



## **Current State of English-Language Learners in the U.S. K-12 Student Population**

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### Introduction

ETS research and assessment of English-language learners (ELLs) has been continuous since 1961. The vast share of attention has been devoted to international students who are seeking admissions to U.S. colleges and universities or pursuing employment in commerce throughout the world. ETS research and policy analyses on ELL students in the United States are evolving as well. This is due in part to the fact that the population of ELL students in the U.S. is growing in size, variety and importance. This brief document presents the status of the growth and complexity of public policy and population trends of ELL students. These trends explain, in part, the growing need for greater attention to research and analyses of the ELL students in the United States.

### National and State Policies

The dominant prevailing national education policy for most children in the nation including ELL students is No Child Left Behind (NCLB). To a larger extent than with

past national policies, NCLB has great influence on the policies and actions of each of the fifty states pertaining to ELL students. NCLB requires all states to identify English learners, measure their English proficiency, and include them in state testing programs that assess academic skills. States are also required to establish statewide English proficiency standards and assess each ELL with a statewide English proficiency assessment that reflects these standards. In addition to the annual assessment of English proficiency, ELL students are expected to participate in regular state assessments in academic content with all other students' grades 3-8 and once in high school. States are expected to include the assessments of ELL students in determining Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).<sup>1</sup>

Each state must set Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO) for ELLs in the areas of English-language proficiency and performance on academic content. Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives must include:

- Annual increases in progress in learning English
- Annual increases in attainment of English-language proficiency
- Making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in the academic content areas<sup>2</sup>

### English Learner Characteristics

In order to contribute to the advancement of the ELL student achievement, ETS is interested in tracking the progress of ELL students' acquisition of English and their achievement in other subjects as well. The following are some characteristics of the ELL population and some current indicators of achievement.

- ✓ In 2004-2005, approximately 5.1 million or 10.5 percent of the U.S. student population are English-language learners<sup>3</sup>
- ✓ Approximately 79 percent of ELLs nationally are from Spanish-language backgrounds<sup>4</sup>
- ✓ While English learners reside throughout the United States, they are heavily concentrated in the six states of Arizona, California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois<sup>5</sup>
- ✓ These six states contain 61 percent of the nation's ELL population.
- ✓ In addition, the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico accounts for another 1 percent of the U.S. ELL population.
- ✓ Despite the high concentration in six states, other states have experienced a 300 percent or higher growth of ELLs in a ten-year period from 1995 to 2005. These states include Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee<sup>6</sup>
- ✓ California educates one-third of all the nation's ELL students – 1.6 million students<sup>7</sup>
- ✓ 85 percent of all ELLs in California are Spanish Speaking<sup>8</sup>
- ✓ More ELLs in both Elementary and Secondary schools are U.S. born<sup>9</sup>

## California's English Learners in 2005-06

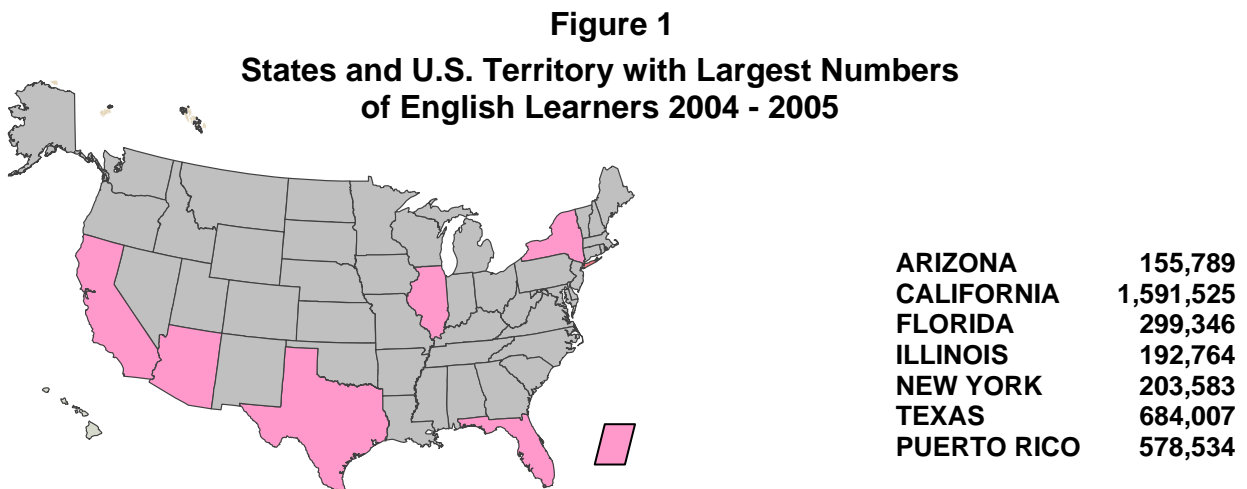
The state of California has the largest and fastest growing ELL student population.

