

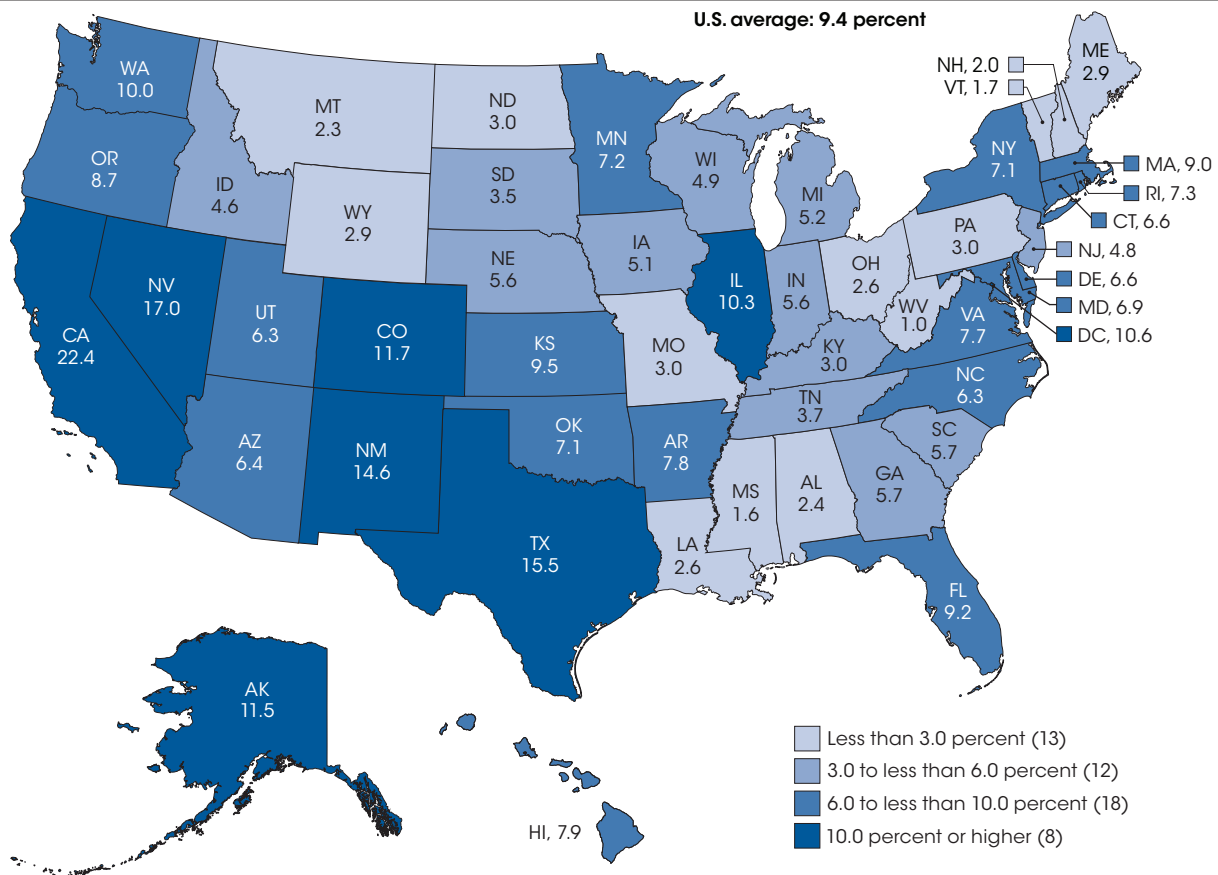
English Language Learners in Public Schools

The percentage of public school students in the United States who were English language learners (ELLs) was higher in school year 2014–15 (9.4 percent, or 4.6 million students) than in 2004–05 (9.1 percent, or 4.3 million students). In 2014–15, the percentage of public school students who were ELLs ranged from 1.0 percent in West Virginia to 22.4 percent in California.

Students who are English language learners (ELLs) participate in language assistance programs to help ensure that they attain English proficiency and meet the same academic content and achievement standards that all students are expected to meet. 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 students in the United States who were ELLs was higher in school year 2014–15 (9.4 percent, or an estimated 4.6 million students) than in 2004–05 (9.1 percent, or an estimated 4.3 million students) and 2013–14 (9.3 percent, or an estimated 4.5 million students).²

Figure 1. Percentage of public school students who were English language learners, by state: School year 2014–15



NOTE: Categorizations are based on unrounded percentages.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Local Education Agency Universe Survey," 2014–15. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.20.

