

Trends in Demographics and Terminology

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While a “majority-minority” student population has long been a reality in Chicago, 2011 marked the first time minority students were the majority in kindergarten, first, second and third grade classrooms across Illinois.¹ Most students in this demographic shift come from immigrant families, have a range of native- and English-language proficiency and/or come from families who may be unfamiliar with how to navigate U.S. schools. Their educational experience serves as a critical conduit for how they will integrate into society. Educators’ preparedness to build on student linguistic and cultural strengths will have a major impact on the future of Illinois.



Demographic Overview

Growth in the children of immigrants.

Throughout the U.S. the number of children under 18 from immigrant families is expected to grow from 17.3 million in 2009 to 34.2 million by 2050; this will account for 33.6 percent of the child population under age 18.²

Within Illinois, 88 percent of children born to immigrants in the state are U.S. citizens and one in four children have at least one foreign-born parent.³ According to data from the Illinois State Board of Education, between 2005 and 2018 both the African American and White student populations declined 24 and 22 percent respectively. The Latino student population grew 28 percent.⁴

A trend within this shift is the number of linguistically and culturally diverse students who reside throughout the state. One of every four Illinois children speaks a language other than English in their home.⁵ Some of these students identify as English Learners (ELs), now representing approximately 12 percent of students statewide; this student group grew 58 percent between 2005 and 2018.⁶

Growth of ELs throughout Illinois, especially in suburban areas.

ELs reside throughout Illinois, with significant growth in the suburbs. ELs reside in 92 of 102 Illinois counties. From 2005 to 2008, 43 counties experienced a new presence of ELs.⁷ The greatest concentrations of ELs are in the City of Chicago (31 percent); 56 percent are in the suburbs and 12 percent downstate (outside the collar counties). While ELs statewide grew 58 percent, in the city, ELs grew 11 percent and throughout the rest of the state ELs grew a tremendous 93 percent.

Illinois ELs are young and largely Spanish-speaking.

The Illinois EL population tends to be young, with 55 percent concentrated in PreK-3rd grade. These demographics mirror national trends. Within the Illinois State Board of Education-funded Preschool for All program, 22 percent are ELs.⁸

Throughout Illinois, ELs come from rich and diverse linguistic backgrounds with more than 136 languages spoken in schools. The majority of school-aged ELs, 71 percent, are Spanish-speakers, followed by Arabic (4 percent), Polish (3 percent), Urdu (2 percent) and Pilipino (1 percent).⁹

Growth of ELs is complicated by rising poverty within Illinois and its schools.

Rising income inequality levels and a growing number of students who face economic adversity accompany the demographic shifts. Today, almost half of all Illinois students identify as low-income, growing from 36 percent in 1999 to 49 percent by 2018.¹⁰ This trend is now a reality outside of Chicago as well. Between 2000 and 2016, the percentage of impoverished residents in suburban counties grew from 34 percent to 50 percent.¹¹

Some children of immigrants fare well, while others face substantial financial hardship. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty's Illinois analysis, 50 percent of children of immigrant parents live in low-income families (compared to 36 percent of children of U.S.-born parents).¹² Research strongly correlates economic adversity with student academic risk along with social-emotional difficulties.¹³

The current political context and familial immigration status influences classroom learning.

Financial hardship is often compounded by parental legal-residency status. Research finds that by age 2, children of undocumented parents tend to demonstrate lower levels of language and cognitive development when compared with children whose parents are legal residents or native-born. The threat of forced family separation, deportation or lack of knowledge about social-service eligibility can inhibit undocumented parents from looking for help. Their children are often negatively affected by the parents' long work hours, low pay and poor living conditions.¹⁴ Toxic stress experienced by young children poses a threat to classroom learning. In response to these demographic shifts, teacher and school-leader preparation needs to include linguistic and cultural responsiveness along with other considerations for socioeconomic and political insecurities.

Historically, EL classifications have been simply defined as EL versus non-EL. Today clearer, more nuanced descriptions are necessary to further understand the progress of these students over time. The categories in the following chart provide a broader consideration for the range of linguistically and culturally diverse students present in today's schools.

Definitions of Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students

HERITAGE SPEAKERS (NEVER ELS): students from linguistic and culturally diverse backgrounds with a high level of English proficiency. These tend to be students who speak a language other than English in the home at various levels of proficiency but may not be literate in that language. These students do not participate in EL services.

