

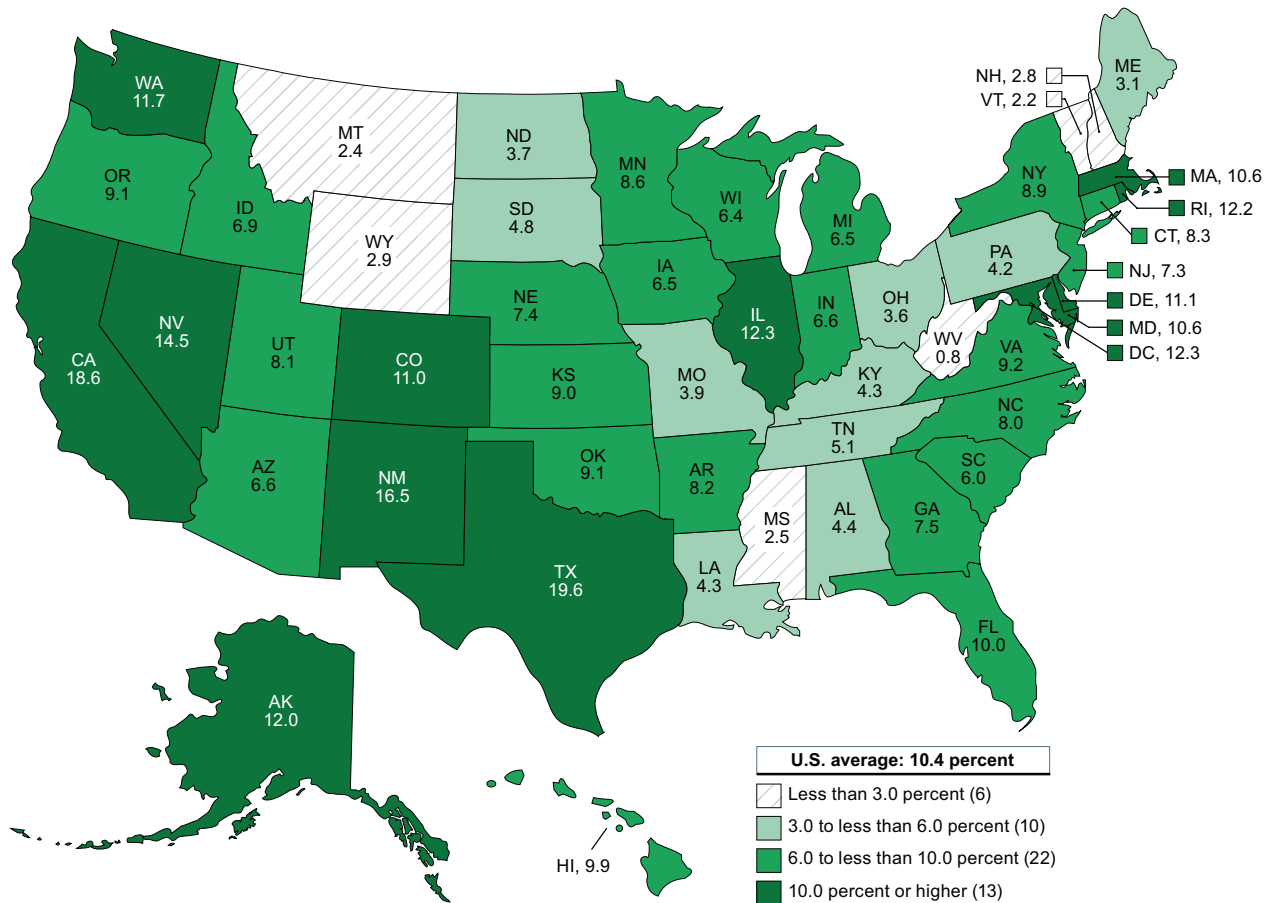
English Learners in Public Schools

The percentage of public school students in the United States who were English learners (ELs) was higher in fall 2019 (10.4 percent, or 5.1 million students) than in fall 2010 (9.2 percent, or 4.5 million students). In fall 2019, the percentage of public school students who were ELs ranged from 0.8 percent in West Virginia to 19.6 percent in Texas.