In 2014–15, the percentage of public school students who were ELLs was 10.0 percent or more in the District of Columbia and seven states. These states, most of which are located in the West, were Alaska, California, Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas.

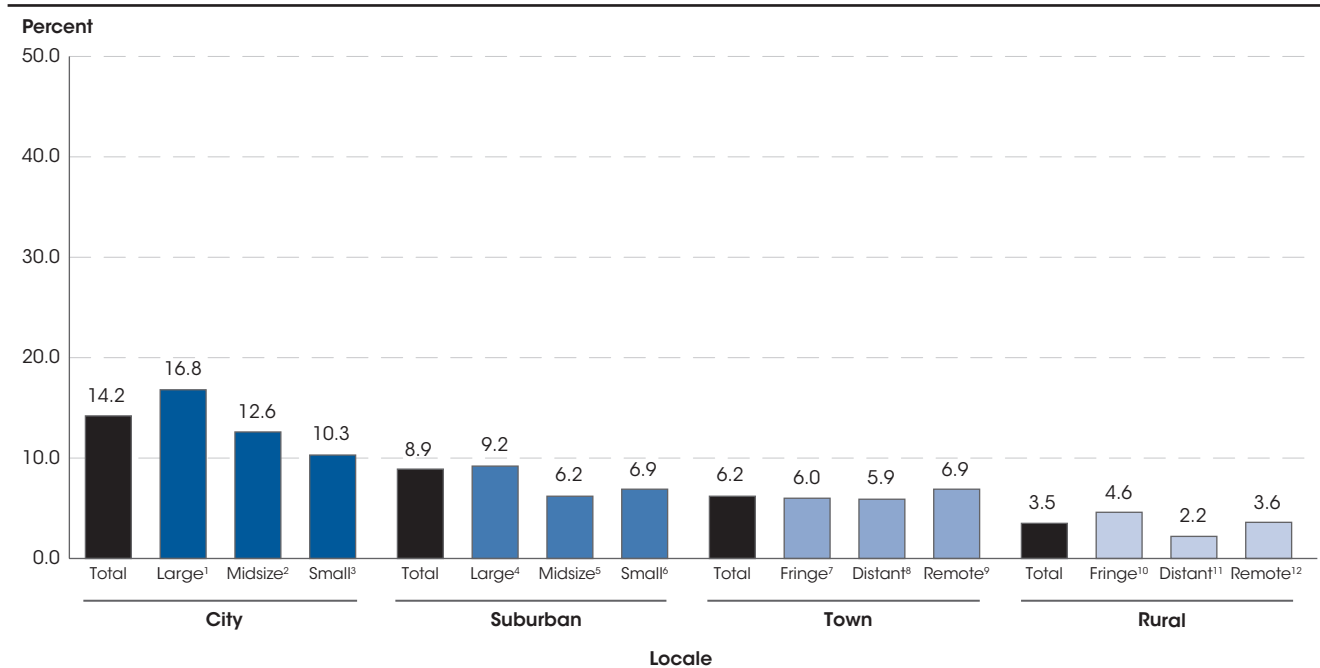
California reported the highest percentage of ELLs among its public school students, at 22.4 percent, followed by Nevada at 17.0 percent. Eighteen states had percentages of ELL students that were 6.0 percent or higher but less than 10.0 percent, and 12 states had percentages that

were 3.0 percent or higher but less than 6.0 percent. The percentage of students who were ELLs was less than 3.0 percent in 13 states, with Vermont (1.7 percent), Mississippi (1.6 percent), and West Virginia (1.0 percent) having the lowest percentages.

The percentage of public school students who were ELLs increased between 2004–05 and 2014–15 in all but 15 states, with the largest percentage-point increase occurring in Maryland (4.4 percentage points) and the

largest percentage-point decrease occurring in Arizona (13.8 percentage points). Between 2013–14 and 2014–15, the percentage of public school students who were ELLs decreased in 13 states, with the largest decrease occurring in New Mexico (0.7 percentage points). In contrast, 37 states and the District of Columbia experienced an increase in the percentage of ELL students between 2013–14 and 2014–15, with the largest increase occurring in Nevada (1.5 percentage points).

Figure 2. Percentage of public school students who were English language learners, by locale: School year 2014–15



¹ Located inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population of at least 250,000.

² Located inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population of at least 100,000 but less than 250,000.

³ Located inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population less than 100,000.

⁴ Located inside an urbanized area and outside a principal city with a population of 250,000 or more.