CURRENT OR ACTIVE ELS: students who are not yet proficient in English and require specialized language service (bilingual education and ESL). These students are generally enrolled in a Dual Language, Transitional Bilingual Education or Transitional Program of Instruction.

FORMER ELS: students who have been reclassified because they have met the state criteria for English language proficiency. They are enrolled in the general education program.

LONG-TERM ELS: ELs who have remained in specialized language programs for more than seven full years. Once the student is identified, they can have EL status for seven measures of English language proficiency (not including kindergarten), allowing for seven full years of instruction. If on the eighth measure of the English Language Proficiency assessment the student does not meet the exit criteria, they are deemed a long-term EL. Long-term ELs are enrolled in middle and high schools (adapted from Glossary of Education Reform 2018).¹⁵

ENGLISH LEARNER WITH AN INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN (IEP): ELs who are receiving both specialized language and special education services.

DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS: this term has two meanings. Within early childhood settings, the United States Department of Education defines this groups as “children who have a home language other than English and are learning two or more languages at the same time or learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language” (US Dept. of Health and Human Services 2018).¹⁶ In K-12 settings, these are students who are participating in dual language education programs where they are taught in more than one language (see Chapter 3 for an in-depth description of types of language programming).

ACCESS and Former ELs

Illinois, like most states, has established English as a Second Language standards and an assessment system. This means that entry and exit criteria for EL status are well-defined and progress toward transition out of services is measured annually. The WIDA MODEL and Screener are English language proficiency

screening instruments used to identify ELs when they enter the Illinois public education system. The ACCESS assessment is the Illinois measure of English language proficiency. The results of the English language proficiency assessment help define the status of ELs per the definitions above. The assessment:

- Is administered K-12th grade for active ELs.
- Is given annually to monitor student progress in learning academic English.

- Meets U.S. federal requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for monitoring and reporting EL progress toward English language proficiency.
- Corresponds to the WIDA English Language Development Standards.
- Assesses the four language domains of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

For more information see: <https://wida.wisc.edu/assess/access>.

Former ELs

Past accountability systems have focused on the speed with which children transition from services and EL status at the expense of long-term achievement outcomes.¹⁷ Under No Child Left Behind, Illinois was required to follow the progress of ELs for two years after transition. The ESSA law increases the number of years of monitoring the performance of ELS to four. The Illinois state ESSA plan requires districts to track student performance data from the year in which a student exits EL instructional programs through the student's high school graduation. Former ELs are tracked according to qualitative indicators as well, such as attendance, participation in AP/IB and dual credit and high school graduation. The Illinois plan goes above and beyond what ESSA requires.

Experience suggests that former ELs be monitored long after they have been reclassified. Looking at the achievement of former ELs helps build a more comprehensive picture of the EL subgroup—many times, former ELs outperform students who were never ELs. Following these students longitudinally provides important data on benchmarks for college and career readiness, such as freshman on track, participation in advanced and dual credit courses and high school completion. Too often districts lose track of former EL

achievement once the students have achieved mastery of English and have left EL classification.¹⁸ For a fuller understanding of EL data, see Chapter 9 of the handbook.

Long-Term ELs

In the Illinois ESSA plan, another subgroup is mentioned: long-term ELs. These are students who begin school qualifying as ELs and do not reach English language proficiency after seven years of service. Nationwide, this group of students tends to be challenged in meeting academic standards and quality indicators. New research indicates that these students can tend to drop in attendance over time, make lower grades in core subject areas and may not complete high school. The research also points to identifying potential long-term ELs as early as first grade given their low proficiency scores on ACCESS.¹⁹ Even though this group might show greater academic growth year-to-year when compared to other student groups, they struggle to be on par and to reach proficiency. Districts are likely to find a correlation between long-term ELs and students identified for special education services. Long-term ELs will be reported as a subgroup and monitored in Illinois' accountability system.

LOCAL CONVERSATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- Is your district following three-year demographic trends for EL enrollment? What are your district's strategies for reducing the number of ELs whose parents are refusing services?
- What percentage of ELs achieve English language proficiency within five years? How does that compare to the state average?
- What is your district's strategy for following the progress of former ELs on both academic and quality indicators?
- How is your district supporting long-term ELs?