- ✓ 25 percent (1.6 million) of California's K-12 students are English learners
- ✓ 85 percent speak Spanish as their primary language
- ✓ 85 percent are economically disadvantaged
- ✓ 11 percent receive special education services
- ✓ At least 6 percent have attended California schools less than 12 months
- ✓ 8-10 percent are re-designated as "Fluent English Proficient" each year
- ✓ Of all ELL students, 61 percent are in elementary school (grades K-5), 20 percent are in middle school (grades 6-8), and 19 percent are in high school (grades 9-12)

Source: California Legislative Analysts Office (LAO) 2007-08 Education Analyses, February 21, 2007

## States with the Largest Numbers of English Learners

Figure 1 is a map showing the location of the most populous states presented with corresponding data for the number of ELL elementary and secondary students in these six states and Puerto Rico. In addition to California, the five other states with the largest ELL student populations are Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Texas and New York.



Source: Padolsky, Daniel, *Ask NCELA No. 1: How many school-aged English-language learners (ELLs) are there in the U.S.?* [American Community Survey Special Calculation](#) provided to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition; Consolidated State Performance Reports; and additional 2002-2005 data reported by state. August 2006



**Table 1**

**States with greatest ELL Student Population Growth from 1994-95 – 2004-05**

<b>State</b>	<b># ELL in 2004 - 05</b>	<b>% Growth From 1994 - 95</b>
South Carolina	15,396	714.2%
Kentucky	11,181	417.4%
Indiana	31,956	407.8%
North Carolina	70,288	371.7%
Tennessee	19,355	369.9%
Alabama	15,295	336.8%
Puerto Rico	578, 534	304.4%
Nebraska	16,124	301.4%
Arkansas	17,384	294.6%
Georgia	50,381	291.6%
Colorado	90,391	237.7%
Nevada	72,117	208.3%
New Hampshire	3,235	198.4%
Virginia	67,933	196.1%
Delaware	5,094	183.2%
Missouri	15,403	183.0%
Utah	56,319	163.7%
Minnesota	56,829	161.4%
Iowa	14,421	148.3%
Oregon	59,908	133.1%
Kansas	23,512	131.7%
Ohio	25,518	108.4%
Wyoming	3,742	101.9%
Pennsylvania	39,847	100.3%

Sources: U.S. Department of Education's Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students and Available Educational Programs and Services, 1991-1992 through 2000-2001 summary reports; state publications (1998-1999 data); enrollment totals from the National Center for Educational Statistics Core of Common Data, 1998-1999

English Learners Enroll in Large School Districts

Even though the ELL population is growing throughout the country including rural and suburban areas, a large number are distributed in a few urban school districts in a few states. One hundred of the largest school districts identified by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) enroll 23 percent of all U.S. public school students.

Twelve percent of the ELL students in 2003 – 2004 were enrolled in those 100 large school districts. While this is a relatively small share of total ELL students in the nation, this level of concentration in high density challenging school districts where achievement gaps are large makes it important to address. The three states of California, Florida, and Texas comprise 41 percent, of the 100 largest public school districts.<sup>10</sup> ELL students enrolled in large districts in these three states, represented 74 percent of total ELL enrollment in large districts reported in 2003 – 2004.