Students who are identified as English learners (ELs) can participate in language assistance programs to help ensure that they attain English proficiency and meet the academic content and achievement standards expected of all students. Participation in these types of programs can improve students' English language proficiency, which

in turn has been associated with improved educational outcomes.¹ The percentage of public school students² in the United States who were ELs increased between fall 2010 (9.2 percent, or 4.5 million students) and fall 2019 (10.4 percent, or 5.1 million students).³

Figure 1. Percentage of public school students who were English learners (ELs), by state and categorized into specific ranges: Fall 2019



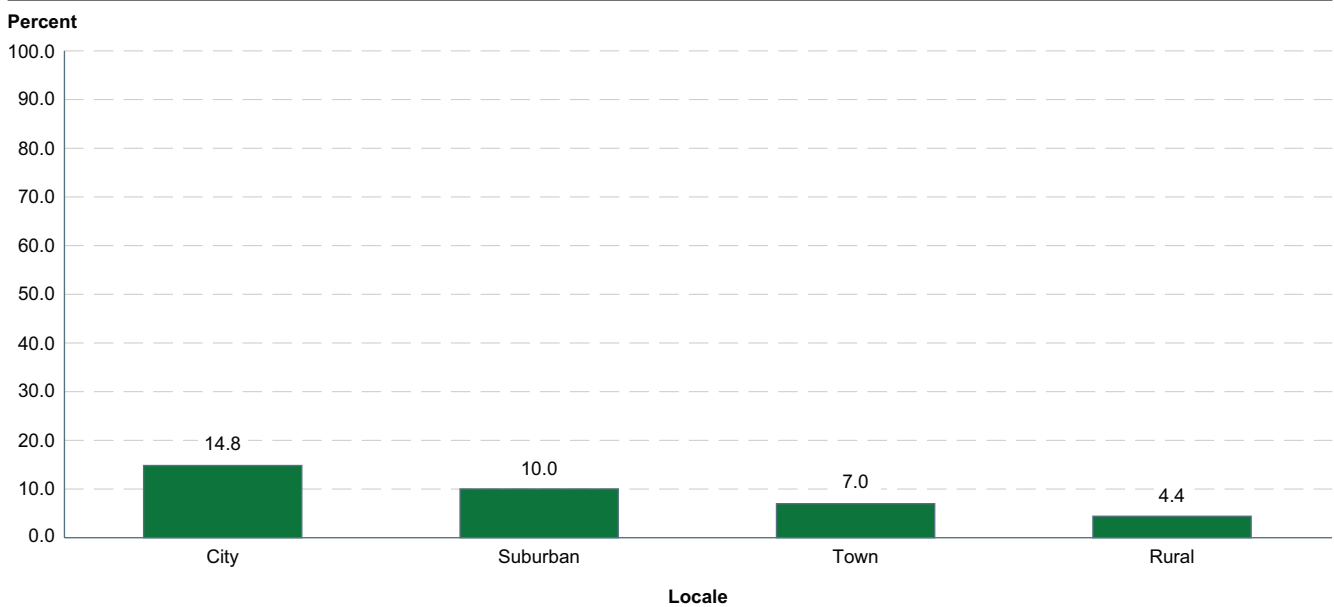
NOTE: U.S. average is for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Categorizations are based on unrounded percentages.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, EDData file 141, Data Group 678, extracted March 31, 2021; and Common Core of Data (CCD), "Local Education Agency Universe Survey," 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 204.20.

In fall 2019, the percentage of public school students who were ELs was 10.0 percent or more in 12 states—half of which were located in the West—and the District of Columbia.⁴ The states were Alaska, California, Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Mexico, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington. Texas reported the highest percentage of ELs among its public school students (19.6 percent), followed by California (18.6 percent) and New Mexico (16.5 percent). An additional 22 states identified between 6.0 and 10.0 percent of their students as ELs and 10 states identified between 3.0 and 6.0 percent of their students as ELs. In contrast, the percentage of students who were ELs was less than 3.0 percent in 6 states:

Wyoming (2.9 percent), New Hampshire (2.8 percent), Mississippi (2.5 percent), Montana (2.4 percent), Vermont (2.2 percent), and West Virginia (0.8 percent).

Reflecting the national increase, the percentage of public school students who were ELs was higher in fall 2019 than in fall 2010 in 42 states and the District of Columbia. In the remaining 8 states, the percentage of public school students who were ELs was lower in fall 2019 than in fall 2010. The largest positive percentage point change occurred in Rhode Island (7.3 percentage points) and the largest negative percentage point change occurred in Nevada (6.4 percentage points).