⁵ Located inside an urbanized area and outside a principal city with a population of at least 100,000 but less than 250,000.

⁶ Located inside an urbanized area and outside a principal city with a population less than 100,000.

⁷ Located inside an urban cluster that is 10 miles or less from an urbanized area.

⁸ Located inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 but less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area.

⁹ Located inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area.

¹⁰ Located outside any urbanized area or urban cluster but 5 miles or less from an urbanized area or 2.5 miles or less from an urban cluster.

¹¹ Located outside any urbanized area or urban cluster and more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, or more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.

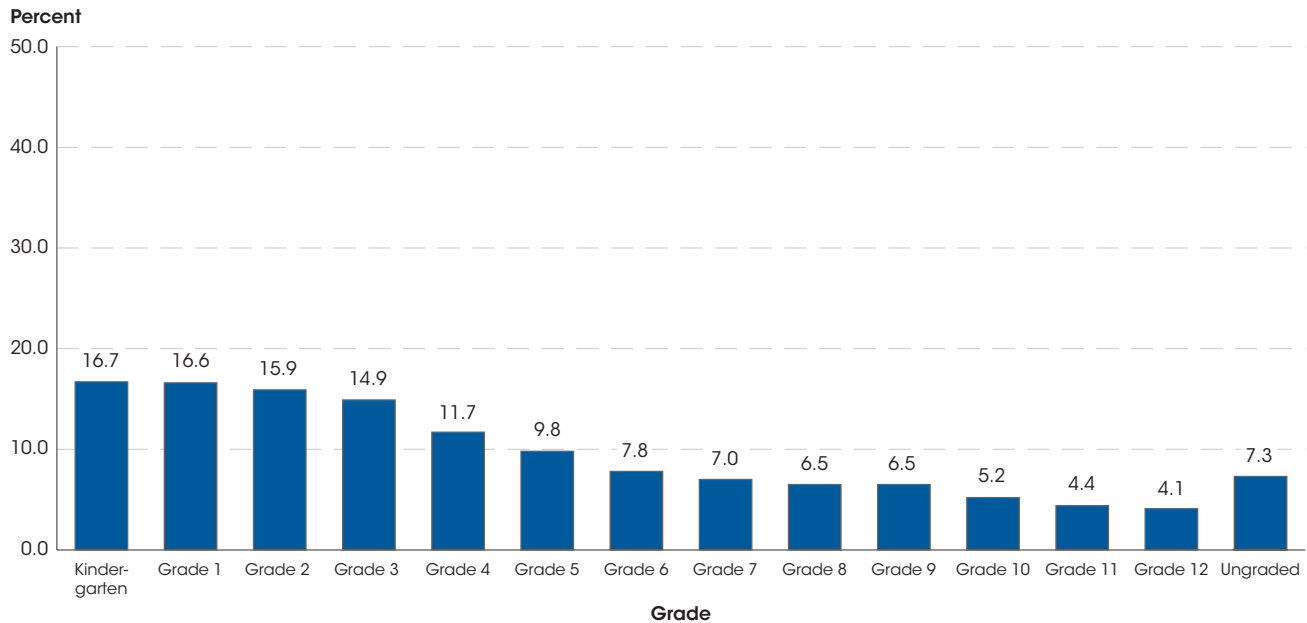
¹² Located outside any urbanized area or urban cluster, more than 25 miles from an urbanized area, and more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

NOTE: Locale codes assigned to school districts are based on the locale code of their schools, weighted by the size of the schools' membership.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Local Education Agency Universe Survey," 2014–15. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 214.40.

In 2014–15, the percentage of students who were ELLs was generally higher for school districts in more urbanized areas, such as cities and suburbs, than for those in less urbanized areas. For example, ELL students in cities made up an average of 14.2 percent of total public school enrollment, ranging from 10.3 percent in small cities to 16.8 percent in large cities. In suburban areas, ELL students constituted an average of 8.9 percent of public school enrollment, ranging from 6.2 percent in midsize suburban areas to 9.2 percent in large suburban areas.

Towns and rural areas are subdivided according to their proximity to urban centers into the categories fringe, distant, and remote, with fringe being the closest to an urban center and remote being the farthest from one. In towns, ELL students made up an average of 6.2 percent of public school enrollment, ranging from 5.9 percent in distant areas to 6.9 percent in remote areas. In rural areas, ELL students constituted an average of 3.5 percent of public student enrollment, ranging from 2.2 percent in distant areas to 4.6 percent in fringe areas.

