

English Learner Educational Experiences and Opportunities: A Report Using Federal Datasets

Prepared for

U.S. Department of Education
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National Clearinghouse for English Language
Acquisition

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January 2024

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Federal Acronyms in this Report

- **Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC):** The CRDC is a mandatory, generally biennial (that is, every other school year) survey of public schools required by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights since 1968. The CRDC collects data on leading civil rights indicators related to access and barriers to educational opportunity from the early childhood to grade 12 levels.
- **Common Core of Data (CCD):** The CCD is the U.S. Department of Education’s primary database on public elementary and secondary education in the United States. The CCD is a comprehensive, annual, national database of all public elementary and secondary schools and school districts.
- **Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA):** The ESEA is the federal law that authorizes various programs, including Title I and Title III. The purpose of Title I is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education and to close educational achievement gaps. One purpose of Title III is to improve the education of English learner students by helping them learn English and meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards. The program also provides enhanced instructional opportunities for immigrant children and youth.
- **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):** Signed into law in December 2015, this act reauthorizes the ESEA.
- **Local educational agency (LEA):** Under section 8101(30) of the ESEA, an LEA is defined, in part, as “a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a state for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a state, or for a combination of school districts or counties that is recognized in a state as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools.”
- **National Center for Education Statistics (NCES):** NCES is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education in the United States and other nations. NCES is located within the Institute of Education Sciences, the independent statistics, research, and evaluation arm of the U.S. Department of Education. NCES fulfills a congressional mandate to collect, collate, analyze, and report complete statistics on the condition of American education; conduct and publish reports; and review and report on education activities internationally.
- **National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA):** Authorized under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended, NCELA collects, coordinates, and conveys a broad range of research and resources in support of an inclusive approach to high-quality education for English learners.
- **Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA):** The U.S. Department of Education’s OELA provides national leadership to help ensure that English learners and immigrant students attain English proficiency and achieve academically.
- **State educational agency (SEA):** As defined in the ESEA, an SEA is the agency primarily responsible for the state supervision of public elementary schools and secondary schools.

Chapter 1: Introduction

About This Report

The mission of the U.S. Department of Education’s (the Department) Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) is to provide national leadership to help ensure that English learners¹ (ELs) and immigrant students attain English proficiency and achieve academic success. OELA also has a stated commitment to preserving heritage languages and cultures and promoting opportunities for biliteracy or multiliteracy skills for all students. One way that OELA accomplishes these goals is by disseminating information about education research, practices, and policies for ELs through the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA).

This report represents one such dissemination effort. Its purpose is to provide information about the educational experiences and opportunities of public school EL students in the United States as compared to public school students overall during the 2017–18 school year (SY) based on analyses of two, large, federal datasets: the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) and the Common Core of Data (CCD). By providing stakeholders with information about EL experiences based on federal data collections, OELA seeks to accomplish two things:

- Highlight available datasets relevant to ELs and model how these data might be used; and
- Provide insights about EL opportunities and experiences that stakeholders may leverage to further their understanding of EL education.

Additional contextual information about this report, including its purpose, audience, organization, and contents, is provided in the remainder of this introduction.

This report provides a series of snapshots about the education experiences and opportunities of **EL students in U.S. elementary and secondary public schools** (see Box 1.4) as compared to students overall (i.e., general education as well as EL students) during SY 2017–18.

There is no standard experience of being an EL in the United States; rather, EL students experience a variety of education environments depending on such factors as where (in what states and districts) they attend school, what kinds of programs their schools offer, personal characteristics, and what

Box 1.1: Context for This Report

Because this report is focused on student access and learning opportunities, the CRDC is a critical data source for the findings that follow. Throughout the period when this report was prepared and reviewed (2021–23), the most recent CRDC data available was from SY 2017–18. For that reason, this report focuses on SY 2017–18. Although the CRDC data are not current, readers should be aware that the findings here are consistent with other years of data prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. **None of the trends or observations described in this report are unique to SY 2017–18, nor do they represent substantial shifts or discrepancies relative to other pre-pandemic years.**

¹ As defined in *ESEA* section 8101(20).

language they speak or what level of English proficiency they have when beginning school. To illustrate these diverse experiences, this report presents information about the range of resources, opportunities, and characteristics observed among EL students and students overall in a variety of contexts. It is designed to add dimension and depth to the accountability and achievement information that OELA must report to Congress every other year by law (see Box 1.6). The report accomplishes this goal in several ways.

- This report **focuses on the learning opportunities and environments** in which EL students were educated in public schools. For example, Chapter 5 focuses on the availability of various types of rigorous course offerings to which EL students had access, and Chapter 4 reports on the numbers, types, and certifications of adults who staffed the schools attended by EL students.
- While there is value in summarizing information about ELs at the state educational agency (SEA) level (e.g., “ELs in Oregon” or “ELs in Georgia”), there is also considerable variation *within* states in terms of where EL students attended school, what those schools looked like, and how those schools performed. There may also be similarities among districts in different states based on other characteristics, such as urbanicity or the types of language instruction educational programs (LIEP) offered for EL students. This report **adds depth to state-level reporting by using data that are reported at the local educational agency (LEA) and school levels**.
- Although the report does report median or middle values for some data points, it also seeks to **show the full breadth of values or experiences within the population**. The majority of data points in this report show complete distributions from the available data and include multiple callout boxes to highlight different points within that distribution. The goal of this approach is to give a better sense of the diversity of experiences within the EL student population.
- Throughout this report, information about ELs’ learning opportunities is provided alongside information about the general population. The purpose of this juxtaposition is to **provide context for whether ELs received the same or similar opportunities as other students in their public schools and LEAs**.

This is not a research report. All data reported here are descriptive information based on rank-ordered data from publicly available datasets. No statistical tests were performed to produce the information reported here, nor were any models built to predict outcomes or relationships among variables. Among other things, this means that any observed differences between EL students and students overall should not be interpreted as statistically significant. These differences also should not be interpreted as the cause or the source of any achievement differences that may be observed between ELs and other students. In addition, it is important to note that states report data differently and that different federal collections are collected at different times, for different purposes, and from different populations.

Similarly, this report is not designed to provide recommendations about best or effective practices to educate EL students. Various offices within the Department, including OELA, create and provide resources for this purpose (e.g., What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guides or

NCELA Teacher Resources²), and this report may include references to such resources when they pertain to the descriptive information being presented. Ultimately, this report is descriptive and designed only to provide information and build awareness. As noted above, this report is also based on a single year of data (SY 2017–18), though there is no evidence that the data from that year are markedly different from other pre-pandemic years. In short, **critical thinking and reader discretion are advised when considering the findings in this report.**

Audience

This report is intended for anyone interested in learning more about the educational opportunities and environments of EL students in the United States. It is written to be accessible to readers without special training or expertise in data analysis or federal policy. This report may be of particular interest to individuals in schools and LEAs with decision-making power over resource use, program design, and staffing. It may also be useful for individuals who manage or have access to local data systems.

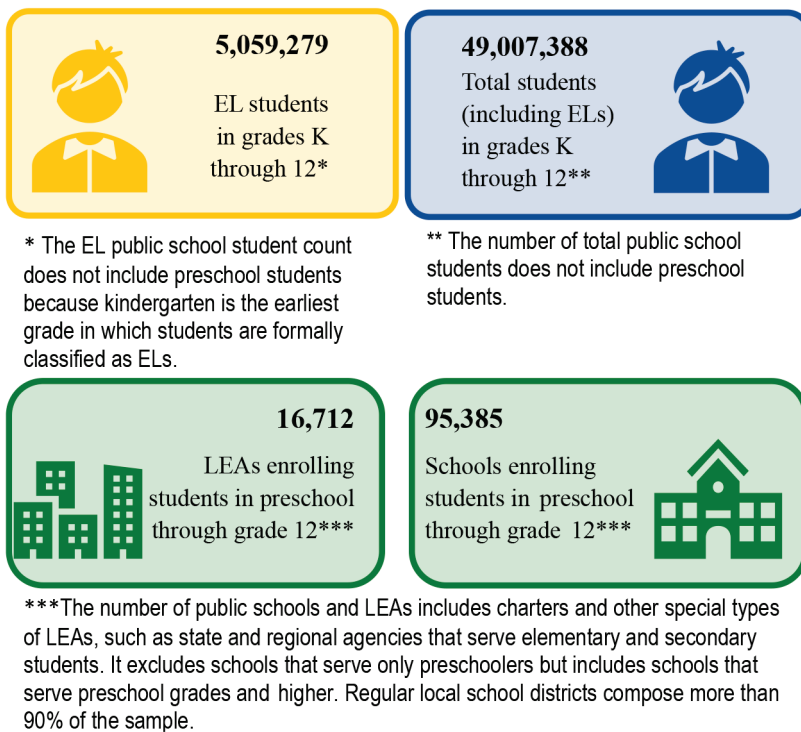
Uses

As noted above, this report is designed to provide descriptive information from a single school year to interested stakeholders. While it does not intend to elicit any specific action or response, it may be productive for readers to engage in the reflection questions in Box 1.3.

As the reflection questions suggest, readers also may find it useful to look up information about their school system so that they may compare it to the information provided in this report. As the

Box 1.2: About the Data Used in This Report

The data in this report are from the 2017–18 school year, and represent the following:



All numbers are based on a dataset merging CCD and CRDC data. More information about the dataset for this report is available in Appendix A.

² NCELA Teacher Resources can be accessed at <https://ncela.ed.gov/teacher-resources>.

next section will discuss, the report was built using publicly available datasets that have websites where users may find information about any LEA or school. More information about these datasets, their purpose, and how they may be accessed is provided in Appendix A.

Box 1.3: Reflection Questions

- Where does my school system fall in the distributions or summaries provided in this report?
- To what extent do the opportunities and experiences of ELs in my school system resemble those of students overall?
- To what extent do I have access to the information I need to know where my school system falls in these distributions for EL students and students overall?
- With whom should I connect in my school system if I want to learn more about the educational opportunities and experiences of ELs or discuss opportunities for change and growth?
- What other stakeholders in my school system might be interested either in this report or in the conversations that are sparked by it?

Presentation of Data Points

This report summarizes information about the characteristics of EL students' schools and LEAs. Data points in subsequent chapters summarize LEA-level information for schools and LEAs attended by ELs and by students overall across the country regarding such factors as

- EL students as a percentage of total enrollment,
- the number of different kinds of educators and professional staff,
- the urbanicity of where LEAs and schools are located, and
- the types of advanced courses offered.

There is a range of values for each of these data points—some students attended schools with large numbers of EL students, and others attended schools with very small EL enrollments. Some students attended schools in rural settings, and some students attended schools in urban settings.

Box 1.4: English Learner Students and Students Overall

For additional context, all data points in this report present information for both EL students and students overall.

EL students are only those students classified as ELs during SY 2017–18. Distributions for EL students are based on schools that have at least one EL student enrolled.

Students overall are all K–12 students in SY 2017–18, including ELs. Because ELs made up approximately 10% of the K–12 population, the majority of students in this second distribution were not ELs. Distributions for students overall include all matched schools in the dataset that are applicable for a given data point.

As noted above (see “Uses”), any observed differences between EL students and students overall should not be interpreted as statistically significant. They also are not causal (i.e., any differences are not necessarily attributable to EL status).

Information with a wide range of values, such as the data points above, is often summarized using average values (arithmetic means). Averages take into account the full range of information available, but they ultimately reduce that range to a single value. Averages also may not accurately represent the experiences of many or even any individuals within a distribution. For example, if many EL students attend schools with fewer than 10 other ELs, and if a few EL students attend schools with hundreds of other ELs, the average number of ELs per school might land somewhere between these extremes (e.g., 75 students), which does not accurately represent the experience of either group.

Averages can be particularly unhelpful when the range of possible values is very unevenly distributed—for example, when some values are much higher or lower than most other values or when students or schools tend to be clumped in only a few places on the distribution.

In this report, rather than calculating average values, we present visualizations of the full **distribution** of values. Most of these **distributions** are created by rank-ordering all schools on a variable of interest (e.g., EL population size, number of teachers in their first year of teaching) and then showing what percentage of students (EL students or students overall) attend schools that are at or below each value in the rank order. For more information on how these distributions are created and how to read them, please see Box 1.5.

Box 1.5: The Distributions in This Report

What is a distribution?

In simplest terms, a distribution is a collection of values for a given variable arranged from smallest to largest. Two common types of distributions are frequency distributions and cumulative frequency distributions.

- A **frequency distribution** shows how many times each value was observed. For example, it might show how many students earned a test score of 300.
- A **cumulative frequency distribution** shows a running sum or percentage of all observed values. For example, it might show how many students earned a test score at or below 300.

This report mostly shows **cumulative frequency distributions** using student percentages.

What can a distribution tell me?

A distribution can show several important things about the variable whose values it contains.

- Both frequency and cumulative distributions can show **the minimum and maximum observed values** for the variable (e.g., the lowest and highest test scores).
- Frequency distributions can show **commonly occurring values** in the group. Values that are observed more often in the group get stacked on top of one another in the display and will create humps, or rises, in the distribution. Thus, humps in the distribution show where there are more students.
- Cumulative distributions can show how many students are **at or below a certain value**.

How are the distributions in this report created?

The federal datasets on which this report is based do not report student-level information for all ELs in the country. Thus, to create cumulative distributions, we used the information about how many ELs were enrolled in each school and district in the dataset. By cumulatively adding the EL populations in schools or districts that had been rank-ordered, we created a student-level distribution that shows how many students were at each rank in the distribution.

What about variables that cannot be lined up to create distributions?

Some variables, such as race or urbanicity, do not have numerical values and cannot be lined up to create a distribution. For variables such as these, we instead calculated the proportion of EL students and students overall in each category and lined up those values.

Exhibit 1.1a. Schools in the Report Dataset at the Lowest Percentile for Student Enrollment: School Year 2017–18