Table 2 presents the total number of ELL students enrolled in large school districts in California, Florida and Texas in the 2003 – 04 school year and the percent of ELL students enrolled selected districts.

**Table 2**

**Number of English Learners in States with the Greatest Number of Large Districts in the 2003-04 School Year**

<b>States with Greatest Numbers of Large School Districts 2003 - 04</b>	<b>Number of Large School Districts in State 2003 - 04</b>	<b>Total Number of ELLS Enrolled in Large Districts 2003 - 04</b>	<b>School Districts with Largest number of ELL enrollment within each state and percent of ELL enrollment for selected districts</b>		
<b>California</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>565,254</b>	Los Angeles S.D.	326,893	45%
			San Diego City	38,790	28%
			Santa Ana Unified	38,207	61%
<b>Florida</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>165,084</b>	Dade County S.D.	62,180	17%
			Broward County	29,612	11%
			Palm Beach CO.	19,599	12%
<b>Texas</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>255,409</b>	Houston I.S.D.	61,144	29%
			Dallas I.S.D.	50,658	32%
			Ft. Worth I.S.D.	21,342	27%

Source: Dalton, B., Sable, J., and Hoffman, L. (2006). *Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States: 2003–04* (NCES 2006-329). U.S.

Languages Spoken By English Learners

ELL students in the United States are a heterogeneous population. While for the majority, Spanish is the native language, ELL students in the U.S. speak more than 450 languages. A substantial share of the U.S. ELL population is native speakers of Asian, Southeast Asian and European languages. The languages spoken most frequently by

ELL students are listed in Table 3. Other languages, such as Arabic, Armenian, Chuukese, French, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Lao, Mandarin, Marshallese, Navajo, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Tagalog, and Urdu are represented by less than 1 percent of the ELL student population.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 3**

**Languages Commonly Spoken by English-Language Learners  
in the U.S. 2000-2001**

Rank	Language	ELL Students	% of LEPs
1	Spanish	3,598,451	79.045%
2	Vietnamese	88,906	1.953%
3	Hmong	70,768	1.555%
4	Chinese, Cantonese	46,466	1.021%
5	Korean	43,969	0.966%

Source: Kindler, A.L., Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students and Available Educational Programs and Services 2000-2001 Summary Report (2002)

<sup>1</sup> Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Public Law 107 – 110, 115 statutes, 1425, January, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Pearson, Greg, *Ask NCELA No. 1: How many school-aged English-language learners (ELLs) are there in the U.S.?* Washington, D.C: National Clearing House for English-Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs 2006, Retrieved Online February 2007 at <http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/expert/faq/01leps.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Loeffler, Melissa, *NCELA Fast FAQ 4: What languages do ELLs speak?* Washington, D.C: National Clearing House for English-Language Acquisition and Language Instruction March 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Capps, R., Fix, M., Murray, J., Ost, J., Passel, J., & Herwanto, S. (2005). *The new demography of America's schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act*. Washington, D.C: The Urban Institute.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Education's Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students and Available Educational Programs and Services, 1991-1992 through 2000-2001 summary reports; state publications (1998-1999 data); enrollment totals from the National Center for Educational Statistics Core of Common Data, 1998-1999 through 2004-2005; FY 2002 Consolidated State Applications for State Grants under Title IX, Part C, § 9302 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (P.L. 107-110); 2004-2005 Consolidated State Performance Reports; and additional 2002-2005 data reported by state. August 2006.

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<sup>7</sup> California Legislative Analysts Office (LAO) 2007 -08 Budget Book - Education Analyses, February 21, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Capps, R., Fix, M., Murray, J., Ost, J., Passel, J., & Herwanto, S. (2005). *The new demography of America's schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act*. Washington, D.C: The Urban Institute.

<sup>10</sup> Dalton, B., Sable, J., and Hoffman, L. (2006). Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States: 2003–04 (NCES 2006-329). U.S.

<sup>11</sup> Kindler, A.L., Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students and Available Educational Programs and Services 2000-2001 Summary Report (2002).