

# English Language Learners

## DEFINITION

*English Language Learners* is the percentage of all public school children (pre-kindergarten through grade 12) who are receiving English as a second language services or bilingual education services in Rhode Island public schools.

## SIGNIFICANCE

English Language Learner (ELL) students are among the fastest growing populations in public schools, especially in elementary schools.<sup>1,2</sup> Many ELL students face challenges to succeeding in school, including poverty, lack of access to health care, low parental education levels and discrimination or racism.<sup>3,4</sup>

ELL students are challenged to simultaneously learn English and succeed academically.<sup>5</sup> ELL students in the same age group have many differing levels of reading, math, and writing proficiency, both in English and in their native languages.<sup>6</sup> Successful ELL education programs are adaptable to student needs, use ongoing assessments of student progress, and provide educators with ongoing professional development. Bilingual education programs can be particularly effective with ELL students.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

ELL students and children in immigrant families are more likely to be concentrated in schools that are under-resourced, large, serve high proportions

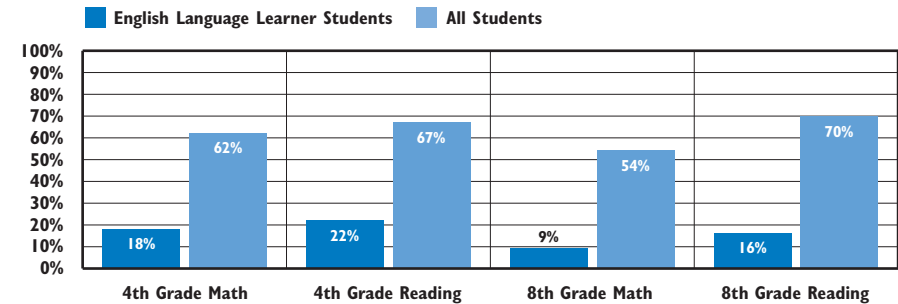
of minority students and located in high poverty communities.<sup>10,11,12</sup> In the 2008-2009 school year in Rhode Island, 85% (6,062) of all ELL students lived in low-income families, and 75% (5,375) lived in the core cities.<sup>13</sup>

Studies show that ELL students believe that school prepares them to get ahead and that studying hard is important to succeed. Most hope to go to college.<sup>14</sup> Schools play a critical role in helping ELL students transition to the culture of the U.S. and supporting their academic success.<sup>15,16</sup>

In the 2008-2009 school year in Rhode Island, ELL students in Rhode Island public schools spoke 80 different languages; the majority (74%) spoke Spanish, 7% spoke Asian languages, 7% spoke Creole or Patois, 4% spoke Portuguese, and 1% spoke African languages.<sup>17</sup>

Twenty-eight percent of ELL students were enrolled in a bilingual program and 72% were enrolled in an English as a second language (ESL) program. Public schools in Central Falls, Cranston, East Greenwich, Providence and the International Charter School offered bilingual programs during the 2008-2009 school year.<sup>18</sup>

## English Language Learners' Mathematics and Reading Proficiency, 2009



Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *New England Common Assessment Program* (NECAP), October 2009.

- ◆ Nationally and in Rhode Island, ELL students score significantly lower on standardized tests than their peers.<sup>19,20</sup> In 2009 in Rhode Island, 22% of fourth-grade ELL students scored at or above proficiency in reading, compared to 67% of fourth graders statewide.<sup>21</sup>
- ◆ Nationally and in Rhode Island, the achievement gap between ELL students and all students widens between elementary and middle school.<sup>22,23</sup> In 2009 in Rhode Island, 16% of eighth-grade ELL students scored at or above proficiency in reading, compared to 70% of eighth graders statewide.<sup>24</sup>

## English Language Learners Mathematics and Reading Proficiency Trends

- ◆ Between 2008 and 2009, the percentage of ELL students proficient in reading increased, while the percentage who were proficient in math fell. The achievement gap in math between ELL students and other students grew by three percentage points in 2009.<sup>25,26</sup>
- ◆ Best practices to increase the academic achievement of ELL students include tailoring instructional practices to students' needs, understanding and using demographic and assessment data, employing highly skilled teachers and leaders, collaboration and shared accountability among educators and school administrators, and implementing programs with a dual focus on English proficiency and course content.<sup>27</sup>

Table 40.