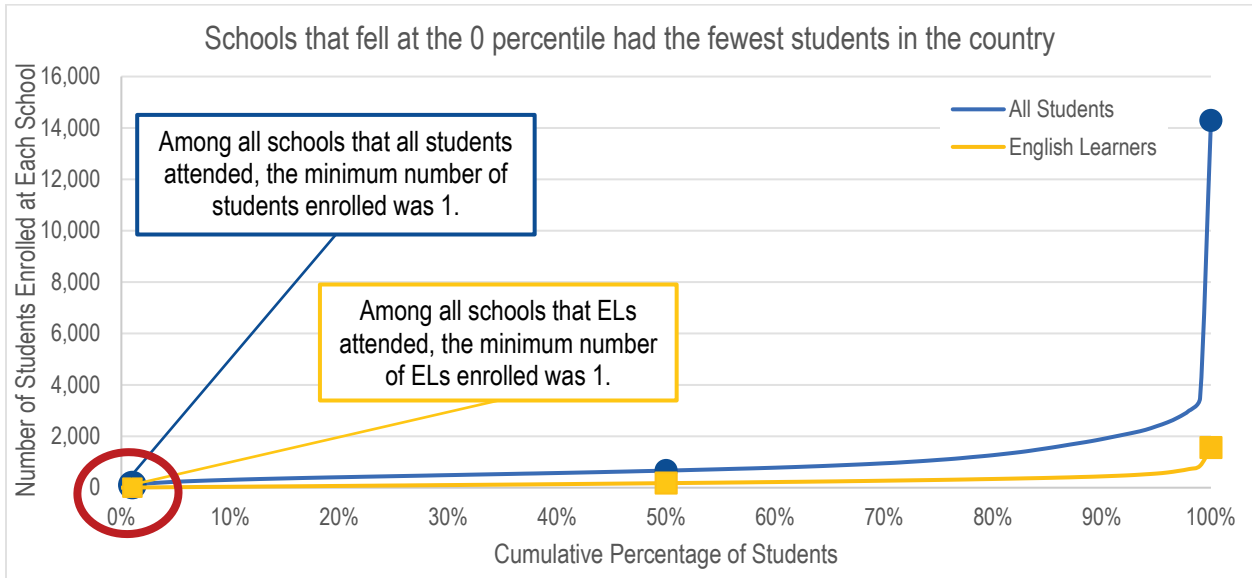
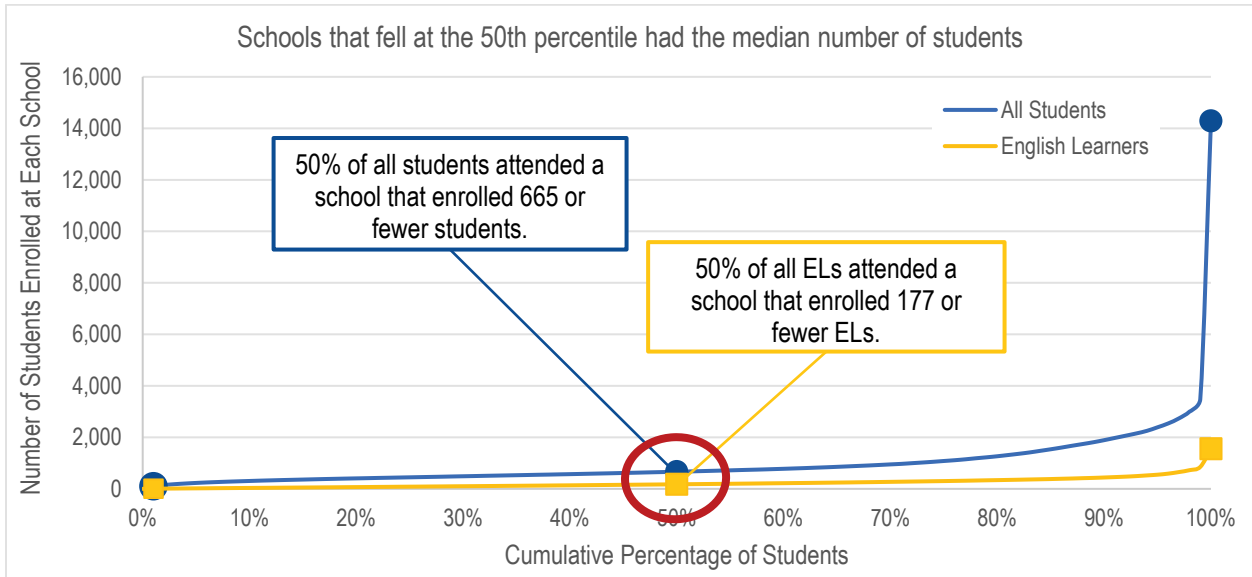
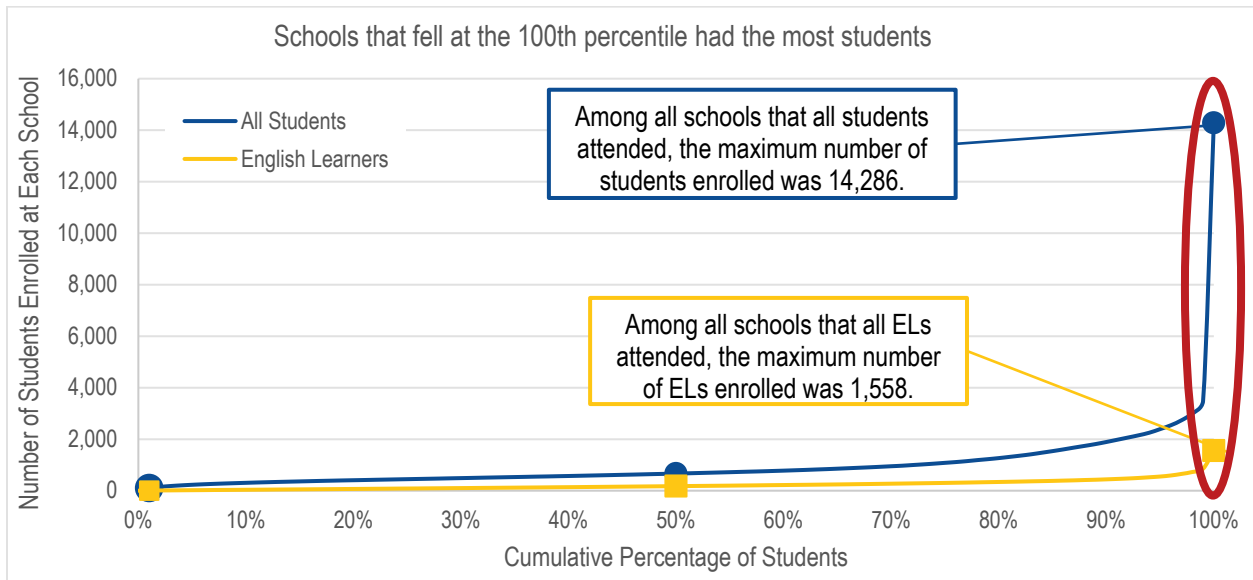


Exhibit 1.1b. Schools in the Report Dataset at the 50th Percentile for Student Enrollment: School Year 2017–18



**Exhibit 1.1c. Schools in the Report Dataset at the 100th Percentile for Student Enrollment:
School Year 2017–18**



**Exhibit 1.2a. Local Educational Agencies in the Report Dataset at the Lowest Percentile for
Student Enrollment: School Year 2017–18**

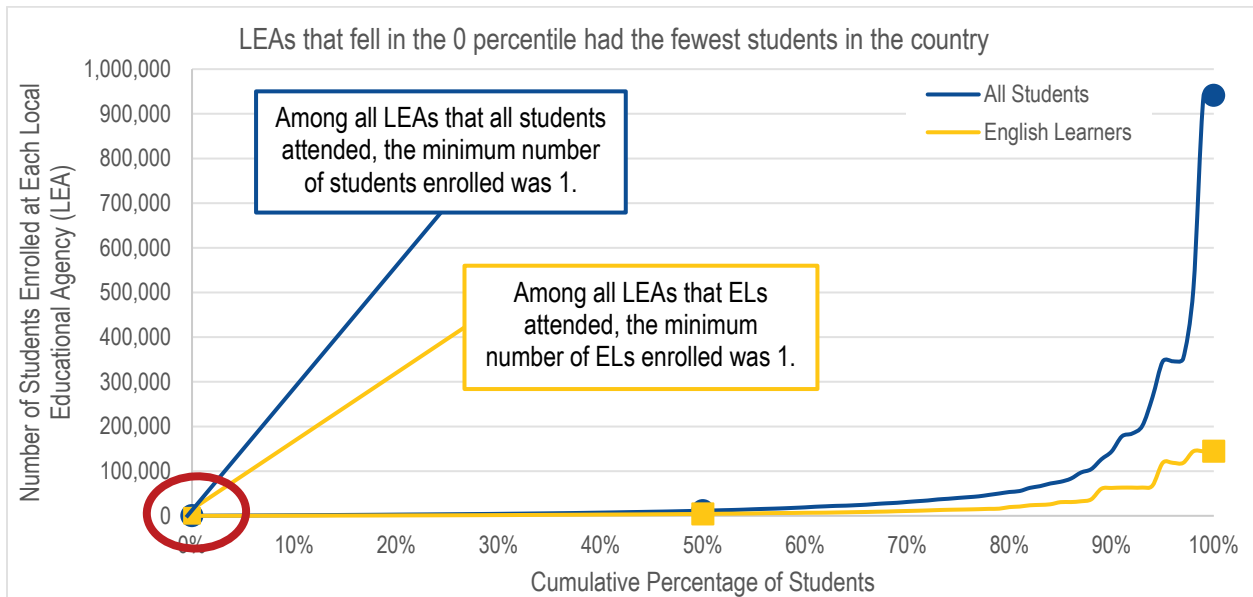


Exhibit 1.2b. Local Educational Agencies in the Report Dataset at the 50th Percentile for Student Enrollment: School Year 2017–18

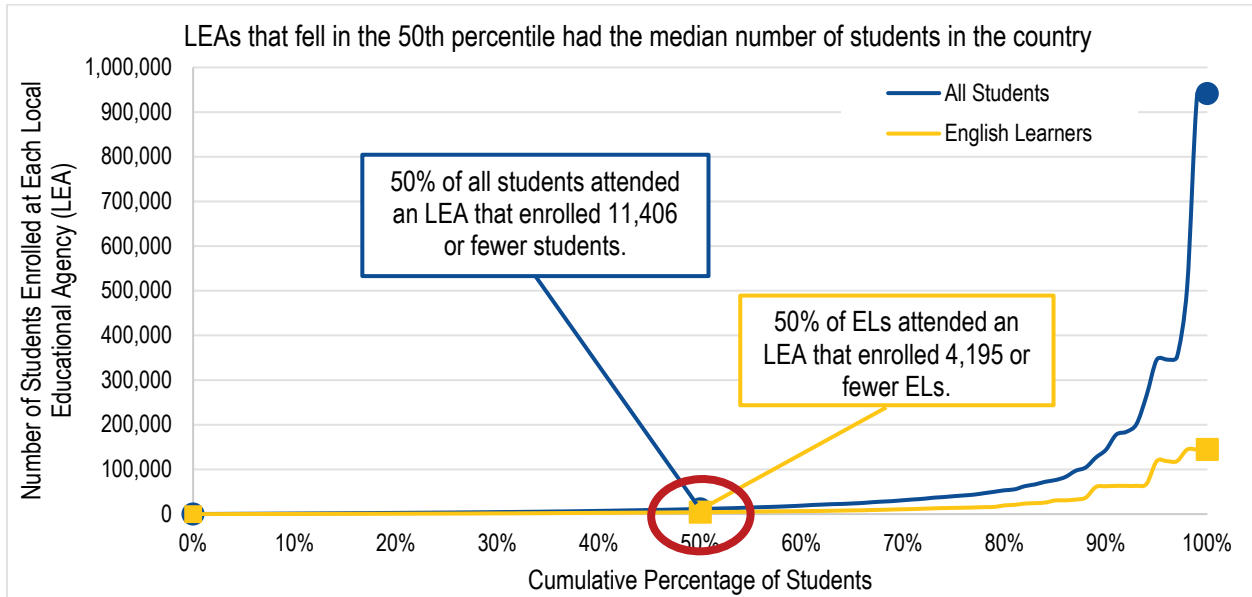
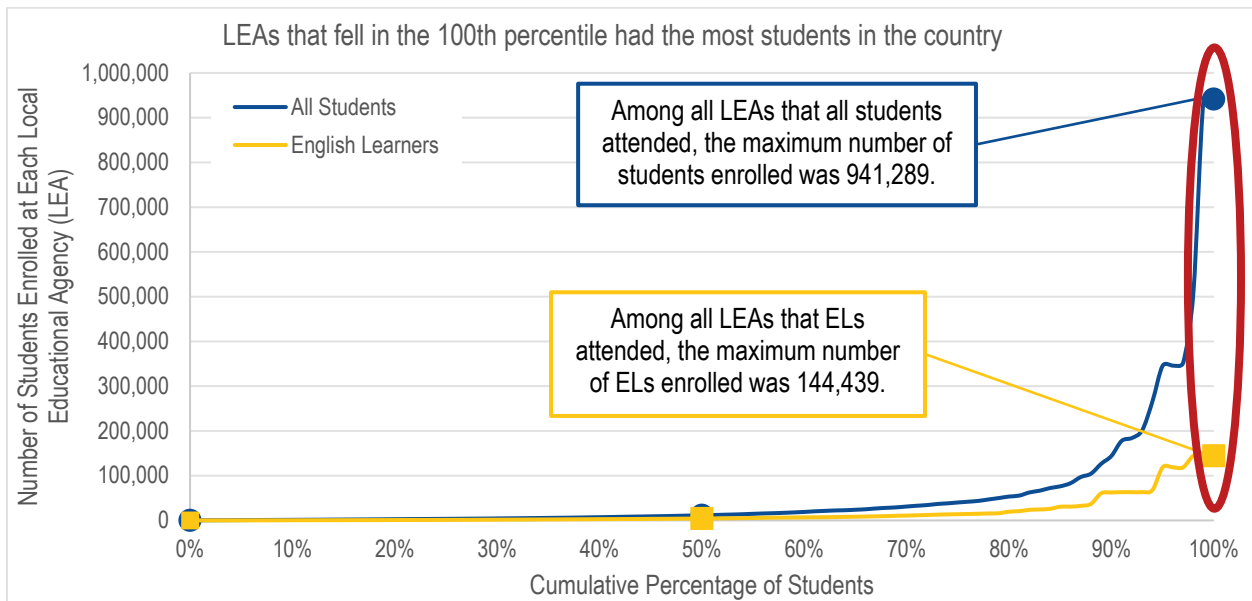


Exhibit 1.2c. Local Educational Agencies in the Report Dataset at the 100th Percentile for Student Enrollment: School Year 2017–18



Report Structure and Content

The remainder of this report is organized into four chapters. Each chapter focuses on a specific topic and includes relevant data points. These chapters are designed to mirror certain chapters in the OELA report, *The*

Biennial Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Title III State Formula Grant Program, so that the information from both reports can be considered together by interested parties. (More information about the *Biennial Report* is provided in Box 1.6.) **Given that the data in this report are from SY 2017–18, the most appropriate *Biennial Report* to consider alongside this report is the 2016–18 report.**

The chapter titles for the remainder of this report are as follows:

- Chapter 2: Funding and Support Activities for English Learners
- Chapter 3: The English Learner Population
- Chapter 4: English Learners' Access to Educators and Other Support Staff
- Chapter 5: Academic Access and Opportunity

Each chapter begins with a brief introduction to the topic, including research-based evidence and relevant policy information. The bulk of the chapter consists of data points on the topic reported for the EL students and students overall in the dataset. A data point might consist, for example, of the range of first-year teachers employed in the schools attended by EL students and by students overall. Each data point is represented visually and accompanied by a brief explanation of its meaning, including the definitions for any important terms or concepts. Throughout the chapters, readers are referred to other resources that may be relevant to the data points being presented. For example, data points about the number of high-level science courses offered in the school attended by a typical EL student might be accompanied by links to an NCELA brief on evidence-based teaching practices for ELs in science or to a report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine on ELs in STEM subjects.

Box 1.6: The Biennial Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Title III State Formula Grant Program

As mandated in the ESEA, OELA prepares a biennial report for Congress to summarize specific information about student service and achievement under the Title III State Formula Grant Program. The reports use data from *EDFacts* and Consolidated State Performance Reports (CSPRs) to provide a snapshot of efforts by the Department to hold states accountable for ensuring that all ELs attain English language proficiency and are achieving in the content areas of mathematics, reading/language arts, and science at the same high levels set by the states for all students. Each biennial report uses states' self-reported data about EL students, and its primary audience is members of Congress.

All biennial reports are publicly available via the NCELA website:
<https://ncela.ed.gov/biennial-reports-on-title-iii-state-formula-grants>

Chapter 2: Funding and Support Activities for English Learners

This chapter includes information on LEA-level financial information related to ELs' education.

Funding Context for English Learners

Research evidence shows there is a positive relationship between funding (specifically, aggregate per-pupil spending) and student achievement.³ In other words, students in schools with more funding tend to do better on measures of academic achievement. The magnitude of this relationship varies across settings, across student groups (e.g., the relationship between funding and achievement is often stronger for students from less well-resourced backgrounds), and across specific uses (e.g., there may be more and less impactful ways to spend additional funds). Overall, there is a clear relationship between the resources and funding in a school and the achievement of students in that school.⁴

A robust evidence base also indicates that providing ELs with an appropriate education requires more funding than standard per-pupil costs.⁴ However, recommendations for exactly how much that additional funding should be vary considerably and are implemented with great variation across states. No consensus exists on either the appropriate methodology for setting an adequate per-pupil funding level for ELs or the definition of an adequate education for an EL student.⁵ Accordingly, even when funding or

Box 2.1: What is in the *Biennial Report*?

Chapter 2 of the 2016–18 *Biennial Report* provides summary information about federal Title III funding and expenditures for the 2016–17 and 2017–18 school years. The chapter reports the size of each SEA's Title III grant for SYs 2016–17 and 2017–18, as well as the top 25% of states whose grants increased or decreased the most in each year compared to the one before. At the LEA level, the report provides the percentage of LEAs that reported using their Title III subgrants for different sanctioned activities, such as increasing parent, family, and community engagement. Data for this chapter come from ED*Facts*, CSPRs, and Department budget tables showing state allocations for formula and student aid programs.

All biennial reports are publicly available on the NCELA website: <https://ncela.ed.gov/biennial-reports-on-title-iii-state-formula-grants>

³ Baker, B. D. (2017). *How money matters for schools*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/how-money-matters-report>.

⁴ Cortez, A., & Villarreal, A. (2009). *Education of English language learners in U.S. and Texas schools: Where we are, what we have learned and where we need to go from here. A 2009 update*. Intercultural Development Research Association. http://www.idra.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/IDRA_ELL_Policy_Update_2009.pdf; Gándara, P., & Rumberger, R. W. (2008). Defining an adequate education for English learners. *Education Finance and Policy*, 3(1), 130–148. <https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp.2008.3.1.130>; Jimenez-Castellanos, O., & Topper, A. M. (2012). The cost of providing an adequate education to English language learners: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 82(2), 179–232. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654312449872>

⁵ Jimenez-Castellanos, O., & Topper, A. M. (2012). The cost of providing an adequate education to English language learners: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 82(2), 179–232. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654312449872>

revenue is higher in an LEA attended by an EL, those funds may not go as far and will not necessarily provide an adequate or quality education for the EL as they might for students who are not ELs.

Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), SEAs receive formula grants under Title III to support the education of students classified as ELs. As with all students, however, federal funding provides a relatively small portion of the overall funding that supports their schools. Approximately 92% of funds for elementary and secondary education come from nonfederal sources.⁶

For ELs in particular, Title III funds are also subject to the “supplement, not supplant” requirement. As stated in section 3115(g) of the ESEA:

Federal funds made available under this subpart shall be used so as to supplement the level of federal, State, and local public funds that, in the absence of such availability, would have been expended for programs for English learners and immigrant children and youth and in no case to supplant such federal, State, and local public funds.

As this wording suggests, federal funds provided under Title III are to be used to enhance what SEAs and LEAs are already doing with local funds; federal funds may not be the primary source of funding to support required programs, supports, or activities for ELs’ education. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of funding for EL education requires attention to fiscal information at the state and local levels, as well.

Data Notes for This Chapter

This chapter is based primarily on data from the **School District Finance Survey (F-33)** for SY 2017–18. Each school year, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) administers the F-33 in coordination with the U.S. Census Bureau as part of the CCD. While SEA participation in the F-33 is voluntary, NCES documentation shows that nearly all SEAs contribute information. In SY 2017–18, SEAs provided information for 18,139 LEAs out of a total of 18,715 nationally at the time (96.9%). Using F-33 data, NCES also produces an annual report titled *Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts*, which summarizes national and annual trends in LEA-level funding.⁷

⁶ U.S. Department of Education. (2021). *The federal role in education*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html>
See also National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *Revenues and expenditures for public elementary and secondary school districts: FY 18*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020308.pdf>

⁷ National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *Revenues and expenditures for public elementary and secondary school districts: FY 18*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020308.pdf>

This chapter includes visualizations and information about per-pupil revenue and expenditures for LEAs attended by ELs and students overall using a subset of 16,712 LEAs with data in both the CCD and the CRDC datasets from SY 2017–18 (see Box 1.2). “LEAs attended by EL students” means LEAs that enroll at least one EL student. “LEAs attended by students overall” or “LEAs attended by all students” both mean LEAs that enroll at least one student of any kind.

The chapter also presents information about how funding was distributed across federal, state, and local sources for LEAs attended by ELs and all students. For additional context, the chapter also uses data from the fiscal year (FY) 2018 version of the NCES *Revenues and Expenditures* report referenced above, which covers SY 2017–18. The latter is included to provide additional information from a fuller universe of LEAs in the country than the subset of LEAs that could be matched between the CCD and CRDC.

Important

For this chapter, the sample also includes some preschool students (in addition to K–12 students).⁸ These students were included when they were part of an elementary school in an LEA because revenue and expenditures are based on school- or LEA-level student counts.⁹

This chapter also uses the American Community Survey Comparable Wage Index for Teachers (ACS-CWIFT, or CWIFT).¹⁰ The CWIFT is a geographic cost index designed by NCES to facilitate comparisons of educational finance data across different geographic settings. The CWIFT is designed to address the reality that dollars do not go as far in some parts of the country as in others due to differing economies and associated costs of living. In places where costs of living are high, the purchasing power of a dollar is less than in areas with lower costs of living. As a result, LEAs in high-cost environments must spend more money to provide the same level of services as LEAs in lower-cost environments. The CWIFT describes how much more LEAs must spend, thus allowing a more accurate comparison of purchasing power across geographies. It accomplishes this comparison by calculating a unique value for each LEA that reflects how its teacher salaries—one of the largest costs for most school LEAs—compare to the national average. Thus, LEA-specific CWIFT values can be used to support more direct comparisons.

⁸ A preschool student or nursery school student is defined by NCES as a student enrolled in a group or class that is organized to provide educational experiences for children during the year or years preceding kindergarten. A full definition may be found here: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/technical-documentation/subject-definitions.html#nurseryschool>.

⁹ The base file for these analyses contains 96,679 schools belonging to 16,730 distinct LEAs. Because of data trimming, cleaning, and analytical choices, counts of schools and LEAs that make up each data point will vary. Footnotes associated with each data point below will detail the count (N) of schools and LEAs that make up each data point.

¹⁰ For more detail, see https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/docs/EDGE_ACS_CWIFT_FILEDOC.pdf.

Box 2.2: What Are Revenue and Expenditures?

This chapter reports information about revenues and expenditures at the LEA level. Broadly speaking, **revenue** refers to income (meaning, money in), while **expenditures** refers to expenses (meaning, money out).

Revenue may include:

- local tax income of any kind (e.g., from property taxes or sales taxes),
- school lunch revenue,
- income from rent, royalties, or property sales,
- formula funding from state or federal sources (e.g., federal Title III funding), and
- tuition or other fees paid by families.

Expenditures may include:

- salaries for teachers and other staff,
- costs for instructional services and materials (e.g., curriculum, classroom supplies, software, technology),
- costs for operations (e.g., building utilities, janitorial services, maintenance), and
- costs for other support services (e.g., transportation, food service).

To see the full form that collects information on revenue and expenditures at the LEA level, see Appendix E of this NCES report: https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pdf/2020309_FY18F33_Documentation.pdf

Overarching Question

What did LEA-level revenue and expenditures look like for LEAs attended by ELs and students overall during SY 2017–18?

Data Point 2.1: At the extremes, ELs and students overall attended LEAs with similar revenue in SY 2017–18. Gaps existed between the two groups in the upper middle of the distribution.¹¹

On the F-33, SEAs report the total revenue from federal, state, and local sources for each of its LEAs. NCES then calculates the per-pupil revenue by dividing this total general revenue by the number of students enrolled in the LEA in the fall of the school year reported on.¹² As noted above, the values in this report represent the NCES values after they have been adjusted by the CWIFT to account for geographical differences.

¹¹ There are 92,445 schools and 15,253 distinct LEAs that underlie this data point. To maintain a consistent dataset throughout the report, outlier values were retained as reported publicly (not dropped, excluded, or recalculated) for the full set of matched LEAs described in Chapter 1 of this report. To prevent extreme skewness or bias in summary values, these extreme and outlier values are trimmed for some data points. For this data point, the analysis excludes the top and bottom 1% of district per-pupil revenue values, which both included outlier values (for example, per-pupil revenue of \$600,000). This data point also necessarily excludes LEAs that did not report LEA per-pupil revenue.

¹² Exact CCD variable used is Total Revenue (TOTALREV) per pupil (V33) [District Finance].

Sorted by total LEA per-pupil revenue (local, state, and federal sources), the overall range in adjusted per-pupil revenue in SY 2017–18 was similar for LEAs attended by EL students and students overall. The minimum and maximum values in the dataset were the same in both groups, ranging from a low of \$9,493.31 per student to a high of \$35,088.45 per student.¹³

The median values were also comparable in the two groups: \$13,971.88 for students overall and \$13,456 for EL students. Both of

these values were also comparable to the median LEA in the country as reported by NCES, which had a per-pupil revenue of \$13,914.¹⁴ This means that half of all students in the dataset, as well as half of all EL students, attended school in an LEA whose per-pupil revenue was between approximately \$9,500 and \$13,500, and half attended school in an LEA whose per-pupil revenue was between approximately \$13,500 and \$35,000.

Exhibit 2.1a shows that, despite these similar characteristics, gaps still existed between ELs and all students. The exhibit shows the full distribution of adjusted per-pupil revenue for LEAs attended by EL students (in yellow) and all students (in blue). The gap that is visible between the two lines (from roughly the middle of the distribution, or the 50th percentile, up to about the 95th percentile) reveals that, despite being similar at the two ends of the distributions, students in the middle of the distribution for the two groups did attend LEAs with different levels of revenue, which implies the two groups are attending different LEAs, generally.

Box 2.3: Understanding Medians

What is a median?

In statistics, the **median** is one of several ways to identify the center or middle of a distribution of things. When you rank-order a set of values (say, test scores) from highest to lowest, the median value is the one in the exact center of all the observed values. Half of all values are higher than the median and half are lower.

For example: If the median score on a test is 75, that means half of all test takers earned scores higher than 75 and half earned scores lower than 75.

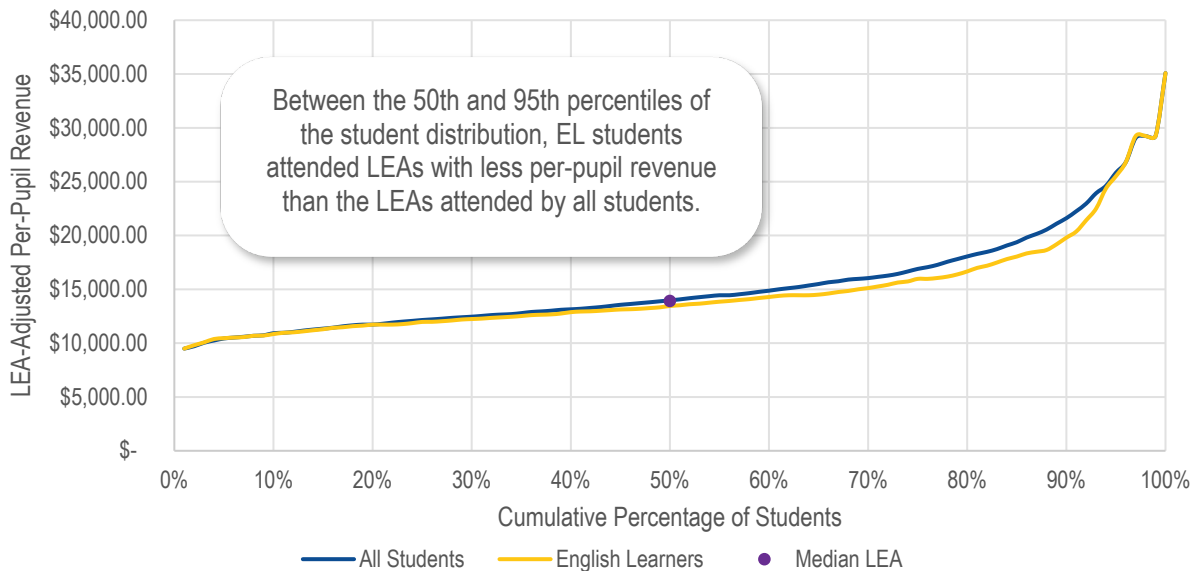
Keep in mind the median value does not say anything about the span or shape of the entire distribution of values. A distribution ranging from 2 to 2,000 and a distribution ranging from 45 to 50 might both have a median value of 48. So, too, might a distribution ranging from 45 to 2,000; distributions do not have to be symmetrical.

In this report, schools or LEAs are ranked to create the data points, but medians are identified at the student level based on the total number of students enrolled across schools or LEAs. This approach is based on the fact that students (and especially EL students) are not distributed evenly across schools or LEAs.

¹³ The identical values for both groups suggest that EL students and students overall attend schools in the same LEAs.

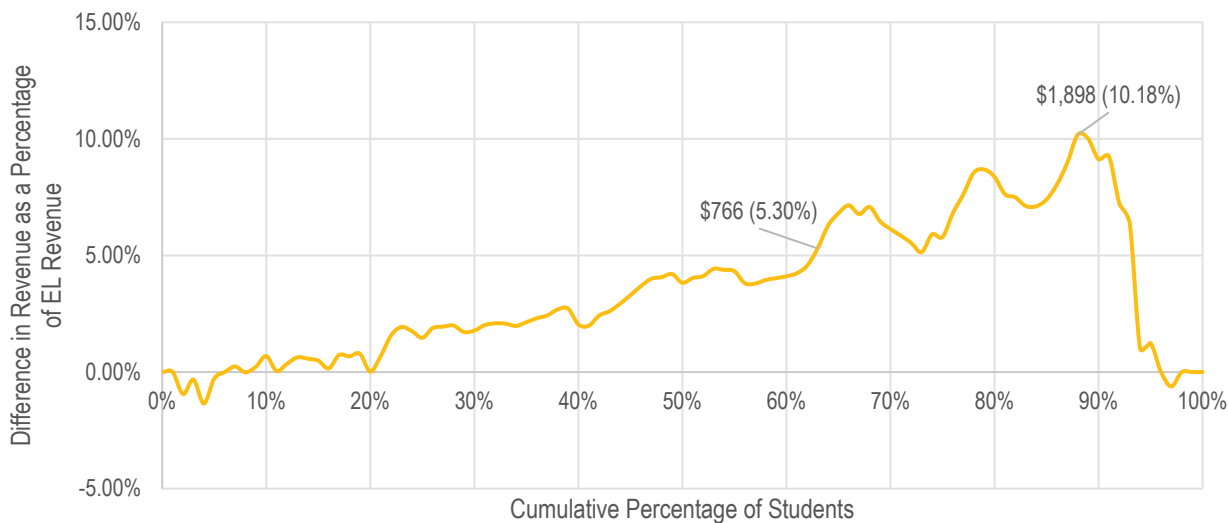
¹⁴ Note that the NCES report does not include decimal places in the values it reports; values are thus reported as is, without adding or imputing decimal places.

Exhibit 2.1a. Adjusted Per-Pupil Revenue for English Learners and the Overall Student Population: School Year 2017–18



The magnitude of these revenue differences is presented in Exhibit 2.1b, which shows the size of the gap as a percentage of the per-pupil revenue for ELs at each point in the distribution. A positive value indicates that the LEAs attended by students overall at that point in the distribution had higher revenue levels, while a negative value indicates that the LEAs attended by EL students at that point in the distribution had higher revenue levels. This exhibit shows that, at the extremes, EL students attended LEAs with slightly higher revenue than the LEAs attended by students overall (illustrated by the fact that the line dips below 0% at the far left and near 100% at the far right). Most of the differences were relatively small in magnitude—defined for this chapter as less than a 5% difference between the EL and overall student revenue—and amounted to less than \$750 per pupil. The gaps were widest between the 60th and 90th percentiles, ranging from 5.3% (about \$766) at the 63rd percentile to a high of 10.18% (about \$1,898) at the 88th percentile.

Exhibit 2.1b. Revenue Differences as a Percentage of the Per-Pupil Revenue Value for English Learners: School Year 2017–18



Context for This Data Point

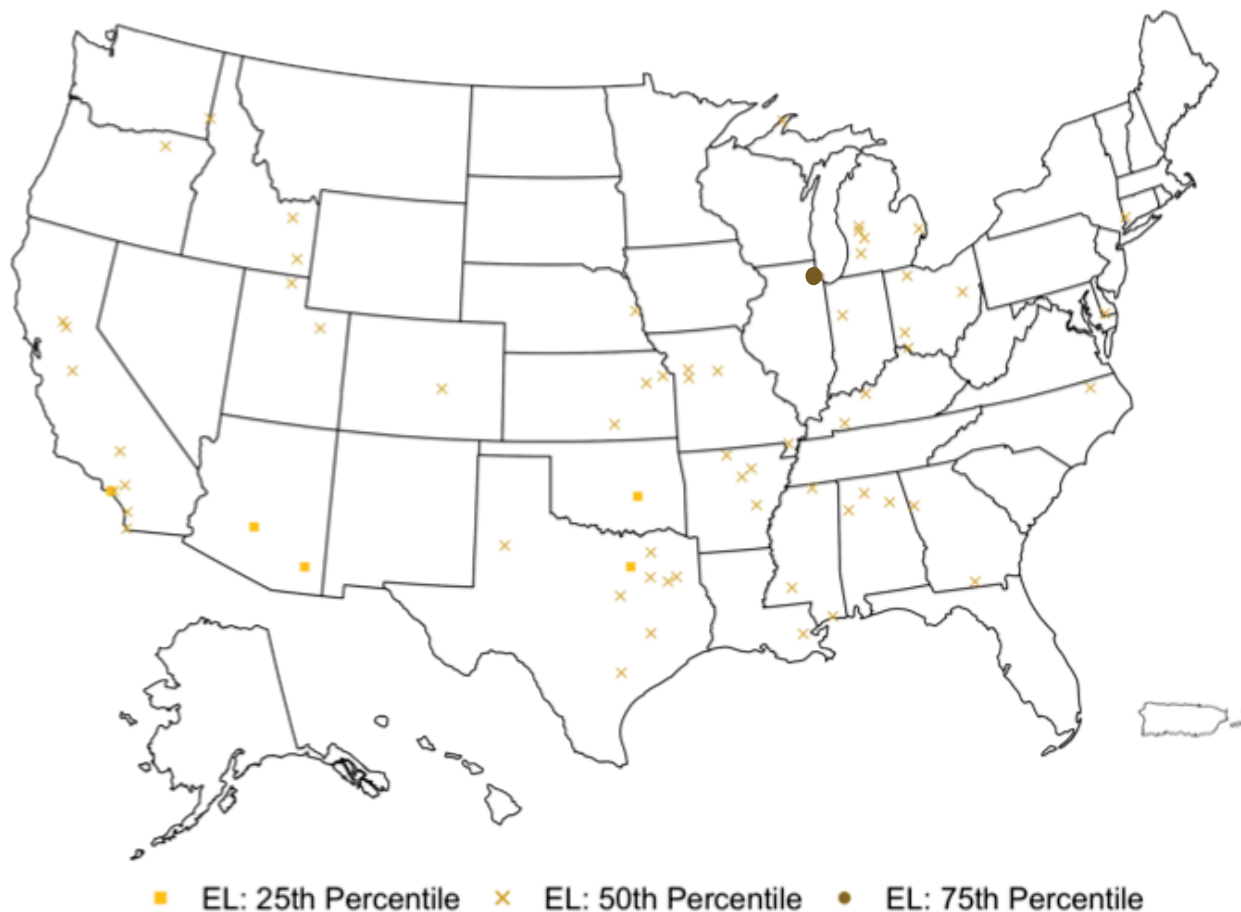
The FY 2018 NCES report on revenue and expenditures for SY 2017–18 found that, nationwide, LEAs reported revenue between \$7,030 and \$34,524 per pupil, with considerable differences across settings.¹⁵ On average, per-pupil revenue was highest in the Northeast and lowest in the South. Also, suburban and rural LEAs had higher revenue on average than did LEAs based in towns and cities. This latter finding may partially explain the group differences observed here, as NCES data reveal that a higher percentage of the EL population than the population overall attended schools in cities while a lower percentage attended schools in suburbs (see Chapter 3: The English Learner Population). Large cities such as New York and Los Angeles—both of which have large EL populations—also tended to have high CWIFT values (i.e., greater than 1), meaning their dollars did not go as far as they would in areas with a lower cost of living.

