 shows that as grade level increases, the population and share of ELs in Minnesota K-12 schools decreases. Whereas 13 percent of early-elementary-grade students were EL in SY 2015-16, that number dropped to 5 percent for grades 9-12.

**Table 7. Number and Share of ELs in Minnesota, by Grade, SY 2015-16**

	Grades K-2	Grades 3-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
Share of ELs	13.0%	10.3%	6.7%	4.9%
Number of ELs	25,241	20,142	12,971	13,127

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education, “2015-16 Enrollment by Special Populations.”

**Table 8. Share of ELs at Each ACCESS Composite Level (%), SY 2015-16**

	Grades K-2 (%)	Grades 3-5 (%)	Grades 6-8 (%)	Grades 9-12 (%)	All Students (%)
Level 1	18.3	2.1	4.3	7.2	9.3
Level 2	17.9	5.4	12.4	13.6	12.6
Level 3	28.8	13.8	28.2	21.8	23.3
Level 4	21.3	29.7	35.2	24.6	26.8
Level 5	11.6	35.0	17.8	22.9	21.3
Level 6	2.1	14.0	2.0	9.9	6.8

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education, "Data Reports and Analytics: Assessment and Growth Files. 2016 ACCESS Results," accessed December 1, 2016, <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/Data.jsp>.

## II. EL Student Outcomes in Minnesota

Minnesota 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 8 shows the number of ELs scoring at each level, by grade band.

Across the state, 22 percent of K-12 ELs scored at the lowest proficiency levels (levels 1 and 2) and 71 percent at the upper levels (levels 3, 4, and 5) in SY 2015-16. Only 7 percent scored at level 6, likely because students in Minnesota may exit EL status once they have reached a composite score of 5.0 out of 6.0 with no component score (listening, speaking, reading, writing) less than 4.0.<sup>5</sup>

Next, the fact sheet looks at outcomes of the EL subgroup on state standardized assess-

ments. 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 Minnesota ELs.

**Table 9. Share of Minnesota ELs and All Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard on the MCA-III Reading, by Grade (%), SY 2015-16**

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 10 (%)
Share of ELs who met or exceeded standard	23.4	16.9	20.6	12.8	9.0	11.3	6.1
Share of all students who met or exceeded standard	57.3	58.3	67.7	62.3	56.6	57.0	58.9

EL = English Learner; MCA = Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments; SY = School Year.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education, "Minnesota Report Card," accessed December 1, 2016, <http://rc.education.state.mn.us/>.

**Table 10. Share of Minnesota ELs and All Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard on the MCA-III Math, by Grade (%), SY 2015-16**

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 11 (%)
Share of ELs who met or exceeded standard	36.7	29.7	20.1	11.7	11.9	17.6	4.1
Share of all students who met or exceeded standard	69.4	68.7	58.8	55.9	56.2	58.0	47.1

EL = English Learner; MCA = Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments; SY = School Year.  
 Source: Minnesota Department of Education, “Minnesota Report Card.”

Minnesota administers the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) for accountability purposes.<sup>6</sup> The MCA for reading is given in grades 3–8 and grade 10, for math in grades 3-8 and grade 11, and for science in grades 5, 8, and high school.<sup>7</sup>

Table 9 shows considerable achievement gaps between the share of ELs and of all students who met or exceeded the standard in reading, with that gap growing larger at successively older grade levels. The gap was smallest in 3rd grade (34 points) and largest in 10th grade (53 points).

As with reading, there are considerable gaps between ELs and all students on the MCA math assessment (see Table 10). The gap was smallest at 3rd grade (33 points) and grew to 44 points in 6th grade after which it held relatively steady.

Science test scores show steady gaps between ELs and all students of around 40 to 50 points at all three grade levels (see Table 11).

Finally, graduation rates in Minnesota 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 63 percent, compared to a rate of 82 percent for all students.<sup>8</sup> These rates are similar to the national rates for that year, which were 65 percent for ELs and 83 percent for all students.<sup>9</sup>

### III. Accountability under NCLB and ESSA

Although many mechanisms within Minnesota’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.

**Table 11. Share of Minnesota ELs and All Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard on the MCA-III Science, by Grade (%), SY 2015-16**

	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	High School (%)
Share of ELs who met or exceeded standard	13.4	5.4	5.6
Share of all students who met or exceeded standard	61.5	47.0	55.5

EL = English Learner; MCA = Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments; SY = School Year.  
 Source: Minnesota Department of Education, “Minnesota Report Card.”

## A. Identification and Reclassification of ELs

As in most states, the EL identification process in Minnesota begins with the administration of a home-language questionnaire, which is distributed to parents when their child enters a Minnesota school. These surveys assess whether students speak a language other than English at home, and whether their first language or the language they speak most often is one other than English.

If students are identified as potential ELs, a licensed English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher administers a language-screening test, most commonly the WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT), although districts may use another appropriate test. State guidelines indicate the cut-off points that districts may use to determine eligibility for EL status, although districts may take additional criteria into account.<sup>10</sup> Once identified, ELs are given the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs annually until they meet reclassification requirements. As per NCLB guidelines, the ACCESS tests proficiency levels in the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. To be reclassified, students must score a 5.0 out of 6.0 composite score on the ACCESS with no component score (listening, speaking, reading, writing) less than 4.0.<sup>11</sup>

## 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).<sup>12</sup>

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:<sup>13</sup>

- **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.<sup>14</sup> 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/MN/US/](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/MN/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 Minnesota Department of Education, “Data Reports and Analytics: Student. 2015-16 Enrollment by Special Populations,” accessed December 1, 2016, <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/Data.jsp>.
- 5 Minnesota Department of Education, *English Learner Education in Minnesota, 2015-2016* (Roseville, MN: Minnesota Department of Education, 2016), [http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_FILE&dDocName=MDE035523&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary](http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE035523&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary).
- 6 Minnesota Department of Education, “Statewide Testing,” accessed December 1, 2016, <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/fam/tests/>.
- 7 For the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA), there are four achievement levels: does not meet the standards, partially meets the standards, meets the standards, and exceeds the standards. Students who meet or exceed standards are said to have attained proficiency.
- 8 Minnesota Department of Education, “Minnesota Report Card,” accessed December 1, 2016, <http://rc.education.state.mn.us/>.
- 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](http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2014-15.asp).
- 10 Minnesota Department of Education, *W-APT™ Guidance. English Learner Education Program Guidance* (Roseville, MN: Minnesota Department of Education, 2011), [www.wida.us/membership/states/MN/W-APT\\_FAQ\\_2011\\_Minnesota.pdf](http://www.wida.us/membership/states/MN/W-APT_FAQ_2011_Minnesota.pdf).
- 11 Minnesota Department of Education, *English Learner Education in Minnesota*.
- 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-12-08/pdf/2016-29128.pdf).

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For policy and/or implementation support related to the data provided in this fact sheet, contact Delia Pompa, Senior Fellow for Education Policy at the MPI National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy ([dpompa@migrationpolicy.org](mailto:dpompa@migrationpolicy.org)).

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](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/nciip-english-learners-and-every-student-succeeds-act).

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