Figure 3. Percentage of public K–12 students identified as English language learners, by grade level: School year 2014–15

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, ED*Facts* file 141, Data Group 678, extracted August 24, 2016; Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 2014–15. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.27.

In 2014–15, a greater percentage of public school students in lower grades than in upper grades were ELL students.³ For example, 16.7 percent of kindergarteners were ELL students, compared to 7.8 percent of 6th-graders and 6.5 percent of 8th-graders. Among 12th-graders, only

4.1 percent of students were ELL students. This pattern is driven, in part, by students who are identified as ELLs when they enter elementary school but obtain English language proficiency before reaching upper grades.⁴

Table 1. Eleven most commonly reported home languages of English language learner (ELL) students: School year 2014–15

Home language	Number of ELL students	Percentage distribution of ELL students ¹	Number of ELL students as a percentage of total enrollment
Spanish, Castilian	3,709,828	77.1	7.6
Arabic	109,165	2.3	0.2
Chinese	104,279	2.2	0.2
Vietnamese	85,289	1.8	0.2
English ²	83,230	1.7	0.2
Hmong	37,412	0.8	0.1
Somali	33,712	0.7	0.1
Russian	32,493	0.7	0.1
Haitian, Haitian Creole	31,428	0.7	0.1
Tagalog	28,547	0.6	0.1
Korean	28,530	0.6	0.1

¹ Details do not sum to 100 percent because not all 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.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, ED*Facts* file 141, Data Group 678, extracted August 24, 2016; Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 2014–15. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.27.

Spanish was the home language of 3.7 million ELL students in 2014–15, representing 77.1 percent of all ELL students and 7.6 percent of all public K–12 students. Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese were the next most common home languages (spoken by approximately 109,000, 104,000, and 85,300 students, respectively).

English was the fifth most commonly reported home language for ELL students (83,200 students), which may reflect students who live in multilingual households or students adopted from other countries who had been raised speaking another language but currently live in households where English is spoken. Hmong

(37,400 students), Somali (33,700 students), Russian (32,500 students), Haitian (31,400 students), Tagalog (28,500 students), and Korean (28,500 students) were the next most commonly reported home languages of ELL students in 2014–15. The 30 most commonly reported home languages also include several whose prevalence has increased rapidly in recent years. For example, the number of ELLs who reported that their home language was a Karen language⁵ or Nepali more than quadrupled between 2008–09 and 2014–15 (from 3,000 to 12,600 students for Karen languages and from 3,200 to 14,400 students for Nepali).

In 2014–15, there were about 3.7 million Hispanic ELL students, and Hispanic students made up over three-quarters (77.8 percent) of ELL student enrollment. Asian students were the next largest racial/ethnic group

among ELLs, with 517,000 students (10.7 percent of ELL students). In addition, there were 283,000 White ELL students (5.9 percent of ELL students) and 172,000 Black ELL students (3.6 percent of ELL 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 50,000 students were identified as ELLs.

Newly released figures from the U.S. Department of Education's *EDFacts* data collection shed light on the population of ELLs who are also students with disabilities. In 2014–15, some 665,000 ELL students were also identified as students with disabilities.⁶ ELL students with disabilities represented 13.8 percent of the total ELL population enrolled in U.S. public elementary and secondary schools.

Endnotes:

¹ Ross, T., Kena, G., Rathbun, A., KewalRamani, A., Zhang, J., Kristapovich, P., and Manning, E. (2012). *Higher Education: Gaps in Access and Persistence Study* (NCES 2012-046). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved May 3, 2017, from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2012046>.

² In this indicator, data on the total number of ELLs enrolled in public schools include ELLs enrolled on October 1, excluding ELL students who did not participate in ELL programs. Data do not include students who were formerly identified as ELLs but later obtained English language proficiency.

³ Data on the characteristics (grade level, home language, race/ethnicity, and disability status) of ELL students enrolled in public schools include ELLs enrolled at any point during the school year,

regardless of ELL program participation. Data do not include students who were formerly identified as ELLs but later obtained English language proficiency.

⁴ 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 May 3, 2017, from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0162373712461849>.

⁵ Includes several languages spoken by the Karen ethnic groups of Burma and by individuals of Karen descent in the United States.

⁶ Includes only students with disabilities who were served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, tables 204.20, 204.27, and 214.40

Related indicators and resources: Elementary and Secondary Enrollment, Children and Youth With Disabilities, Reading Performance, Mathematics Performance, Science Performance, Technology and Engineering Literacy, *Programs and Services for High School English Learners in Public School Districts*

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