Exhibits 2.1c and 2.1d show maps of LEAs at the 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles for per-pupil revenue for EL students (Exhibit 2.1c) and for all students (Exhibit 2.1d). For EL students (see Exhibit 2.1c), the map shows a somewhat different geographic distribution compared to the country as a whole. Specifically, LEAs in the middle of the revenue distribution for ELs (represented by “x”s on the map) tended to be clustered toward the middle of the country—including some in the Southeast—while those at the bottom end of the EL revenue distribution were predominately in the West and Southwest (in California, Arizona, Texas, and Oklahoma). Only one LEA (Chicago Public Schools) fell at the 75th percentile of the EL distribution, though

¹⁵ Cortez, A., & Villarreal, A. (2009). *Education of English language learners in U.S. and Texas schools: Where we are, what we have learned and where we need to go from here. A 2009 update*. Intercultural Development Research Association. http://www.idra.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/IDRA_ELL_Policy_Update_2009.pdf; Gándara, P. & Rumberger, R. W. (2008). Defining an adequate education for English learners. *Education Finance and Policy*, 3(1), 130–148. <https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp.2008.3.1.130>; Jimenez-Castellanos, O. & Topper, A. M. (2012). The cost of providing an adequate education to English language learners: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 82(2), 179–232. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654312449872>

this appears to be a random coincidence—the number of LEAs at each percentile tended to increase across the overall revenue distribution.

Exhibit 2.1c. Geographic Locations of Local Educational Agencies Attended by English Learner Students at the 25th, 50th, and 75th Per-Pupil Revenue Percentiles: School Year 2017–18

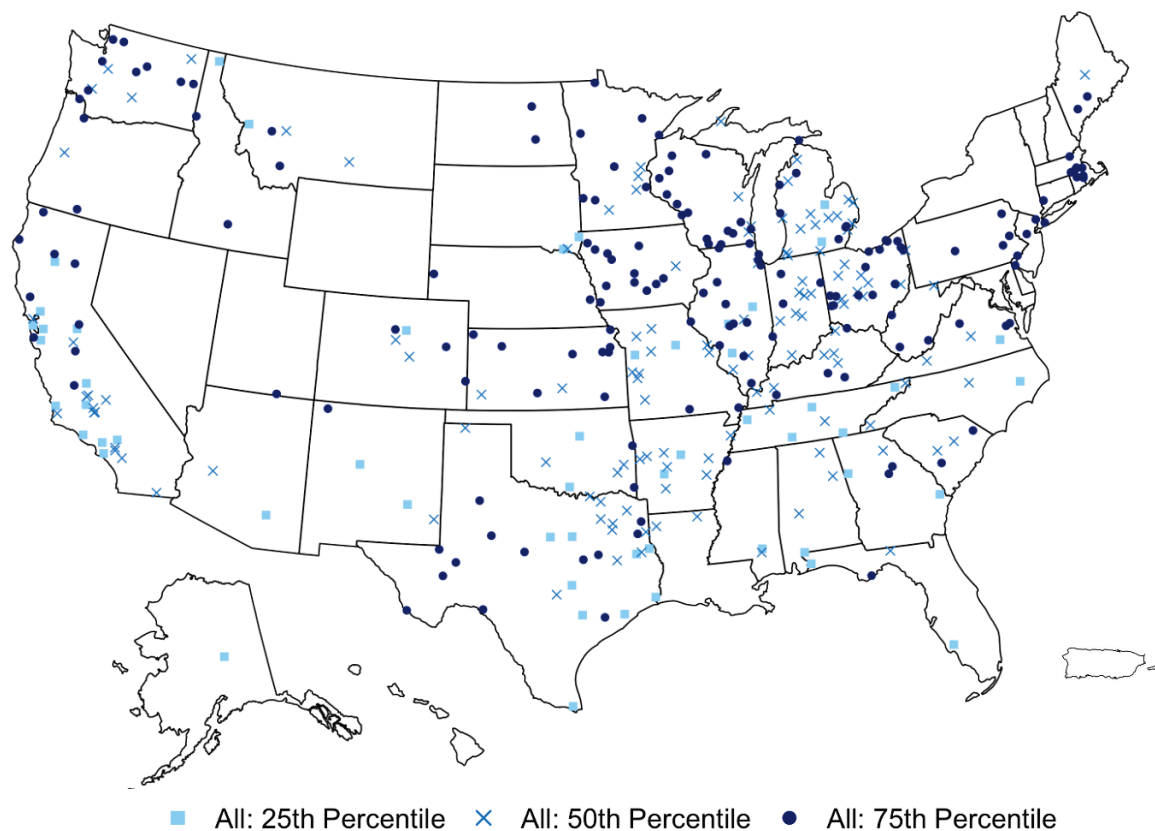


The map for all students (see Exhibit 2.1d) more closely reflects the national trends described above.¹⁶ LEAs at the 75th percentile (shown in dark blue circles) were generally clustered in the Midwest and Northeast,¹⁷ while LEAs at the 25th percentile (shown as light blue squares) were more concentrated in the bottom (i.e., southern) half of the map.

¹⁶ Exact CCD variable used is Total Revenue (TOTALREV) per pupil (V33) [District Finance].

¹⁷ Regional labels and definitions are based on those used in the NCES *Revenues and Expenditures* report referenced elsewhere in this chapter: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020308.pdf>

Exhibit 2.1d. Geographic Locations of Local Educational Agencies Attended by All Students at the 25th, 50th, and 75th Per-Pupil Revenue Percentiles: School Year 2017–18



Data Point 2.2: At the extremes, ELs and students overall attended LEAs with similar expenditures in SY 2017–18.¹⁸ Gaps existed between the two groups in the upper middle of the distribution.

On the F-33, SEAs report expenditures on a variety of instructional and operational items for each of their LEAs (see Box 2.2 for some examples). NCES then calculates the per-pupil expenditures by dividing these expenditure totals by the number of students enrolled in the LEA in the fall of the school year being reported on.¹⁹ As noted above, the values in this report represent the NCES values after they have been adjusted by the CWIFT to account for geographical differences.

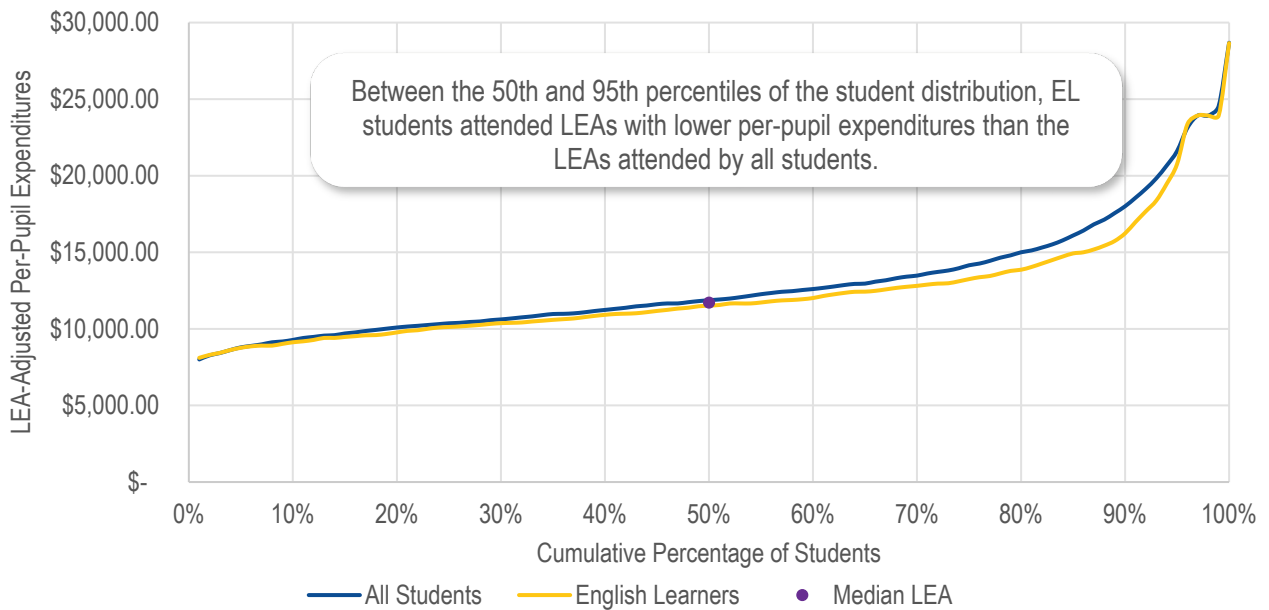
As with revenue, the data for this chapter show that per-pupil expenditures were similar for LEAs attended by EL students and all students at the extremes but that gaps existed in the middle

¹⁸ This analysis excludes the top and bottom 1% of LEA per-pupil expenditure values (see footnote 17 above), as well as LEAs that did not report LEA per-pupil expenditures. There are 91,697 schools and 15,046 distinct LEAs that underlie this data point. Medians throughout this chapter draw from 98% of the LEAs in the country that are included in the full dataset described in Chapter 1 of this report.

¹⁹ Exact CCD variable used is Total Revenue (TOTALREV) per pupil (V33) [District Finance].

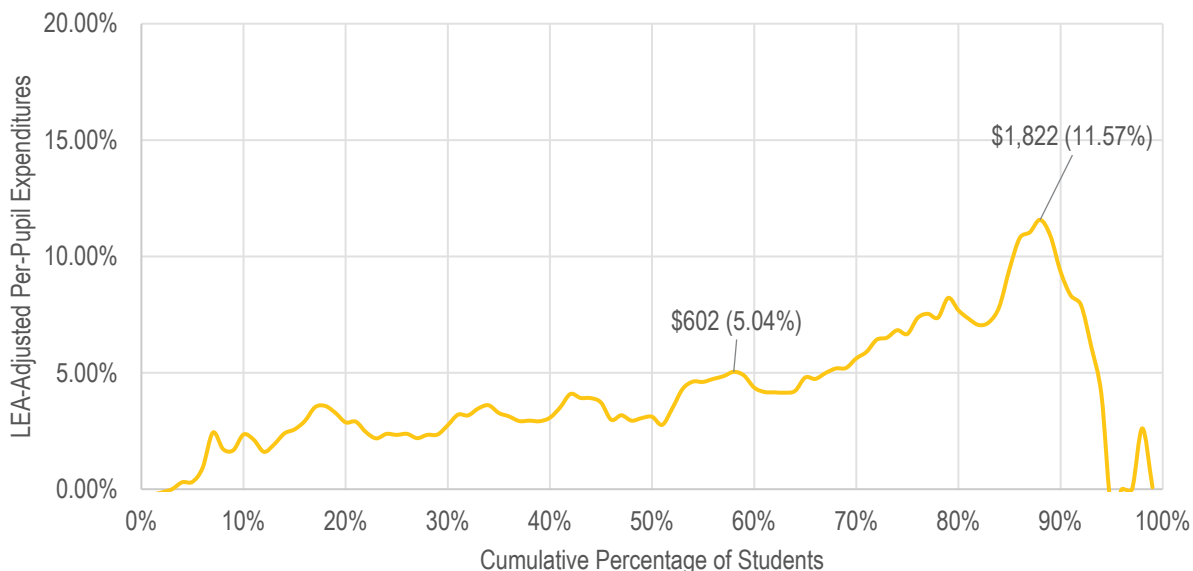
(see Exhibit 2.2a). Sorted by total LEA per-pupil expenditures (all instruction, support, and program costs), EL students attended schools in LEAs with expenditures ranging from a low of \$8,109.16 per student to a high of \$28,661.78 per student. The range was nearly identical for students overall: from a low of \$8,003.82 to a high of \$28,684.67. The median values were also similar for EL students and all students—\$11,518.41 and \$11,870.63, respectively—and for the median LEA in the country (\$11,722). Between the 60th and 90th percentiles, however, a gap is evident between the two populations similar to the gap observed with revenue (see Data Point 2.1).

Exhibit 2.2a. Adjusted Per-Pupil Expenditures for English Learners and the Overall Student Population: School Year 2017–18



The magnitude of these differences is graphed in Exhibit 2.2b using the same approach as for Exhibit 2.2a. Regarding expenditures, a 5% difference represents less money than it did for revenue—approximately \$600 per pupil—and the largest difference was 11.57% (\$1,821.64) at the 89th percentile.

Exhibit 2.2b. Difference in Expenditures as a Percentage of the Per-Pupil Expenditure Value for English Learners: School Year 2017–18



Context for This Data Point

As with revenue, the NCES report about LEA-level expenditures found that average per-pupil expenditures were highest in the Midwest and Northeast and lowest in the South; they were also higher in suburban and rural LEAs than they were in cities and towns. In maps showing the geographic locations of LEAs at various points of the distribution for EL students (see Exhibit 2.2c) and for all students (see Exhibit 2.2d), some of these patterns were borne out more clearly than they were for revenue.

Geographically, higher-spending LEAs were found in states with larger EL populations (e.g., all 10 states with the largest EL populations in fall 2017: California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, Washington, Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, and Colorado), as well as in states in the Northeast (e.g., New Jersey and Massachusetts) and states with more rural settings (e.g., Montana and Kansas).²⁰ The geographic distributions of LEAs for EL students and for all students were also more similar to one another for expenditures compared to revenue (see Exhibits 2.1c and 2.1d).