Figure 2. Percentage of public school students who were English learners (ELs), by locale: Fall 2019

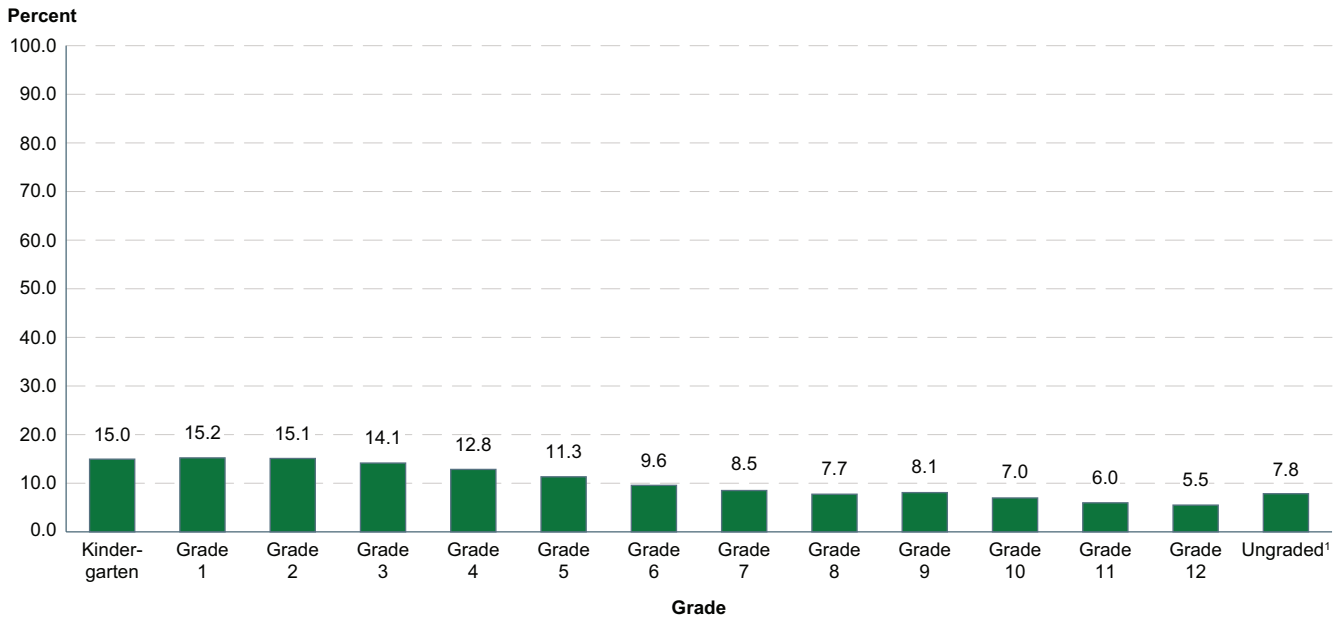


NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are based on locales of school districts. Excludes EL students who are enrolled in prekindergarten.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, ED*Facts* file 141, Data Group 678, extracted December 10, 2021; and Common Core of Data (CCD), "Local Education Agency Universe Survey," 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 214.40.

In fall 2019, the percentage of students who were ELs was higher for school districts in more urbanized locales than for those in less urbanized locales. EL students constituted

an average of 14.8 percent of total public school enrollment in cities, 10.0 percent in suburban areas, 7.0 percent in towns, and 4.4 percent in rural areas.

Figure 3. Percentage of public school students who were English learners (ELs), by grade level: Fall 2019



¹ Also includes students reported as being enrolled in grade 13.

NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, ED^oFacts file 141, Data Group 678, extracted March 31, 2021; and Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 204.27.

In general, a higher percentage of public school students in lower grades than of those in upper grades were EL students in fall 2019. For example, 15.0 percent of kindergarteners were EL students, compared with 9.6 percent of 6th-graders and 7.7 percent of 8th-graders.

Among 12th-graders, only 5.5 percent of students were ELs. This pattern was driven, in part, by students who are identified as ELs when they enter elementary school but obtain English language proficiency before reaching the upper grades.⁵

Table 1. Number and percentage distribution of English learner (EL) students in public schools and number of EL students as a percentage of total public school enrollment, by the 10 most commonly reported home languages of EL students: Fall 2019

Home language	Number of EL students	Percentage distribution of EL students ¹	Number of EL students as a percent of total enrollment
Spanish, Castilian	3,872,153	75.7	7.9
Arabic	131,554	2.6	0.3
English ²	105,296	2.1	0.2
Chinese	100,085	2.0	0.2
Vietnamese	75,558	1.5	0.2
Portuguese	44,771	0.9	0.1
Russian	39,721	0.8	0.1
Haitian, Haitian Creole	31,504	0.6	0.1
Hmong	30,786	0.6	0.1
Korean	25,810	0.5	0.1

¹ Detail does not sum to 100 percent because not all home language categories are reported.

