

# 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 elementary and secondary schools. The term “Limited English Proficient students” has been replaced by the term “English language learners” in the education community.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Children of recent immigrants are at very high risk for difficulties at school. They face multiple risk factors including poverty, non-English speaking backgrounds, low educational level of parents, and discrimination based on race, ethnic background, culture, or language.<sup>1</sup> Adults who report that they have some difficulty with English are twelve times as likely to have completed less than five years of schooling and half as likely to have graduated from high school. Children who live in these households are fifty percent more likely to live in poverty.<sup>2</sup> These children are also most likely to be concentrated in underresourced schools in high poverty communities.<sup>3</sup> Children who speak languages other than English at home and who also have difficulty speaking English

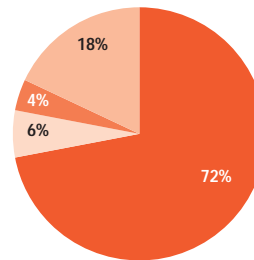
face greater challenges progressing in school and in the workforce.<sup>4</sup>

Schools play a critical role in helping children to transition to the culture of the United States and in providing an education that supports academic success for children with a primary language other than English.<sup>5</sup> The Rhode Island Department of Education is legally mandated to provide programs to English language learners that are comparable in structure and content to instruction provided to their English proficient peers. Programs must focus on full English language literacy and all programs must have a process for evaluating the adequate yearly progress of each English language learner, including those who have left the English as a Second Language (ESL) system.<sup>6</sup>

The number of Rhode Island public school students who are English language learners has increased from 6,494 students in 1990-1991 to 10,779 students in 2001-2002. Nearly all of the increase has been in the school districts of the core cities. During the 2001-2002 school year, nearly 4 out of 5 English language learners in Rhode Island went to school in the cities of Central Falls, Pawtucket and Providence.<sup>7,8</sup>

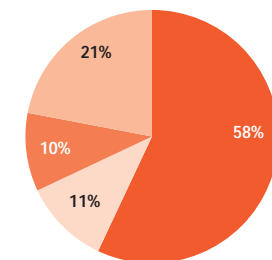
English Language Learners, by Language, Rhode Island, 2002

72% Spanish  
6% Portuguese  
4% Cape Verdean  
18% Other\*



English Language Learners, by Community, Rhode Island, 2002

58% Providence  
11% Pawtucket  
10% Central Falls  
21% Remainder of State



*n* = 10,779

\*Includes Arabic, Armenian, Cambodian, Chinese, French, Korean, Laotian, Polish, Russian, Vietnamese, Haitian/Creole, and others.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

- ◆ Spanish is the most commonly spoken language of Rhode Island’s public school students who are English language learners. This is consistent with the increase in the Latino child population in Rhode Island, from 16,000 in 1990 to 35,000 in 2000.<sup>9</sup>
- ◆ Compared to students of other racial/ethnic groups, Latino high school students in Rhode Island have the lowest achievement ratings in math, reading and writing.<sup>10</sup> Nearly one-third of all students attending low-performing schools are Latino. Eighty-five percent of Rhode Island’s Latino students attend a low-performing school.<sup>11</sup>
- ◆ To improve educational outcomes for Latino students, schools can increase academic expectations, place Latino students in special education only when appropriate, develop culturally-rich curricula and deliberately talk with Latino students about the courses they choose and postsecondary options.<sup>12</sup>

Table 28.

## English Language Learners, Rhode Island, 2001-2002

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL ENROLLMENT IN DISTRICT	NUMBER OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELL)				TOTAL ELL	% OF TOTAL DISTRICT
		PRE K AND K	ELEMENTARY GRADES 1-5	MIDDLE GRADES 6-8	HIGH GRADES 9-12		
Barrington	3,286	0	5	0	2	7	<1%
Bistol-Warren	3,810	25	86	22	9	142	4%
Burrillville	2,749	0	1	2	1	4	<1%
Central Falls	3,638	87	530	274	209	1,100	30%
Charlho	3,887	1	8	2	7	18	<1%
Coventry	5,785	4	12	1	5	22	<1%
Cranston	11,155	37	236	113	89	475	4%
Cumberland	5,373	10	105	38	26	184	3%
East Greenwich	2,440	4	14	5	4	27	1%
East Providence	6,566	69	185	52	40	346	5%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	2,152	3	4	2	3	12	1%
Foster	402	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Foster-Glocester	1,632	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Glocester	802	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Jamestown	588	0	1	0	0	1	<1%
Johnston	3,381	3	33	14	11	61	2%
Lincoln	3,706	4	10	5	9	28	1%
Little Compton	350	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Middletown	2,856	2	15	8	13	38	1%
Narragansett	1,742	0	6	0	1	7	<1%
New Shoreham	130	0	2	0	0	2	2%
Newport	2,937	1	41	20	19	81	3%
North Kingstown	4,501	9	26	9	14	58	1%
North Providence	3,476	0	60	22	26	115	3%
North Smithfield	1,861	0	0	1	0	1	<1%
Pawtucket	9,833	110	482	312	292	1,196	12%
Portsmouth	2,888	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Providence	27,159	690	3,577	1,097	787	6,195	23%
Scituate	1,772	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Smithfield	2,733	0	0	0	0	0	0%
South Kingstown	4,344	1	26	14	9	50	1%
Tiverton	2,222	0	1	2	0	3	<1%
Warwick	12,222	8	41	16	13	78	1%
West Warwick	3,795	22	32	14	13	81	2%
Westerly	3,691	16	29	16	12	73	2%
Woonsocket	6,760	47	237	58	31	374	6%
<b>Core Cities</b>	<b>54,122</b>	<b>957</b>	<b>4,899</b>	<b>1,775</b>	<b>1,351</b>	<b>9,027</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Remainder of State</b>	<b>102,502</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>906</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>1,752</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>156,624</b>	<b>1,153</b>	<b>5,805</b>	<b>2,119</b>	<b>1,645</b>	<b>10,779*</b>	<b>7%</b>

\* Includes 57 students in ungraded classes from Cumberland (5), North Providence (7), Providence (44) and Woonsocket (1).

### Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2001-2002 school year. Total number of English language learners 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 2001-2002 school year. Students who are not yet fully English proficient but have exited the ESL or bilingual program to regular education are not included in these numbers. Denominator is the fall enrollment figures by district.

### References

- <sup>1</sup> *Information Works!* (2000). Providence RI: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and University of Rhode Island, National Center on Public Education and Social Policy.
- <sup>2</sup> Crawford, James (1997). *Best Evidence: Research Foundations for the Bilingual Education*. Washington DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- <sup>3,5</sup> Ruiz-de-Velasco, J. and Fix, M. (2001). *Overlooked and Underserved: Immigrant Students in U.S. Secondary Schools*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- <sup>4</sup> *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2002* (2002). Washington, DC: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.
- <sup>6</sup> Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Regulations Chapter 16-54, 2000.
- <sup>7</sup> *Results: Education in Rhode Island 2001* (2001). Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council: Providence, RI and the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- <sup>8,10,11</sup> Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2001-2002 and 1998-2000.
- <sup>9</sup> US Bureau of the Census, Census 2000.
- <sup>12</sup> Uriarte, M., et al (2002). *Rhode Island Latinos: A Scan of Issues Affecting the Latino Population of Rhode Island*. Boston, MA: Mauricio Gaston Institute, University of Massachusetts, Boston.