²⁰ De Brey, C., Snyder, T. D., Zhang, A., & Dillow, S. A. (2021). *Digest of education statistics 2019* (NCES 2021-009). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2021/2021009.pdf>

Exhibit 2.2c. Geographic Locations of Local Educational Agencies Attended by English Learner Students at the 25th, 50th, and 75th Expenditure Percentiles: School Year 2017–18

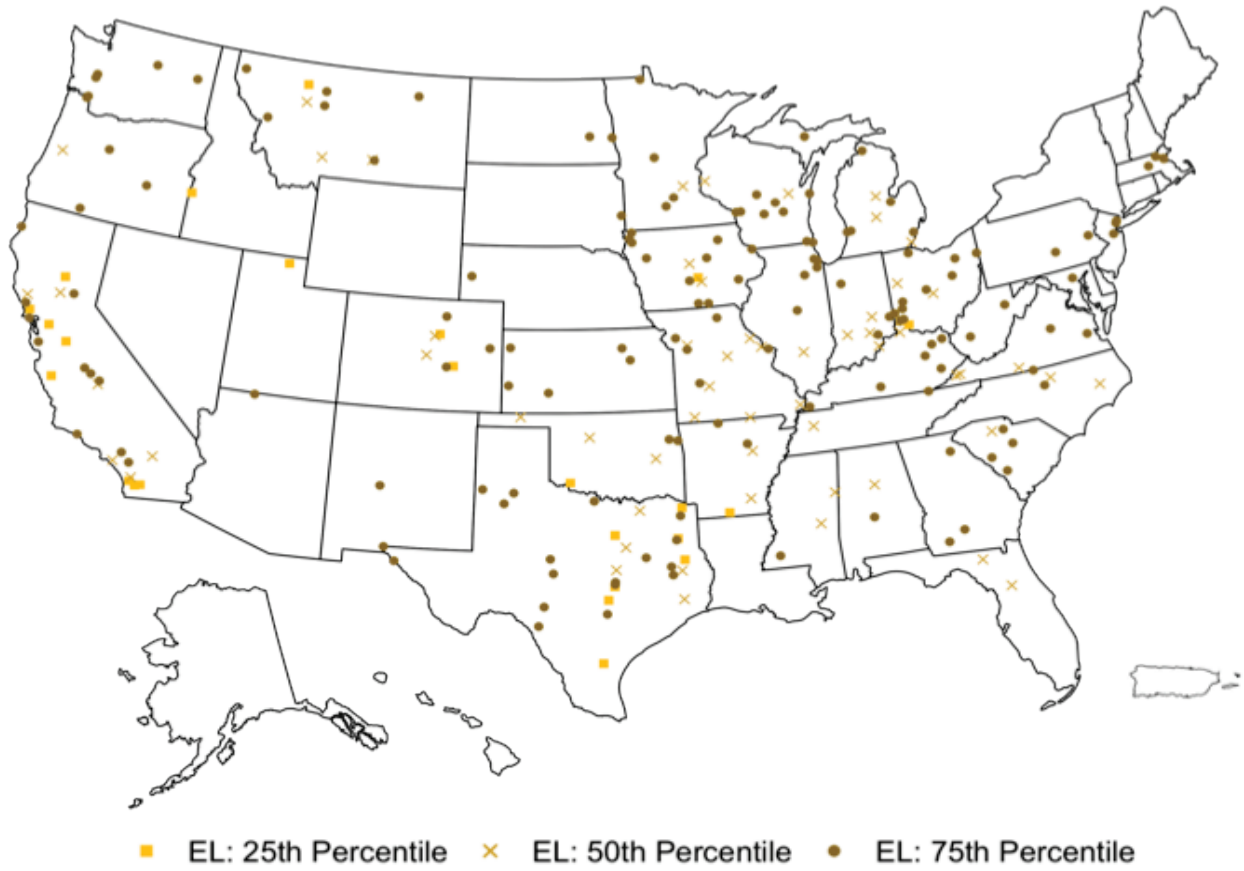
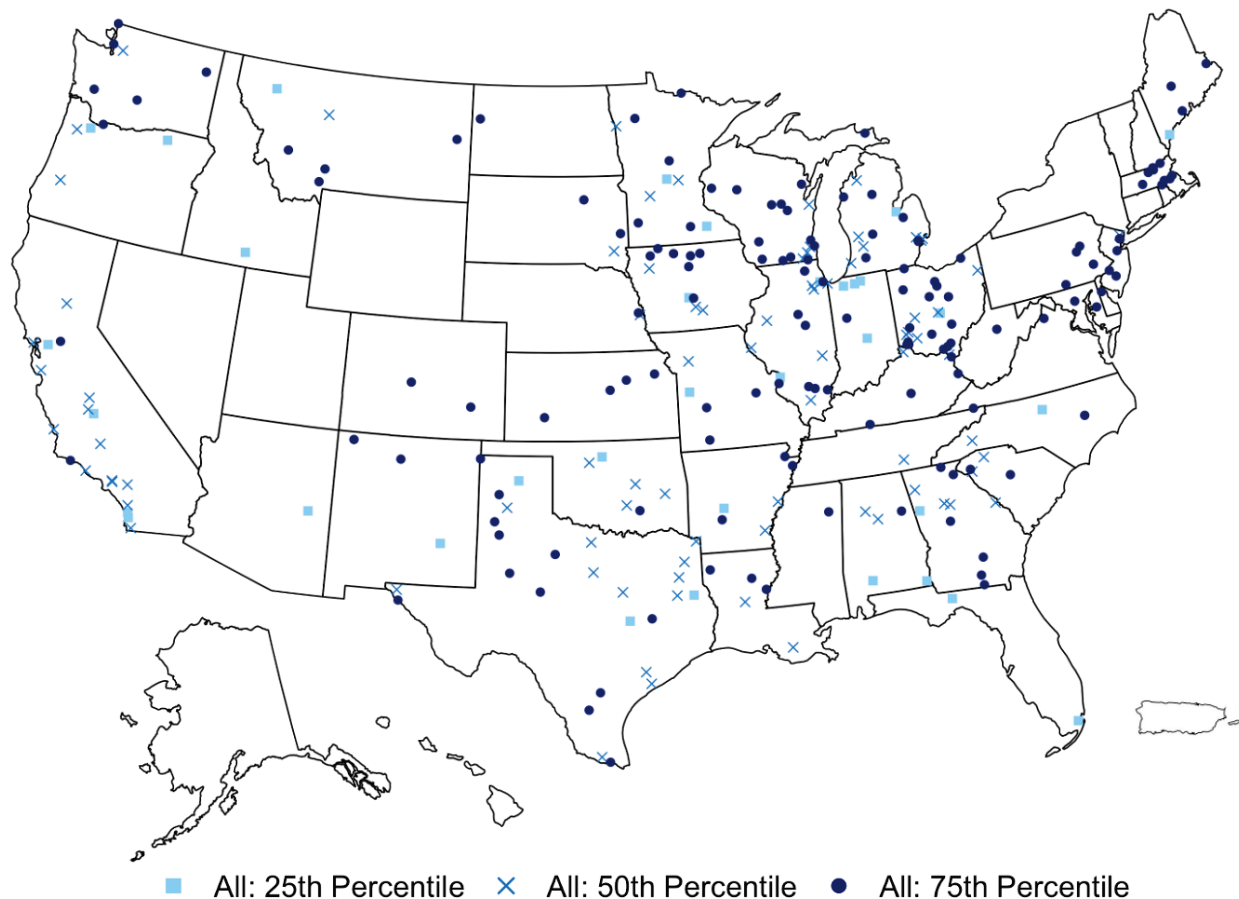


Exhibit 2.2d. Geographic Locations of Local Educational Agencies Attended by All Students at the 25th, 50th, and 75th Expenditure Percentiles: School Year 2017–18



Data Point 2.3: LEAs with a range of per-pupil revenue had similar funding distributions whether they enrolled any EL students or none.

LEA revenue may come from a variety of sources, including federal formula grants, state formula grants, state and local taxes, and program fees or donations from families. Also, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, federal funds are generally intended to supplement local funds and programs rather than make up the bulk or the foundation of spending for programs or practices that are required by law. In SY 2017–18, federal funds made up only 8% of states’ total revenue on average (no more than 16% in any state), and Title III funds made up no more than 3% of all federal funds in any state.²¹

Exhibit 2.3a shows the ranges for federal, state, and local funding as a proportion of total funding for LEAs enrolling EL students and all students across the distribution for LEAs rank-ordered by

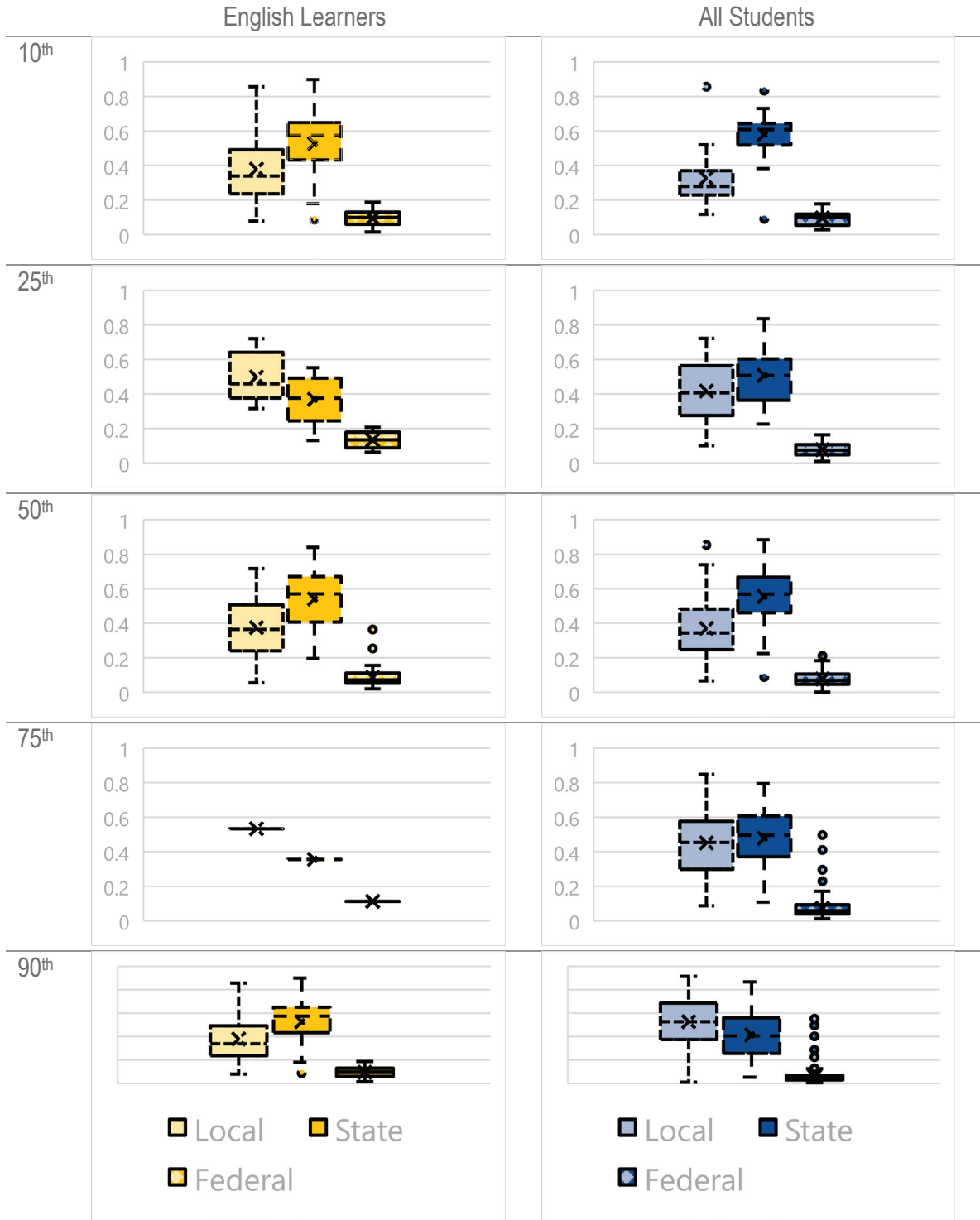
²¹ National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *Revenues and expenditures for public elementary and secondary school districts: FY 18*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020308.pdf>

per-pupil revenue. The box and whisker plots in Exhibit 2.3a show more similarities than differences among LEAs across the distribution. In all cases except three (EL-enrolling LEAs at the 25th percentile of per-pupil revenue, all LEAs at the 90th percentile, and the single EL-enrolling LEA at the 75th percentile), state funding made up the largest source of funding—just under 50% on average—as evidenced by the fact that the mean and median values in the middle box were higher than for the other two boxes in each cell of the exhibit. Federal funds made up the smallest proportion of funding on average across the distribution for both groups, and local funds made up roughly 40% of funds on average in all cases. These numbers concur with NCES data for all LEAs from FY 2018, which found that states received 45.7% of their revenue from local sources.

Nationally, nearly two-thirds of local funds (63.1%) at the LEA level were derived from local property taxes, and property taxes alone accounted for 28.8% of all education revenue from any source.²² Historically, wealthier LEAs often generate larger local revenue, usually due to greater tax revenue that stems from higher property values. States have discretion about how to allocate funding to LEAs and may opt to provide more, less, or the same amount of state-level funding to each LEA based on the LEA’s ability to generate revenue on its own. Given the relatively small role of federal funds, these numbers suggest that an LEA’s ability to fully fund high-quality educational programs for EL students depends heavily on its state-level funding formulas and its ability to generate revenue locally.

²² National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *Revenues and expenditures for public elementary and secondary school districts: FY 18*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020308.pdf>

Exhibit 2.3. Distribution of Local, State, and Federal Funding for Local Educational Agencies Attended by English Learner Students and All Students: School Year 2017–18



Takeaways: LEA-Level Funding for English Learner Students

The data points in this chapter suggest many similarities in funding levels and sources for LEAs attended by EL students and all students. The range of per-pupil revenue and expenditure values at the LEA level was generally similar for both groups (between approximately \$8,000 and \$35,000), as was the relative mix of federal, state, and local funds (roughly 10%, 50%, and 40%, respectively, on average).

Although this comparability may at first appear to suggest equity between the two groups, research suggests that quality services and programming for EL students often require additional funding compared to a general education baseline.²³ To the extent that this is true, evidence of level funding between the two groups could represent an inequity, as the same amount of money may cover fewer, or lower-quality, programs for EL students compared to all students.

Against this backdrop, the revenue and expenditure gaps observed between EL students and all students for LEAs that ranked between roughly the 60th and 90th percentiles are particularly notable. Although the gaps generally amounted to less than 15% of the total revenue or expenditures for an LEA attended by an EL student (less than \$2,000 in all cases), they remain noteworthy in light of the research base cited above about necessary funding for EL student programming. These gaps may stem from higher concentrations of EL students within certain LEAs (which is explored in greater depth in Chapter 3 of this report). Put simply, since EL students tend to be concentrated together in a subset of all LEAs in the country, this also means many LEAs have few or no EL students. If many of these LEAs rank between the 60th and 90th percentiles in terms of revenue and expenditures, a gap would emerge at the student level between ELs and all students at this point in the distribution, as is seen in the graphs and data reported here.

Additional Resources

For more information about the School District Finance Survey (F-33) and to look up fiscal data for specific schools or LEAs, the following resources may be of interest:

- CCD District Search page: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/>
- CCD Elementary/Secondary Information System: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/default.aspx?agree=0>
- CCD F-33 Information page: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/f33ageninfo.asp>
- F-33 Reports and Documentation:
 - *Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts: FY 2018*: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020308.pdf>
 - *Documentation for the NCES Common Core of Data School District Finance Survey (F-33), School Year 2017–18 (Fiscal Year 2018)*: https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pdf/2020309_FY18F33_Documentation.pdf

²³ Jimenez-Castellanos, O., & Topper, A. M. (2012). The cost of providing an adequate education to English language learners: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 82(2), 179–232. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654312449872>

For additional resources and information about school funding and finance, the following sites and resources may be of use:

- [Learning Policy Institute School Finance Resources](#)
- [Education Week *Quality Counts 2020: School Finance*](#)
- [Education Law Center School Funding Fairness](#)
- [Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University](#)
- [School Finance Indicators Database at the Albert Shanker Institute](#)
- Jimenez-Castellanos, O., & Topper, A. M. (2012). The cost of providing an adequate education to English language learners: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 82(2), 179–232. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654312449872>

Chapter 3: The English Learner Population

This chapter focuses on the enrollment characteristics of the schools and LEAs attended by the median EL compared to the median overall student during SY 2017–18 (see Box 2.3 for a review of what a median is).

The English Learner Population

While Spanish was the most commonly spoken non-English language among ELs in 45 states during SY 2017–18, great diversity also exists within the population.

This diversity takes many forms. For example, a survey of the top five languages spoken by EL students across all states revealed 44 unique languages in SY 2017–18, with many more languages represented outside the top five. ELs also enter school at a variety of different ages and with different levels of initial proficiency in English, as well as in their home language. ELs may also enter school with different immigration backgrounds, ranging from students who were born in the United States (more than three-quarters of all ELs in the United States) to students whose families immigrated to the U.S. under a variety of circumstances, including as refugees or as professionals pursuing new jobs in such industries as academia, medicine, or technology.

Diversity among EL students also often exists in concentrated pockets. For example, the 2016–18 *Biennial Report* lists Somali as the fifth most commonly spoken language among ELs in SY 2017–18, with 32,226 speakers nationwide. More than half of those speakers, however, are found in Minnesota, which reported nearly 17,000 Somali-speaking ELs in SY 2017–18. Within Minnesota, there is an even further concentration of the Somali-speaking population. More than half of the state’s Somali-speaking ELs attend school in Hennepin County, where the number of ELs who spoke Somali in 2021 approached the size of the population of ELs who spoke Spanish (roughly 11,000 Somali-speaking EL students versus 17,000 Spanish-speaking EL students).