² Examples of situations in which English might be reported as an English learner's home language include students who live in multilingual households and students adopted from other countries who speak English at home but also have been raised speaking another language.

NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *EDFacts* file 141, Data Group 678, extracted March 31, 2021; and Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 204.27.

Spanish was the home language of 3.9 million EL public school students in fall 2019, representing 75.7 percent of all EL students and 7.9 percent of all public school students. Arabic was the second most commonly reported home language (spoken by 131,600 students). English was the third most common home language for EL students (105,300 students), which may reflect students who live in multilingual households or students adopted from other countries who were raised speaking another language but currently live in households where English is spoken. Chinese (100,100 students), Vietnamese (75,600 students), Portuguese (44,800 students), Russian (39,700 students), Haitian (31,500 students), Hmong (30,800 students), and Korean (25,800 students) were the next most commonly reported home languages of EL students in fall 2019. The 15 most commonly reported home languages also include several whose prevalence has changed greatly between school year 2009-10 and fall 2019. For example, the number of EL students who reported that their home language was Swahili was nearly five times higher in fall 2019 (21,600 students) than in school year 2009-10

(4,400 students) and the number of EL students who reported that their home language was Portuguese nearly tripled in that time (from 15,200 to 44,800 students).⁶

In fall 2019, about 3.9 million Hispanic EL public school students constituted over three-quarters (76.8 percent) of EL student enrollment overall.⁷ Asian students were the next largest racial/ethnic group among ELs, with 523,400 students (10.2 percent of EL students). In addition, there were 332,400 White EL students (6.5 percent of EL students) and 221,000 Black EL students (4.3 percent of EL students). In each of the other racial/ethnic groups for which data were collected (Pacific Islanders, American Indians/Alaska Natives, and individuals of Two or more races), fewer than 40,000 students were identified as ELs.

In addition, 792,000 ELs were identified as students with disabilities in fall 2019, representing 15.5 percent of the total EL student enrollment. In comparison, students with disabilities made up 14.4 percent of total public school enrollment in 2019-20.

Endnotes:

¹ Genesee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K., Saunders, W., and Christian, D. (2005). English Language Learners in U.S. Schools: An Overview of Research Findings. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 10(4): 363-385. Retrieved January 18, 2022, from https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327671espr1004_2.

² Includes students in kindergarten through grade 12, as well as ungraded students and students reported as being enrolled in grade 13. Excludes students in prekindergarten.

³ For 2014 and earlier years, data on the total number of EL students enrolled in public schools and on the percentage of public school students who were ELs include only those EL students who participated in EL programs. Starting with 2015, data include all EL students, regardless of program participation. Due to this change in definition, comparisons between 2019 and earlier years should be interpreted with caution. For all years, data do not include students who were formerly identified as ELs but later obtained English language proficiency.

⁴ Categorizations are based on unrounded percentages.

⁵ Saunders, W.M., and Marcelletti, D.J. (2013). The Gap That Can't Go Away: The Catch-22 of Reclassification in Monitoring the Progress of English Learners. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 35(2): 139-156. Retrieved January 18, 2022, from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/O162373712461849>.

⁶ School year 2009-10 data include all EL students enrolled at any time during the 2009-10 school year, except data for California, which reflect EL students enrolled on a single date. All other data in this indicator include only EL students enrolled on October 1 of the corresponding year.

⁷ The number of Hispanic EL students is larger than the number of EL students who speak Spanish. Home language data may be missing for some Hispanic EL students. In addition, some Hispanic EL students may report that they speak a language other than Spanish at home (such as a language that is indigenous to Latin America).

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 204.20, 204.27, and 214.40; *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 204.70

Related indicators and resources: [English Language Learners in Public Schools](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [Mathematics Performance](#); [Programs and Services for High School English Learners in Public School Districts: 2015-16](#); [Public School Enrollment](#); [Reading Performance](#); [Science Performance](#); [Students With Disabilities](#); [Technology and Engineering Literacy](#)

Glossary: Disabilities, children with; English learner (EL); Enrollment; Geographic region; Household; Locale codes; Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group; School district