



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

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 Tennessee. 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 Tennessee, including the entire state population using U.S. Census Bureau 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) data, and EL students as reported by the Tennessee 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 Tennessee accountability mechanisms that affected ELs under NCLB and relevant provisions of ESSA.

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

In 2014, approximately 321,258 foreign-born individuals resided in Tennessee, accounting for 5 percent of the state population—a share less than half as large as the corresponding immigrant share of the overall U.S. population (13 percent), as seen in Table 1. The growth rate of the foreign-born population in Tennessee slowed considerably from 169 percent in the period between 1990 and 2000 to 102 percent between 2000 and 2014.

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

	Tennessee		United States	
	Foreign Born	U.S. Born	Foreign Born	U.S. Born
Number	321,258	6,228,094	42,391,794	276,465,262
Share of total population	4.9%	95.1%	13.3%	86.7%
Population Change over Time				
% change: 2000-14	102.0%	12.6%	36.3%	10.4%
% change: 1990-2000	169.0%	14.8%	57.4%	9.3%
Age Group				
Share under age 5	1.0%	6.3%	0.6%	7.1%
Share ages 5-17	8.3%	17.1%	5.3%	18.6%
Share ages 18+	90.6%	76.5%	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/TN/US/.

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

	Tennessee		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
Children between ages 6 and 17 with	945,433	100	46,968,394	100
Only native parent(s)	846,874	89.6	35,171,703	74.9
One or more foreign-born parents	98,559	10.4	11,796,691	25.1
Child is native born	78,761	8.3	10,011,547	21.3
Child is foreign born	19,798	2.1	1,785,144	3.8
Children in low-income families	695,831	100	30,272,597	100
Only native parents	593,416	85.3	20,793,941	68.7
One or more foreign-born parents	102,415	14.7	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 rate of the immigrant population in Tennessee is nearly three times the rate of the U.S. foreign born more generally and far outpaces the growth rate of the native-born population. Age group trends in Tennessee 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 smaller in Tennessee (10 percent) than in the United States overall (25 percent), as

shown in Table 2. Additionally, about 80 percent of children of immigrants in Tennessee were native born. In Tennessee, 15 percent of children in low-income families had foreign-born parents, which is about half the national rate (31 percent).

Tennessee has a diverse immigrant population, as seen in Table 3. Most notably, the state’s share of immigrants from Africa (10 percent) is twice that of the United States more generally (5 percent), while the share of immigrants from Latin America (47 percent) is slightly lower than the national rate (52 percent). The shares of Asian and European

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

Region of Birth	Tennessee		United States	
	Number	Share of Population (%)	Number	Share of Population (%)
Africa	31,370	9.8	1,931,203	4.6
Asia	96,817	30.1	12,750,422	30.1
Europe	33,850	10.5	4,764,822	11.2
Latin America	149,477	46.5	21,890,416	51.6
Northern America	7,989	2.5	812,642	1.9
Oceania	1,755	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 Tennessee and U.S. LEP Students, 2014

	Share of K-12 LEP Children Born in the United States (%)		
	Grades K-5	Grades 6-12	Total
Tennessee	71	56	65
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/>.

immigrants living in Tennessee (30 percent and 11 percent, respectively) are comparable to the national rates.

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 2 percent of Tennessee children ages 5 to 17 are LEP.³ In contrast, the most recent data from the Tennessee Department of Education, from SY 2015-16, indicate EL enrollment represents 5 percent of the total K-12 student population, or 45,739 students.⁴

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 Tennessee about 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 most recent data available that show the top languages spoken by ELs in Tennessee come from the Consolidated State Performance Reports submitted by each state to the federal government. Table 5 shows data from SY 2013-14 that indicate Spanish was spoken by three-quarters of Tennessee ELs, with Arabic, Somali, Vietnamese, and Kurdish rounding out the top five.

According to data from the Tennessee Department of Education, there are six school districts

Table 5. Top Five Home Languages Spoken by Tennessee ELs, SY 2013-14

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs (%)
Spanish	25,970	74
Arabic	2,294	7
Somali	470	1
Vietnamese	465	1
Kurdish	396	1

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Note: Share calculated based on 35,145 Limited English Proficient students reported by the state in 2013-14.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, “SY 2013-2014 Consolidated State Performance Reports Part I. Tennessee,” updated October 30, 2015, www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/consolidated/sy13-14part1/index.html.

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

	Number of ELs	Share of ELs in District (%)
Davidson County	13,655	16.2
Shelby County	9,669	8.3
Knox County	2,597	4.3
Rutherford County	2,474	5.9
Hamilton County	2,178	5.0
Hamblen County	1,227	11.9

EL = English Learner; SY = School Year.