These examples point to another important fact: EL students often are concentrated together in communities. They are not, in other words, distributed evenly among the schools or LEAs within a given state such that each school has a few EL students or a small EL subpopulation. Rather, as the data points in this chapter show, it is common for many or most of the ELs within a state or LEA to be concentrated in a few schools or LEAs that have fairly large EL populations.

Box 3.1: What is in the *Biennial Report*?

Chapter 3 of the SY 2016–18 *Biennial Report* provides summary information about the number of identified ELs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. It also reports the number of ELs who are served by Title III funds, the number of ELs who are identified as students with disabilities, and the number of ELs who have demonstrated English proficiency and exited the EL subgroup. In addition, the *Biennial Report* provides information about the top five languages spoken by ELs in all states and jurisdictions.

All biennial reports are publicly available on the NCELA website: <https://ncela.ed.gov/biennial-reports-on-title-iii-state-formula-grants>

The purpose of this chapter is to provide numbers and nuance to the patterns described above. In this chapter, some data points show distributions similar to those presented in earlier chapters, whereas others are summarized at the level of the entire EL population compared to the student population overall. These differences are driven by the differences in the variables summarized and whether it was feasible to rank data to identify a median given the nature of the information. Thus, to provide appropriate nuance and comparisons within the data points below, the unit of analysis will vary between singular median students and whole populations of students and will be noted in the data points as well as in the footnotes.

Overarching Question

What were the characteristics of the schools and LEAs attended by a typical EL student, as well as the EL population as a whole, in SY 2017–18 compared to the same information for students overall?

Data Notes for This Chapter

Data for this chapter come from the merged CRDC and CCD datasets described in Box 1.2 and Appendix A. For all data points in this chapter, except for information about students with disabilities, data were trimmed to include only students in grades K through 12 (see Appendix A for additional information about the exclusion of students in pre-K). The baseline student counts for this chapter are 5,059,279 EL students and 49,007,388 students overall enrolled in 95,385 schools in 16,712 LEAs. For some data points, the 1st and 99th percentiles were excluded from median calculations due to extreme outlier values. These data points are accompanied by footnotes providing updated sample information.

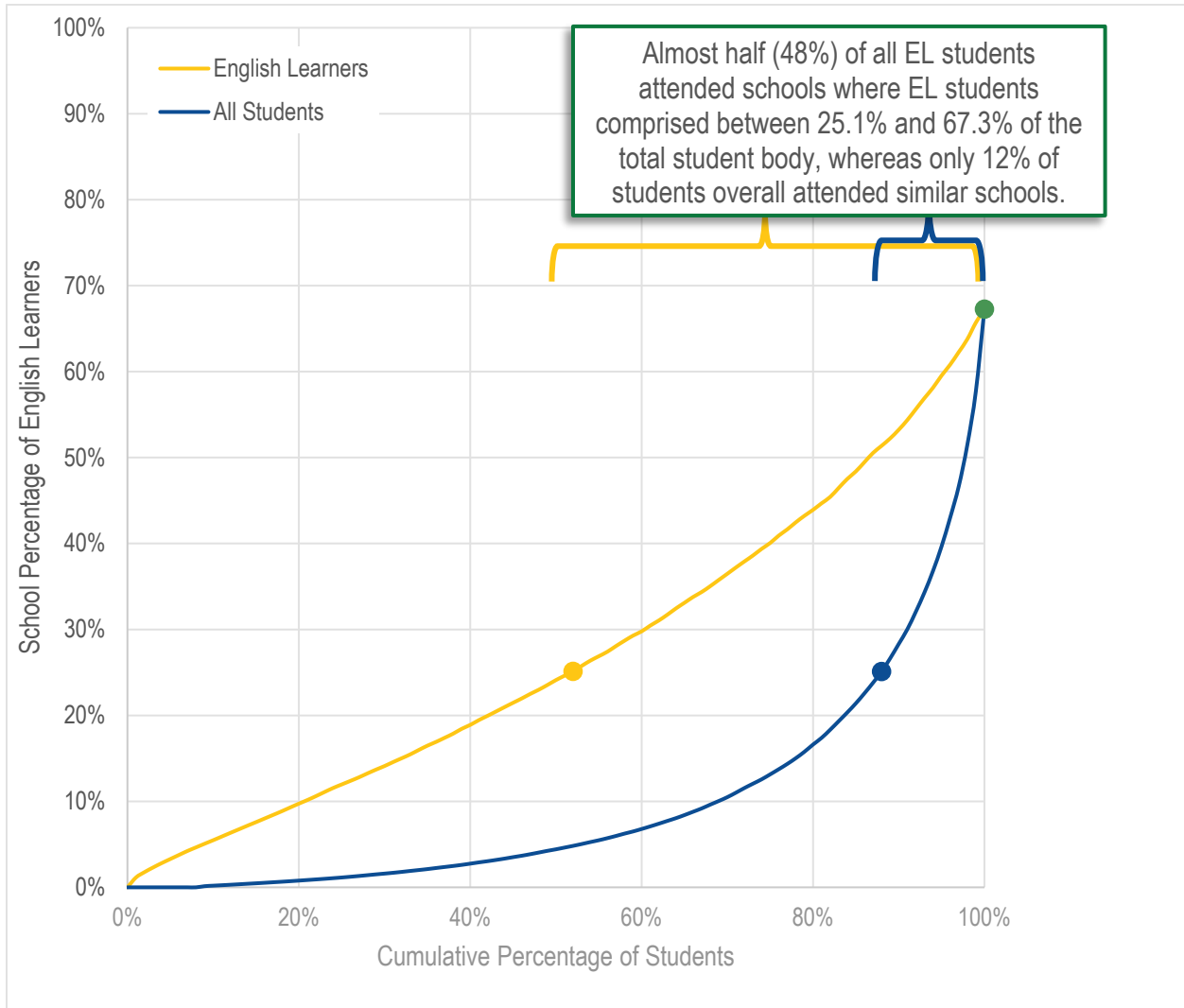
Data Point 3.1: In SY 2017–18, EL students tended to be concentrated in the same schools rather than distributed evenly across all schools.

As noted in the introduction, ELs were not distributed evenly across schools in SY 2017–18. Instead, they tended to be concentrated. Half of all students in the United States attended schools where ELs composed less than 5% (4.4%) of the student body. In contrast, half of ELs attended schools where ELs made up almost a quarter (24.5%) of the student population, a difference of 20 percentage points. And nearly a quarter attended schools where two in every five students (40.9%) were ELs.

Sorted by the percentage of EL students enrolled in a school, the median EL student in the country attended Mayde Creek Elementary School in Katy Independent School District in Texas,

where EL students made up almost a quarter of the total student population (24.5%).²⁴ By contrast, the median student overall was enrolled at Boiling Springs School in Macon County in Tennessee, where ELs composed less than 5% of the student body (4.4%)—a difference of 20 percentage points.

Exhibit 3.1. Distribution of ELs Across Schools: School Year 2017–18



²⁴ Data for Data Point 3.1 were trimmed to exclude the 1st and 99th percentiles due to extreme outlier values in the federal datasets. The remaining medians are thus based on 4,777,634 EL students enrolled in 75,496 schools in 12,025 LEAs and 48,640,376 students overall enrolled in 94,432 schools in 16,206 LEAs.

Data Point 3.2: In SY 2017–18, EL students were identified as having disabilities at similar overall rates as all students.²⁵

As a general matter, there is no reason to expect that people who speak languages other than English are more likely to have a learning disability than those who are monolingual English speakers. In practice, however, it can be difficult for educators to differentiate learning disabilities from language development, particularly if assessments for disabilities rely on or assume some level of English proficiency to be accurate. The Department has explained that districts are not permitted to identify EL students as having a disability because of EL status.²⁶ This can leave educators and schools in a challenging position as they try to ensure that students receive appropriate services. As a likely result of this challenging balancing act, research has suggested that EL students are likely to be both over- and under-identified for special education services.²⁷

Box 3.2: Section 504 and the *IDEA*

Students with disabilities may be served by one or both laws.

- **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** is a law designed to ensure a “free appropriate public education” to students with specific qualifying conditions, including visual or hearing impairments, speech or language impairments, emotional disturbances, traumatic brain injuries, autism, or specific learning disabilities. Under the IDEA, an “appropriate” education is one that is specifically designed to provide “educational benefit” to a person with a disability.
- **Section 504** of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a federal civil rights law prohibiting disability discrimination by entities, including public school districts, that receive federal funds. Section 504 uses a different definition of disability than the IDEA and covers all people with disabilities, including elementary and secondary students, postsecondary students, and employees. Among other things, Section 504 requires that school districts provide to students with disabilities a free appropriate public education that meets the individual educational needs of these students as adequately as the needs of students without disabilities are met.

Among the EL students in this chapter’s dataset (see Box 1.2), a total of 791,699 students (15% of all ELs in the dataset for this chapter) were also served by either Section 504 or the *IDEA*. This was similar to the percentage among all students, where 7,995,229 individuals (16% of the

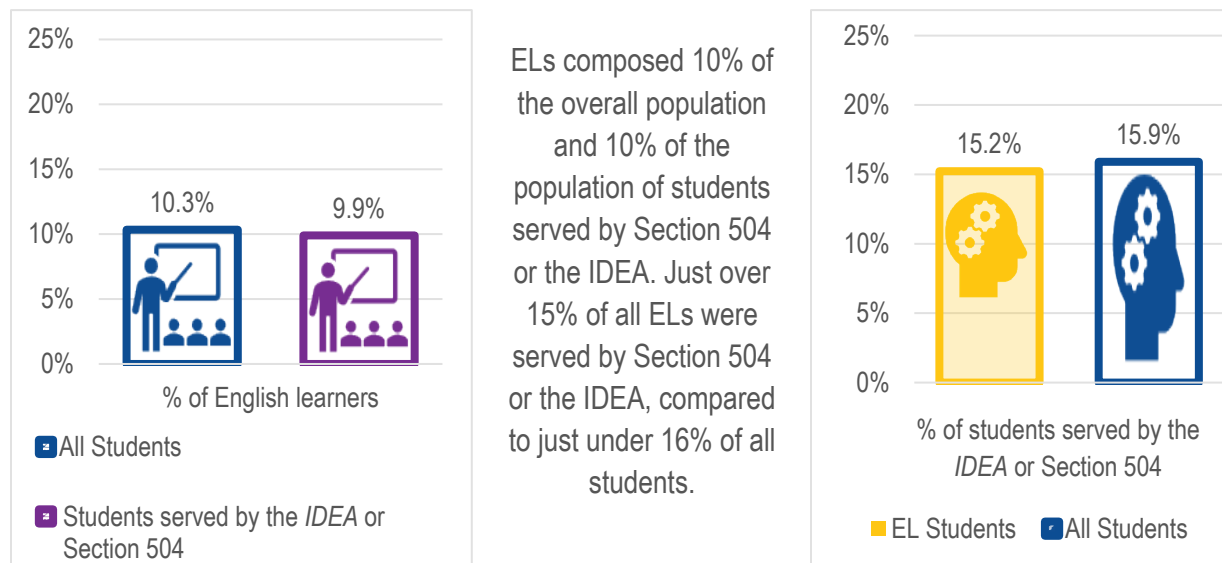
²⁵ This data point is based on the characteristics of the EL population as a whole and not on the school or LEA attended by the median EL student. More recent data also suggest that ELs may differ from all students in terms of which specific disabilities they have. For more information, see [OSEP Fast Facts: Students With Disabilities Who Are English Learners \(ELs\) Served Under IDEA Part B](#) (April 8, 2022).

²⁶ See, for example, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf> and <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ell/september27.html#:~:text=OCR's%20overall%20policy%20on%20this,and%20evaluate%20English%20language%20skills>.

²⁷ Carnock, J. T., & Silva, E. (2019). *English learners with disabilities: Shining a light on dual-identified students*. New America Foundation. <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/english-learners-disabilities-shining-light-dual-identified-students/challenges-and-strategies-for-accurate-identification/#a-two-pronged-issue-trends-of-under-and-over-identification>; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising futures*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24677>; Umansky, I. M., Thompson, K. D., & Díaz, G. (2017). Using an ever-English learner framework to examine disproportionality in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 84(1), 76–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402917707470>

total) were served by one of these two laws for students with disabilities. EL students also made up 10% of the total student population (5,198,412 students out of 50,259,920) as well as 10% of students served by the IDEA or Section 504.²⁸

Exhibit 3.2. English Learners and All Students Served by the IDEA or Section 504: School Year 2017–18



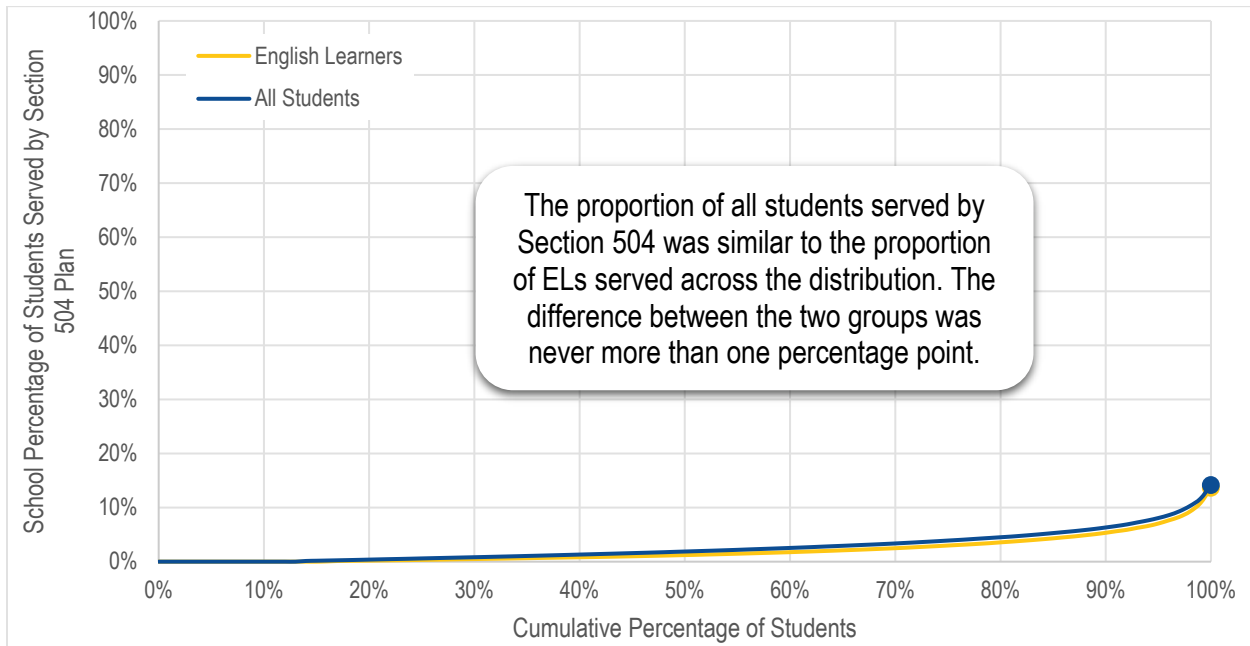
Data Point 3.3: Students with disabilities were not more heavily concentrated in schools with EL students.

The distributions of schools and LEAs attended by students overall and by ELs were similar when it came to the prevalence of students with disabilities.²⁹ Sorted by the percentage of students served by Section 504, the median EL student in the country was enrolled at North Salinas High in Salinas Union High School District in California, where 1.2% of all students were served by Section 504. The median student overall was enrolled at Indiana Math and Science Academy in Indiana (a charter school), where 1.9% of all students were served by Section 504.

²⁸ Although the federal datasets report IDEA service separately for pre-K students, they do not separately report pre-K numbers for Section 504. For consistency, Exhibit 3.2 include pre-K students for all student counts. These data points are based on 5,198,412 EL students and 50,259,920 students overall enrolled in 95,385 schools in 16,712 LEAs.

²⁹ Although the federal datasets report IDEA service separately for pre-K students, they do not separately report pre-K numbers for Section 504. For consistency, Exhibits 3.3a and 3.3b include pre-K students for all student counts. These data points are based on 5,198,412 EL students and 50,259,920 students overall enrolled in 95,385 schools in 16,712 LEAs.

