

# 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

Children for whom English is a second language are at risk of difficulties at school. Many of them face multiple other risk factors including poverty, lack of access to health care, low parental education levels, discrimination and racism. Children who speak languages other than English at home and who also have difficulty speaking English, face greater challenges in school and the workforce as adults than their English-speaking peers.<sup>1,2</sup>

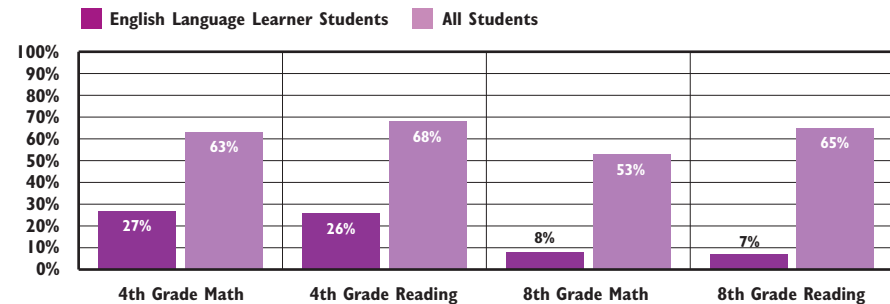
English language learner (ELL) students are the fastest growing population in U.S. public schools. Nationally, 11% of students today are ELL students, compared to 5% in 1990.<sup>3</sup> English language learners are diverse in culture, levels of basic academic content proficiency (regardless of language of instruction) and English ability.<sup>4</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.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup>

Nationally and in Rhode Island, students who are English Language Learners and children in immigrant families are more likely to be concentrated in under-resourced schools in high poverty communities.<sup>9,10,11</sup> Seventy-six percent of all ELL students in Rhode Island live in the core cities, and 85% (6,342) of all ELL students live in low-income families.<sup>12</sup> Given the proven link between educational attainment and family economic success, a high-quality education is the most important vehicle for upward mobility for children in immigrant families.<sup>13,14</sup>

Studies show that ELL students overwhelmingly believe that school prepares them to get ahead; they believe studying hard is important to succeed and most hope to go to college.<sup>15</sup> ELL students are challenged to learn English and simultaneously succeed academically.<sup>16,17</sup> Schools play a critical role in helping ELL students transition to the culture of the U.S. and in supporting their academic success.<sup>18</sup>

In the 2007-2008 school year, ELL students in Rhode Island public schools spoke over 80 different languages.<sup>19</sup> Twenty-eight percent were enrolled in a bilingual program and 72% were enrolled in an English as a second language program. The Providence Public School District and the International Charter School offered the only bilingual programs in Rhode Island in the 2007-2008 school year.<sup>20</sup>

**4th Grade Reading Proficiency Rates, by English Language Learner Status, Rhode Island, 2008**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *New England Common Assessment Program* (NECAP), October 2008.

- ◆ **Nationally and in Rhode Island, students who are English Language Learners score significantly lower on standardized tests than their peers.<sup>21,22</sup> In October 2008 in Rhode Island, 27% of fourth-grade ELL students scored at or above proficiency in math, compared to 63% of all fourth graders statewide. Twenty-six percent of fourth-grade ELL students scored at or above proficiency in reading, compared to 68% of all fourth graders statewide.<sup>23</sup>**
- ◆ **Nationally and in Rhode Island, the achievement gap between students who are English Language Learners and all students widens between elementary and middle school.<sup>24,25</sup> In October 2008 in Rhode Island, 8% of eighth-grade ELL students scored at or above proficiency in math, compared to 53% of all eighth graders statewide. Seven percent of eighth-grade ELL students scored at or above proficiency in reading, compared to 65% of eighth graders statewide.<sup>26</sup>**
- ◆ **ELL student performance on reading and math tests has improved in the last four years. However, ELL students in Rhode Island consistently score significantly lower than any other group of students.<sup>27</sup>**
- ◆ **Best practices to increase the academic achievement of ELL students include: use of data and research, highly skilled teachers and leaders, supports beyond the classroom for parents and students, programs accommodating the needs of students at varying levels of English proficiency and academic ability, positive school environments, and clear guidelines for transitioning students out of ELL programming.<sup>28</sup>**

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Table 36.

English Language Learner Students, Rhode Island, 2007-2008 School Year

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	3,382	2	24	7	6	39	1%
Bristol-Warren	3,433	13	70	29	16	128	4%
Burrillville	2,554	3	2	0	0	5	0%
Central Falls	3,338	80	299	151	198	728	22%
Charlho	3,690	2	12	1	2	17	0%
Coventry	5,215	0	5	1	0	6	0%
Cranston	10,323	48	251	106	80	485	5%
Cumberland	4,766	9	54	15	1	79	2%
East Greenwich	2,347	3	6	4	4	17	1%
East Providence	5,660	30	122	18	23	193	3%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	1,906	0	10	5	3	18	1%
Foster	258	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Foster-Glocester	1,523	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Glocester	554	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Jamestown	481	0	3	1	0	4	1%
Johnston	3,136	1	25	34	8	68	2%
Lincoln	3,318	6	13	4	3	26	1%
Little Compton	303	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Middletown	2,390	2	38	17	20	77	3%
Narragansett	1,456	0	2	0	0	2	0%
New Shoreham	142	1	2	0	2	5	4%
Newport	2,175	7	34	11	10	62	3%
North Kingstown	4,401	11	22	8	5	46	1%
North Providence	3,128	3	21	19	20	63	2%
North Smithfield	1,853	2	12	2	0	16	1%
Pawtucket	8,530	121	398	181	171	871	10%
Portsmouth	2,847	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Providence	24,180	481	1,935	594	605	3,615	15%
Scituate	1,721	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Smithfield	2,496	1	9	4	1	15	1%
South Kingstown	3,614	2	10	5	4	21	1%
Tiverton	1,979	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Warwick	10,742	15	41	17	6	79	1%
West Warwick	3,575	6	46	9	25	86	2%
Westerly	3,327	6	29	20	12	67	2%
Woonsocket	6,166	21	166	51	37	275	4%
Charter Schools	1,901	60	215	9	3	287	15%
State-Operated Schools	1,727	0	0	1	26	27	2%
Core Cities	47,964	716	2,878	997	1,046	5,637	12%
Remainder of State	92,945	160	783	317	216	1,476	2%
Rhode Island	144,537	936	3,876	1,324	1,291	7,427	5%

## Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2007-2008 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 2007-2008 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 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: BEACON Charter School, Blackstone Academy Charter School, Compass Charter School, CVS Highlander Charter School, International Charter, Kingston Hill Academy, Paul Cuffee Charter School and The Learning Community Charter School. The state-operated schools are: William M. Davies Jr. Career-Technical School, DCYF schools, and the Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

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

## References

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