English Language Learner Students, Rhode Island 2008-2009

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS	NUMBER OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER STUDENTS			TOTAL # OF ELL STUDENTS	% OF TOTAL DISTRICT	
		PRE K AND K	ELEMENTARY (GRADES 1-5)	MIDDLE (GRADES 6-8)			HIGH (GRADES 9-12)
Barrington	3,346	4	19	7	7	37	1%
Bristol-Warren	3,441	8	58	24	12	102	3%
Burrillville	2,518	0	3	0	0	3	0%
Central Falls	3,100	78	263	160	141	642	21%
Charlho	3,517	4	7	6	4	21	1%
Coventry	5,239	1	3	1	3	8	0%
Cranston	10,336	48	260	100	63	471	5%
Cumberland	4,830	6	64	20	9	99	2%
East Greenwich	2,315	3	9	3	8	23	1%
East Providence	5,666	27	119	27	26	199	4%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	1,866	0	9	2	0	11	1%
Foster	238	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Foster-Glocester	1,431	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Glocester	584	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Jamestown	464	0	1	2	0	3	1%
Johnston	3,068	15	30	23	12	80	3%
Lincoln	3,181	12	14	4	6	36	1%
Little Compton	297	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Middletown	2,355	3	37	8	15	63	3%
Narragansett	1,441	0	1	1	0	2	0%
New Shoreham	132	2	2	0	0	4	3%
Newport	2,066	5	25	15	9	54	3%
North Kingstown	4,330	6	23	13	4	46	1%
North Providence	3,113	4	22	19	30	75	2%
North Smithfield	1,851	2	10	3	0	15	1%
Pawtucket	8,539	154	406	174	214	948	11%
Portsmouth	2,787	1	2	0	0	3	0%
Providence	23,140	481	1,920	407	609	3,417	15%
Scituate	1,648	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Smithfield	2,471	0	6	4	2	12	0%
South Kingstown	3,591	2	13	6	1	22	1%
Tiverton	1,881	1	1	0	1	3	0%
Warwick	10,374	14	41	15	5	75	1%
West Warwick	3,475	2	26	7	13	48	1%
Westerly	3,183	11	32	12	16	71	2%
Woonsocket	5,958	27	160	48	31	266	4%
Charter Schools	2,021	58	209	3	2	272	13%
State-Operated Schools	1,780	0	0	0	21	21	1%
Core Cities	46,279	747	2,800	811	1,017	5,375	12%
Remainder of State	91,495	174	786	300	224	1,484	2%
Rhode Island	141,575	979	3,795	1,114	1,264	7,152	5%

### Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008-2009 school year. Total number of English Language Learner students is the number of students in each district who were actively enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) or Bilingual Education programs in the 2008-2009 school year. Students who are not yet fully English proficient but have exited ESL or Bilingual Education programs to regular education are not included in these numbers.

Due to a change in methodology, the percentage of English Language Learner students by district cannot be compared with percentages before the 2004 Factbook. The “% of Total District” is based on the total number of English language learners divided by the “average daily membership.”

The charter schools are: Blackstone Academy Charter School, CVS Highlander Charter School, International Charter, Paul Cuffee Charter School and The Learning Community Charter School. The state-operated school is William M. Davies Jr. Career-Technical School.

Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited Proficiency Students. (2008). *The biennial report to congress on the implementation of the Title III state formula grant program, school years 2004-06*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- <sup>2,11</sup> Cosentino De Cohen, C. & Chu Clewell, B. (2007). *Putting English Language Learners on the educational map*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- <sup>3</sup> Short, D. J. & Fitzsimmons, S. (2007). *Double the work: Challenges and solutions to acquiring language and academic literacy for adolescent English language learners – A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.
- <sup>4</sup> Shields, M. K. & Behrman, R. E. (2004). Children of immigrant families: Analysis and recommendations. *The Future of Children: Children of Immigrant Families*, 14(2), 4-15.

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