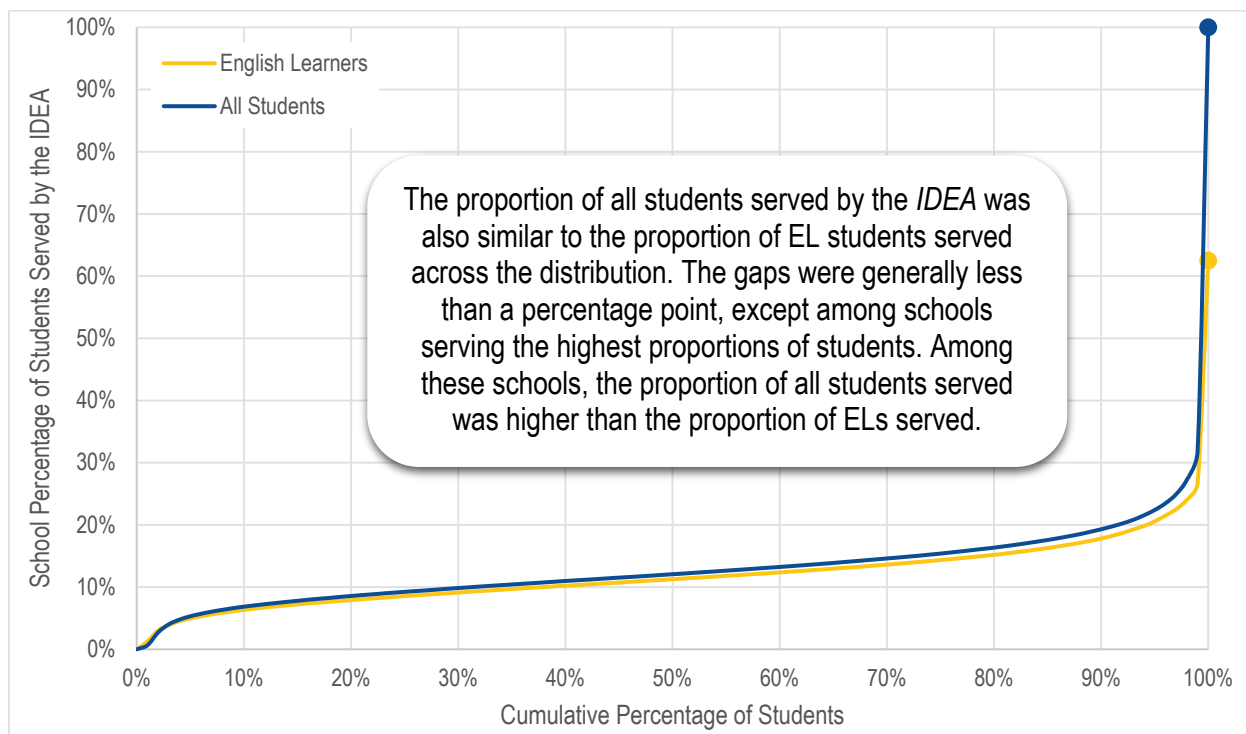
**Exhibit 3.3a. Distribution of Schools Based on Students Served by Section 504:
School Year 2017–18³⁰**



Similarly, when schools were ranked by the proportion of students served by IDEA, the median EL student based on IDEA service attended Kemp-Carver Elementary in Bryan Independent School District in Texas, where 11.3% of students were served by IDEA. The median overall student attended Westfield High School in Westfield-Washington Schools in Indiana, where 12.1% of students were served by IDEA.

³⁰ Data for Exhibit 3.3a were trimmed to exclude the 1st and 99th percentiles due to extreme outlier values in the federal datasets. The distribution is thus created based on 5,177,456 EL students enrolled in 64,334 schools in 12,388 LEAs, and 49,955,715 students overall enrolled in 80,090 schools in 16,688 LEAs. The federal datasets do not separately report Section 504 services for pre-K students, so these students are included in all student counts for this exhibit.

**Exhibit 3.3b. Distribution of Schools Based on Students Served by IDEA:
School Year 2017–18³¹**



Although Data Point 3.1 indicates that EL students were likely to have attended schools with higher concentrations of EL students overall, it appears from Data Point 3.3 that EL students did not attend schools with markedly different concentrations of students with disabilities compared to all students. If anything, students with disabilities were slightly less prevalent in the schools attended by the median EL student compared to the median student overall. This may stem from a hesitation among educators to label EL students as having disabilities based on IDEA regulations that “a child must not be determined to be a child with a disability under this part if the determinant factor for that determination is limited English proficiency” (34 *C.F.R.* § 300.306[b][1][iii]f).

Data Point 3.4: The EL population differed substantially from the overall population in its racial/ethnic composition.

Note: This data point is based on the characteristics of the EL population as a whole during SY 2017–18, not on the school or LEA attended by the median EL student.

³¹ Data for Exhibit 3.3b were trimmed to exclude the 1st and 99th percentiles due to extreme outlier values in the federal datasets. The distribution is thus created based on 5,043,327 EL students enrolled in 64,046 schools in 12,308 LEAs, and 48,984,044 students overall enrolled in 80,585 schools in 16,688 LEAs. Pre-K students are included from the sample for both ELs and all students.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Spanish was the most commonly spoken non-English language in 45 states. Indeed, according to the 2016–18 *Biennial Report*, more than three of four ELs in the United States spoke Spanish during that period. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that comparable numbers of EL students—again, three of every four ELs—were identified as Hispanic in terms of their ethnicity in SY 2017–18. This distribution is markedly different from the overall student population in SY 2017–18, where most students were identified as white (just over 47%) and just over a quarter of all students (27%) was identified as Hispanic. Students identified as Asian were also twice as prevalent in the EL population compared to the population overall (11% of ELs were Asian compared to just over 5% of all students) in SY 2017–18. EL students were also considerably less likely to be Black compared to the general population—only 4% of ELs were identified as Black compared to 15% of the overall population in SY 2017–18.

***Exhibit 3.4a. Racial/Ethnic Composition of English Learner Students:
School Year 2017–18***

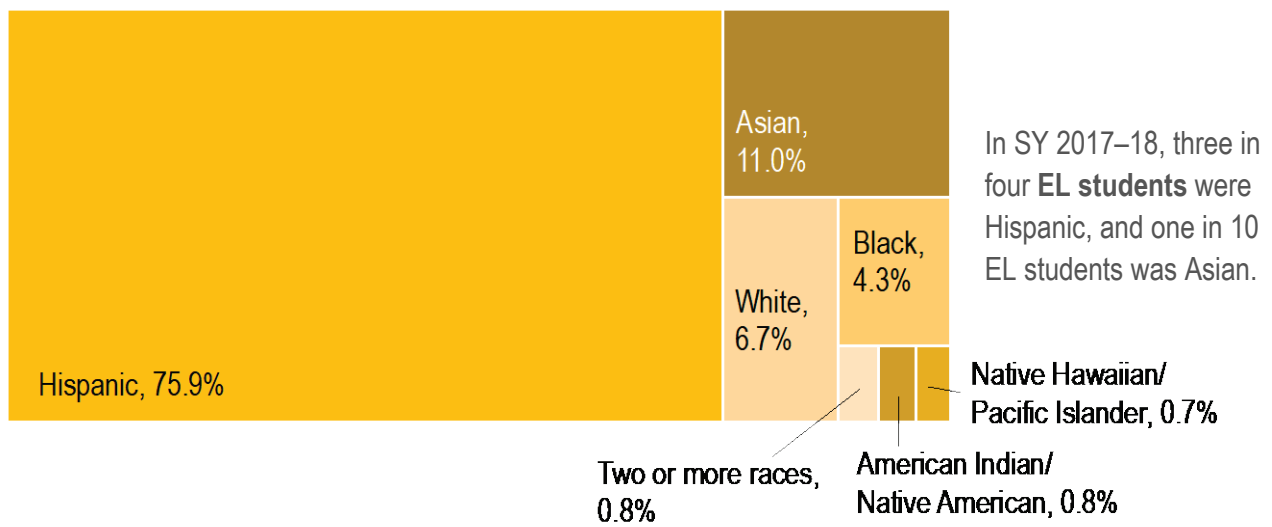
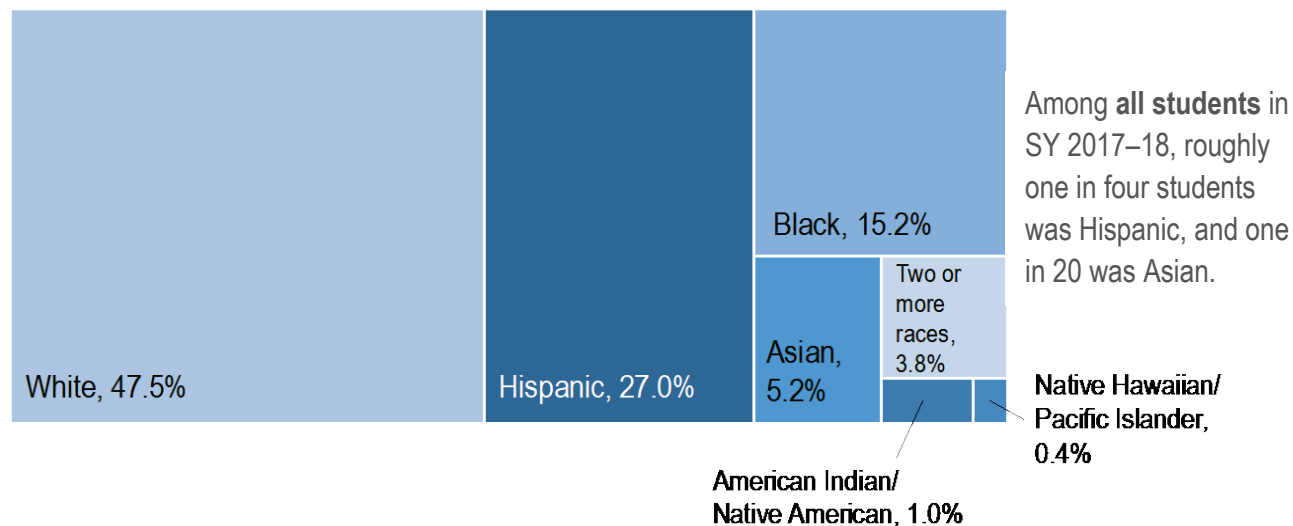


Exhibit 3.4b. Racial/Ethnic Composition of All Students: School Year 2017–18



Data Point 3.5: A higher percentage of EL students attended city schools and a lower percentage attended rural schools in SY 2017–18 compared to the general student population.

NCES uses “urban-centric locale categories” to classify schools based on their zip codes.³² NCES defines the categories as follows:

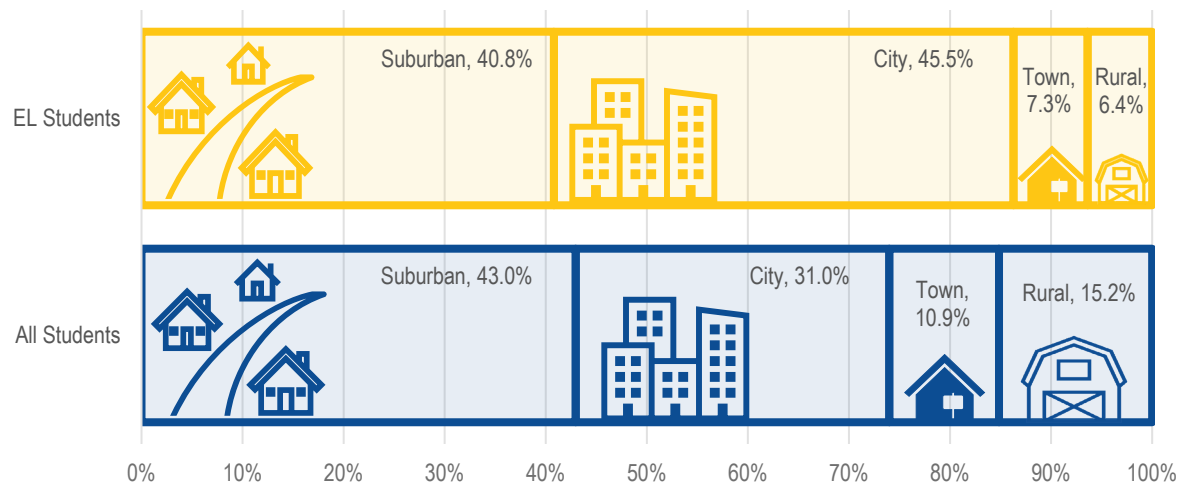
- **Cities** are territories inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city.
- **Suburbs** are territories outside a principal city but inside an urbanized area.
- **Towns** are territories inside an urban cluster but outside an urbanized area.
- **Rural locales** are outside both urban clusters and urbanized areas.

Within each category, additional distinctions are made based either on the population of the locale (for cities and suburbs) or the distance of the locale from the urban clusters or urbanized areas (for towns and rural locales).

Among students overall, suburban settings were by far the most prevalent locale in SY 2017–18. In the dataset for this chapter, 43% of all students attended schools in suburban settings, and ELs attended suburban schools at nearly comparable rates—just under 41%. Notably, however, a higher proportion of ELs attended schools in cities (just over 45%), while only 31% of all students attended schools in cities—a difference of 14 percentage points. Relatedly, a lower proportion of ELs attended schools in rural settings (6%) compared to the general population (15%).

³² See <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/psadd.asp> for exact definitions for locale codes.

Exhibit 3.5. Geographic Loci of Schools Attended by English Learners and All Students: School Year 2017–18



ELs attended suburban schools at comparable rates to all students (40.8% vs. 43%), but a higher percentage attended schools in cities (45.5% vs. 31%), and a lower percentage attended schools in towns (7.3% vs. 10.9%) and rural settings (6.4% vs. 15.2%).

Takeaways: Similarities and Differences in School Composition and Settings

The data points in this chapter suggest that in SY 2017–18, a typical EL student attended school in a similar LEA to that attended by the typical student overall, with a few key exceptions.

EL students often attended school with other ELs. The median EL attended a school in which almost a quarter of the students were also ELs. By contrast, the median student overall attended a school in which less than 5% of students in the school were ELs.

At the population level, a higher percentage of EL students attended school in a city, and a lower percentage attended school in a rural setting compared to the overall student population. The EL population also had a very different racial and ethnic makeup from the overall population.

Whereas the largest racial group among the overall population was white students (at 47.5% of the total population), white students made up only 7% of the EL population. Meanwhile, the EL population was predominately Hispanic (more than 75% of all ELs), with a higher proportion of Asian students (11% compared to 5%) and a lower proportion of Black students (4% compared to 15%) than the overall population.

On a few fronts, EL students were similar to the population overall. At the population level, EL students did not appear to be overrepresented among students with disabilities; the median EL student also did not attend a school with a larger or smaller population of students with disabilities compared to a typical overall student. As a population, EL students also attended schools in suburban settings at comparable rates to students overall.

The data points in this chapter may be helpful to consider in connection with other data points about the resources, programs, and learning opportunities that typical EL students encounter in their schools and LEAs.

Additional Resources

NCES provides annual reports and updates on ELs in public schools at the following site:
<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgf>.

The Office of Special Education Programs has published more recent data (from SY 2020–21) on [Students with Disabilities Who Are English Learners \(ELs\) Served Under IDEA Part B](#).

For more information on identifying, serving, and assessing ELs with disabilities, the following resources may be of interest:

- [National Center on Educational Outcomes resources on ELs with disabilities](#)
- [Strategies to Identify and Support English Learners with Learning Disabilities](#)
- [CCSSO English Learners with Disabilities Guide: A Guide for States Creating Policies on the Identification of and Service Provision for English Learners with Disabilities](#)

For more information on engaging with the families of EL students, the following OELA resources may be helpful:

- [English Learner Family Toolkit](#)
- [English Learner Tool Kit](#)
- [Newcomer Tool Kit](#)

Chapter 4: English Learners' Access to Educators and Other Support Staff

This chapter focuses on the adults and staffing in the schools and LEAs attended by EL students compared to students overall.

The Role of Adults in Student Learning

Teachers play a critical role in education systems, bringing important skills and knowledge to their work. For EL students, teachers are a particularly important source of academic instruction, linguistic instruction, and relational support.

Research has established that teacher effectiveness impacts student outcomes: for example, studies have found that having a teacher whose instructional effectiveness is above average translates into significant learning gains for students.³³ In addition, teacher effectiveness has implications for student outcomes, such as disciplinary infractions and graduation rates.³⁴

Teachers improve considerably in their first years in the classroom through experience as well as by accessing professional development supports.³⁵ As such, access to more experienced teachers can be a source of support for students, while access to more novice teachers may translate into less academic support.³⁶ Nationally, in SY 2010–11, EL students in grades four and eight were found to have access to fewer experienced teachers in comparison with their non-EL peers;³⁷ a more recent study, also based on CRDC data, found that schools with higher proportions of students of color have fewer certified teachers than those with lower proportions

Box 4.1: What is in the *Biennial Report*?