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, “Data Available for Download. Profile Data Files,” updated November 25, 2015, www.tn.gov/education/topic/data-downloads.

in the state with more than 1,000 ELs, shown in Table 6. The share of ELs in these districts varies from 4 percent in Knox County to 16 percent in Davidson County.

II. EL Student Outcomes in Tennessee

This section 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 Tennessee ELs.

Table 7. Share of Tennessee ELs and All Students Meeting Standard on the TCAP Reading/English, by Grade (%), SY 2014-15

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	English I (%)	English II (%)	English III (%)
Share of ELs who met standard	21.9	20.1	20.2	17.2	13.0	8.6	27.7	19.4	7.2
Share of all students who met standard	43.0	44.8	50.2	51.8	50.8	50.3	71.8	64.8	41.7

EL = English Learner; TCAP = Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program; SY = School Year.

Note: Students are considered to have met standard if they score at one of the top two of four TCAP achievement levels (proficient or advanced).

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, “TCAP Results at a Glance,” accessed December 2, 2016, www.tn.gov/education/topic/tcap-results-at-a-glance.

Table 8. Share of Tennessee ELs and All Students Meeting Standard on the TCAP Math, by Grade (%), SY 2014-15

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Algebra I (%)	Algebra II (%)
Share of ELs who met standard	50.6	31.5	51.4	24.5	27.6	26.4	36.0	20.5
Share of all students who met standard	61.7	50.4	65.7	50.5	51.4	54.0	65.6	54.2

EL = English Learner; TCAP = Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program; SY = School Year.

Note: Students are considered to have met standard if they score at one of the top two of four TCAP achievement levels (proficient or advanced).

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, "TCAP Results at a Glance."

Tennessee administers the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) for accountability purposes. Students in grades 3-8 take the TCAP in reading, math, and science, and students in high school take end-of-course exams in English I/II/III, Algebra I/II, Chemistry, and Biology. For each of the TCAP assessments, there are four achievement levels: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. Students who score at proficient or advanced are said to have met state standards.⁵

Table 7 shows considerable achievement gaps between the share of ELs and of all students who met the standard in reading, with that gap growing larger at successively older grade levels. The gap was smallest in 3rd grade (21 points) and largest in English II (45 points).

As with reading/English, the gaps between ELs and all students on the TCAP math assessment are larger in the older grades (see Table 8). The gap was smallest at 3rd grade (11 points) and largest for Algebra II (34 points).

Science test scores show the same pattern as reading/English and math, with the gap between ELs and all students rising from 20 points in 3rd grade to 42 points for Biology and 30 points for Chemistry (see Table 9).

Finally, gaps also exist between ELs and all students in terms of graduation rates. For the class of 2015, the four-year high school graduation rate for ELs in Tennessee was 75 percent compared to a rate of 88 percent for all students.⁶ The national rates for that year were 65 percent for ELs and 83 percent for all students.⁷

Table 9. Share of Tennessee ELs and All Students Meeting Standard on the Science TCAP, by Grade (%), SY 2014-15

	Grade 3 (%)	Grade 4 (%)	Grade 5 (%)	Grade 6 (%)	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Biology (%)	Chemistry (%)
Share of ELs who met standard	48.3	33.7	39.5	36.7	30.9	30.2	22.8	14.1
Share of all students who met standard	68.0	55.5	65.1	65.0	66.3	67.4	65.2	44.2

EL = English Learner; TCAP = Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program; SY = School Year.

Note: Students are considered to have met standard if they score at one of the top two of four TCAP achievement levels (proficient or advanced).

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, "TCAP Results at a Glance."

III. Accountability under NCLB and ESSA

Although many mechanisms within Tennessee'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 Tennessee begins with the administration of a home-language questionnaire, which is distributed to parents when their child enters a Tennessee school. These surveys assess whether students speak a language other than English outside of school, and whether their first language or the language spoken most often at home is one other than English.

If students are identified as potential ELs, they are given a language-screening test, the WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT). State guidelines indicate the cut-off points that districts must use to determine eligibility for EL status. Once identified, ELs are given the 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 and a 5.0 score on the literacy component.⁸

B. Accountability for EL Performance

Under Title III of NCLB, EL performance was monitored at the district and state level through Annual Measurable Achievement Ob-

jectives (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).⁹

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:¹⁰

- **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, 2016.¹¹ 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/CA/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 Tennessee Department of Education, “Data Available for Download. Profile Data Files,” updated November 25, 2015, www.tn.gov/education/topic/data-downloads.
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- 7 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.
- 8 Tennessee Department of Education, “ESEA Title III,” accessed December 2, 2016, www.tn.gov/education/article/esea-title-iii.
- 9 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.
- 10 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.
- 11 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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