Chapter 4 of the SY 2016–18 *Biennial Report* provides summary information about the different types of LIEPs offered by each state, as well as the number of students enrolled in each type of LIEP (for SY 2017–18 only). In addition, the *Biennial Report* provides information about student/teacher ratios between ELs participating in LIEPs and certified or licensed EL instructors for each state. It also reports the types of professional learning activities SEAs report offering using their Title III funds, including the number of participants in each type by state.

The 2016–18 report is available on the NCELA website:

<https://ncela.ed.gov/biennial-reports-on-title-iii-state-formula-grants>

³³ Rockoff, J. E. (2004). The impact of individual teachers on student achievement: Evidence from panel data. *Economic Review*, 94(2), 247–252. <https://doi.org/10.1257/0002828041302244>

³⁴ Jackson, C. K. (2018). What do test scores miss? The importance of teacher effects on non-test score outcomes. *Journal of Political Economy*, 126(5), 2072–2107. <https://doi.org/10.1086/699018>

³⁵ Papay, J. P., & Kraft, M. A. (2015). Productivity returns to experience in the teacher labor market: Methodological challenges and new evidence on long-term career improvement. *Journal of Public Economics*, 130, 105–119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2015.02.008>

³⁶ Ladd, H. F., & Sorensen, L. C. (2017). Returns to teacher experience: Student achievement and motivation in middle school. *Education Finance and Policy*, 12(2), 241–279. https://doi.org/10.1162/EDFP_a_00194

³⁷ Rahman, T., Fox, M. A., Ikoma, S., & Gray, L. (2017). *Certification status and experience of U.S. public school teachers: Variations across student subgroups* [NCES 2017-056]. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017056_report.pdf

of students of color.³⁸ In some contexts, EL students may also be less likely to be assigned to teachers who are more instructionally effective, even when such teachers are available in their schools.³⁹

Another way in which adults in schools shape opportunities and outcomes for students is through the ratio of teachers to students. The ratio of teachers to students is one measure of a teacher's workload and ability to provide supports for students.⁴⁰ Having fewer students per teacher in a school may support stronger student-teacher relationships, support students' academic outcomes, and reduce teachers' stress.⁴¹

Other important education staff members include school-based counselors, school psychologists, and social workers.⁴² **School counselors** play an important role in student well-being and academic success by providing mental health services, delivering instruction on social and emotional skills, providing academic and career counseling, and helping schools ensure their materials are free of bias and stereotypes.⁴³ Having access to effective counselors has been linked to improved academic outcomes and may be particularly important for students who are identified as low-income and/or racially diverse.⁴⁴ Given that a majority of EL students in our 2017–18 dataset were not white (see Data Point 3.4 in the previous chapter), counselors may be an especially critical source of support. Rigorous research about the effects of school counselors suggests that they significantly improve student

In 2017–18, the CRDC school-level form defined a **school counselor** as a professional staff member assigned specific duties and school time for any of the following activities: counseling with students and parents, consulting with other staff members on student learning problems, evaluating student abilities, assisting students in making education and career choices, assisting students in personal and social development, providing referral assistance, and/or working with other staff members in planning and conducting guidance programs for students.



³⁸ Cardichon, J., Darling-Hammond, L., Yang, M., Scott, C., Shields, P. M., & Burns, D. (2020). *Inequitable opportunity to learn: Student access to certified and experienced teachers*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/crdc-teacher-access>

³⁹ Gibney, D. T., & Henry, G. (2020). Who teaches English learners? A study of the quality, experience, and credentials of teachers of English learners in a new immigrant destination. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 90*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.102967>

⁴⁰ McFarland, J., Hussar, B., de Brey, C., Snyder, T., Wang, X., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Gebrekristos, S., Zhang, J., Rathbun, A., Barmer, A., Bullock Mann, F., & Hinz, S. (2017). *Teachers and pupil/teacher ratios*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/Indicator_CLR/coe_clr_2017_05.pdf

⁴¹ Finn, J. D., Pannozzo, G. M., & Achilles, C. M. (2003). The “why’s” of class size: Student behavior in small classes. *Review of Educational Research, 73*(3), 321–368. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543073003321>

⁴² The role definitions used in this report and in the data are adapted from the 2017–18 CRDC school-level data form, available here: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2017-18-crdc-school-form.pdf>

⁴³ Office for Civil Rights. (2020). *The guidance counselor’s role in ensuring equal educational opportunity*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq43ef.html>

⁴⁴ Carrell, S., & Hoekstra, J. (2014). Are school counselors an effective education input? *Economics Letters, 125*(1), 66–69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2014.07.020>; Mulhern, C. (2022). Beyond teachers: Estimating individual guidance counselors’ effects on educational attainment. *EdWorkingPaper: 22-632*. Annenberg Institute at Brown University. <https://doi.org/10.26300/sjxm-zw40>

achievement—particularly for male students—and that one additional counselor in a high school can increase four-year college enrollment rates among students by 10 percentage points.⁴⁵ There is limited research on the effects of school counselors for EL students specifically, though correlational research has found that the use of counselor-delivered interventions is related to EL students’ academic achievement and school adjustment.⁴⁶ School counselors may also play a role in the achievement and postsecondary matriculation among student groups who are identified as low-income and first-generation college students, of which EL students are often composed.⁴⁷ In addition to guidance counselors, **school-based psychologists** and **social workers** also contribute to holistically supporting students. Adults in these roles play a critical role in helping students and families access supports and services focused on student mental health, well-being, and academic achievement.

In 2017–18, the CRDC school-level form defined a **psychologist** as a licensed professional who evaluates and analyzes students’ behavior by measuring and interpreting their intellectual, emotional, and social development and by diagnosing their educational and personal problems. A psychologist may diagnose and treat mental disorders and learning disabilities. A psychologist may also diagnose and treat cognitive, behavioral, and emotional problems using individual, child, family, and group therapies.



⁴⁵ Carrell, S., & Hoekstra, J. (2014). Are school counselors an effective education input? *Economics Letters*, 125(1), 66–69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2014.07.020>; Mulhern, C. (2022). Beyond teachers: Estimating individual guidance counselors’ effects on educational attainment. *EdWorkingPaper: 22-632*. Annenberg Institute at Brown University. <https://doi.org/10.26300/sjxm-zw40>; Hurwitz, M., & Howell, J. (2014). Estimating causal impacts of school counselors with regression discontinuity designs. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92(3), 316–327. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00159.x>

⁴⁶ León, A., Villares, E., Brigman, G., Webb, L., & Peluso, P. (2011). Closing the achievement gap of Latina/Latino students. *Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation*, 2(1), 73–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2150137811400731>; Steen, S., Liu, X., Shi, Q., Rose, J., & Merino, G. (2017). Promoting school adjustment for English-language learners through group work. *Professional School Counseling*, 21(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X18777096>

⁴⁷ Lapan, R.T., Gysbers, N. C., Stanley, B., & Pierce, M. E. (2012). Missouri professional school counselors: Ratios matter, especially in high-poverty schools. *Professional School Counseling*, 16(2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X0001600207>; Pham, C., & Keenan, T. (2011). Counseling and college matriculation: Does the availability of counseling affect college-going decisions among highly qualified first-generation college-bound high school graduates? *Journal of Applied Economics and Business Research*, 1(1), 12–24. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278728755_Counseling_and_college_matriculation_Does_the_availability_of_counseling_affect_college-going_decisions_among_highly_qualified_first-generation_college-bound_high_school_graduates



In 2017–18, the CRDC school-level form defined a **social worker** as a licensed, certified, or otherwise qualified professional who provides social services and assistance to improve the social and psychological functioning of children and their families and to maximize the well-being of the family and the academic functioning of the children. Typical responsibilities include (a) preparing a social or developmental history of a student with disabilities, (b) counseling with a student and their family individually or as a group, (c) working with those problems in a student’s living situation (home, school, and community) that affect adjustment in school, and (d) mobilizing school and community resources to enable the student to receive maximum benefit from their educational program.

Other adults who may impact students at school are **school-based law enforcement officers**. There has been an increase in the presence of law enforcement personnel on public school campuses over the last decades, despite research showing that school safety depends on a more comprehensive approach.⁴⁸ Having school-based law enforcement officers on a school campus has important implications for students’ sense of safety and belonging. The presence of school-based law enforcement is associated with increased arrest rates of children for less serious offenses.⁴⁹ This is especially true for students of color. In addition, attending schools with law enforcement officers present may affect students’ sense of well-being differently based on their race/ethnicity or immigration background. Specifically, students of color are less likely to report positive perceptions of school-based law enforcement officers.⁵⁰ Despite this fact, some studies have found evidence of school-based law-enforcement officers being more likely to work in schools serving high numbers of students of color.⁵¹ Given this potential for negative impacts on student well-being, the placement of law enforcement officers in schools should be done in consultation with educators, families, and community members.

⁴⁸ Petrosino, A., Fronius, T., & Taylor, D. (2020). *Research in brief: School-based law enforcement*. REL West. <https://www.wested.org/resources/research-in-brief-school-based-law-enforcement/>; Diliberti, M., Jackson, M., Correa, S., & Padgett, Z. (2019). *Crime, violence, discipline, and safety in U.S. public schools: Findings from the School Survey on Crime and Safety: 2017–18* [NCES 2019-061]. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019061.pdf>; Cardona, M. A. (2022, September 15). *BSCA Stronger Connections* [Letter]. U.S. Department of Education. https://oese.ed.gov/files/2022/09/BSCA-Stronger-Connections-DCL_9.12_signed.pdf

⁴⁹ Theriot, M. T., & Cuellar, M. J. (2016). School resource officers and students’ rights. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 19(3), 363–379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2016.1181978>

⁵⁰ Nakamoto, J., Cerna, R., & Stern, A. (2019). *High school students’ perceptions of police vary by student race and ethnicity: Findings from an analysis of the California Healthy Kids Survey, 2017/18*. WestEd. <https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/resource-high-school-students-perceptions-of-police.pdf>

⁵¹ Connery, C. (2020). *The prevalence and the price of police in schools*. University of Connecticut Center for Education Policy Analysis. <https://education.uconn.edu/2020/10/27/the-prevalence-and-the-price-of-police-in-schools/>



In 2017–18, the CRDC school-level form defined a **security guard** as an individual who guards, patrols, and/or monitors the school premises to prevent theft, violence, and/or infractions of rules. A security guard may provide protection to individuals and may operate X-ray and metal detector equipment. A security guard is not a sworn law enforcement officer.

In 2017–18, the CRDC school-level form defined a **sworn law enforcement officer** as a career law enforcement officer with arrest authority. A sworn law enforcement officer may be a **school resource officer** (who has specialized training and is assigned to work in collaboration with school organizations) and may be employed by any entity (e.g., police department, school district, or school). An officer's duties may include providing traffic control, enforcing security and patrolling, maintaining school discipline, coordinating with local police and emergency team(s), training teachers and staff in school safety or crime prevention, mentoring students, teaching a law-related education course or training students, and providing information to school authorities about the legal definitions of behavior for recording or reporting purposes (e.g., definition of assault for school authorities).



The information above provides context for why it is important to understand the landscape of staffing in the schools that EL students attend. This chapter reports on the staffing conditions of schools attended by EL students, as well as by students overall. In doing so, it provides nuanced information about how staffing may differ in schools attended by EL students as compared to schools overall. This report also includes information on how the staffing numbers compare to levels recommended by professional service organizations when that information is available. Staffing counts in this chapter are presented as full-time equivalent counts, meaning that “1” indicates one full-time equivalent staff member in that role, with proportions of a full-time equivalent count indicating less than full-time employment. A value of 0.5 for social workers can be interpreted as a school or LEA having half of one employee’s duties devoted to social work.

Data Notes for This Chapter

The data points in this chapter are drawn from the dataset of merged CCD and CRDC data described in Box 1.2. Each data point, however, is drawn from a slightly different LEA or school sample based on the data source and available data. Certain data points, such as 4.1 and 4.3, are collected via the CCD and are reported at the LEA level. Other data points, such as 4.2 and 4.4, are collected via the CRDC and are reported at the school level. Because of these variations in levels and sources, each data point is accompanied by a footnote clarifying the source and sample on which it is based.

Overarching Question

In SY 2017–18, how many and what kinds of teachers and staff worked in the schools and LEAs that enrolled one or more EL students compared to schools and LEAs generally?

Data Point 4.1: Overall, LEAs that enrolled one or more EL students in SY 2017–18 tended to have slightly higher student/teacher ratios as compared to LEAs generally.

According to NCES, the average student/teacher ratio has been gradually decreasing. In 1955, the ratio for public schools was approximately 27 students to every teacher; by fall 2017, it was approximately 16:1. Longitudinal NCES data from 2019 also showed that student/teacher ratios varied as a function of school size—larger schools tended to have higher student/teacher ratios. The ratio also varied by school level, as large, combined elementary and secondary schools had the highest ratios at approximately 23 students per teacher compared to lower ratios among stand-alone elementary and secondary schools.⁵²

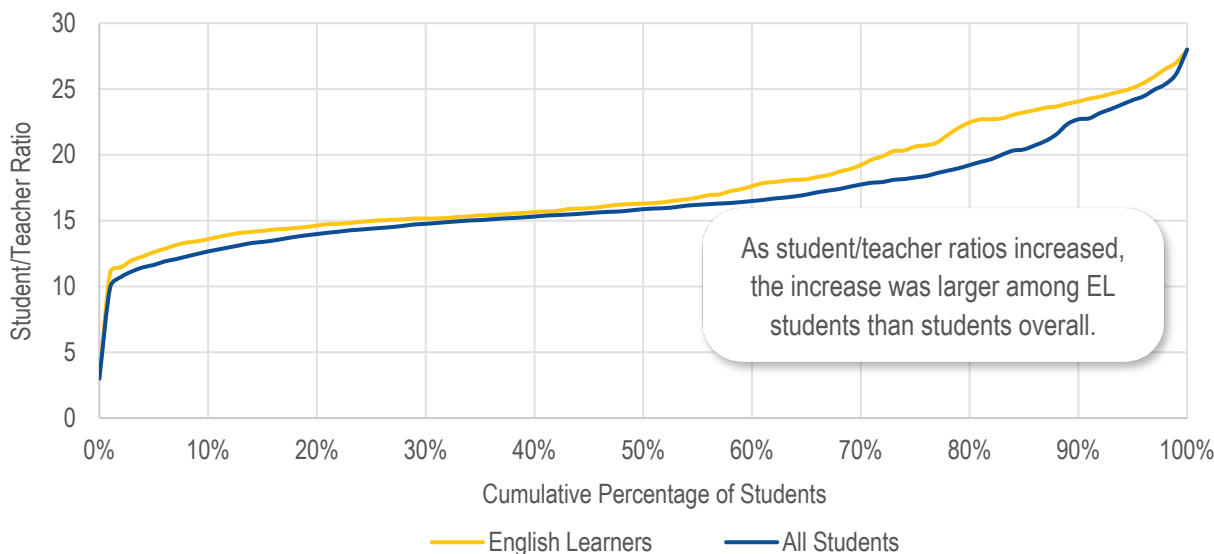
Data on student/teacher ratios for this chapter suggest that the median EL student and the median student overall attended LEAs with similar ratios, both of which aligned with the national average. Specifically, when LEAs that enrolled EL students were sorted by the LEA-level student/teacher ratio, the median EL student in the country was enrolled in an LEA with a student/teacher ratio of 16 students to one teacher.⁵³ This ratio was the same for students and LEAs overall.⁵⁴ As seen in Exhibit 4.1, which plots the cumulative population of EL students and of students overall within LEAs that were sorted by their student/teacher ratio, there were gaps at the two ends of the distribution, meaning ELs in schools with very low and very high student/teacher ratios had different ratios than students overall at the same parts of the distribution. At both ends, the ratio was higher for EL students; for example, even EL students with the lowest student/teacher ratios in their distribution had higher ratios than students overall at the same point in their distribution. The gap was particularly pronounced at the high end of the distribution: EL students at the 80th percentile of the distribution attended an LEA with a ratio of 22 students to every one teacher compared to a 19:1 ratio for students overall at the same point in their distribution.

⁵² National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). Table 208.20. Public and private elementary and secondary teachers, enrollment, pupil/teacher ratios, and new teacher hires: Selected years, fall 1955 through fall 2029. *Digest of Education Statistics*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_208.20.asp

⁵³ The analytic sample is 11,812 LEAs after trimming the top and bottom percentiles removed 309 LEAs due to data irregularities.

⁵⁴ The analytic sample is 15,615 LEAs after trimming the top and bottom percentiles removed 309 LEAs due to data irregularities.

**Exhibit 4.1. Student/Teacher Ratio for English Learner Students and Students Overall:
School Year 2017–18**



Data Point 4.2: Schools that enrolled one or more EL students tended to have a slightly higher percentage of teachers who were in their first year of teaching as compared to schools generally.

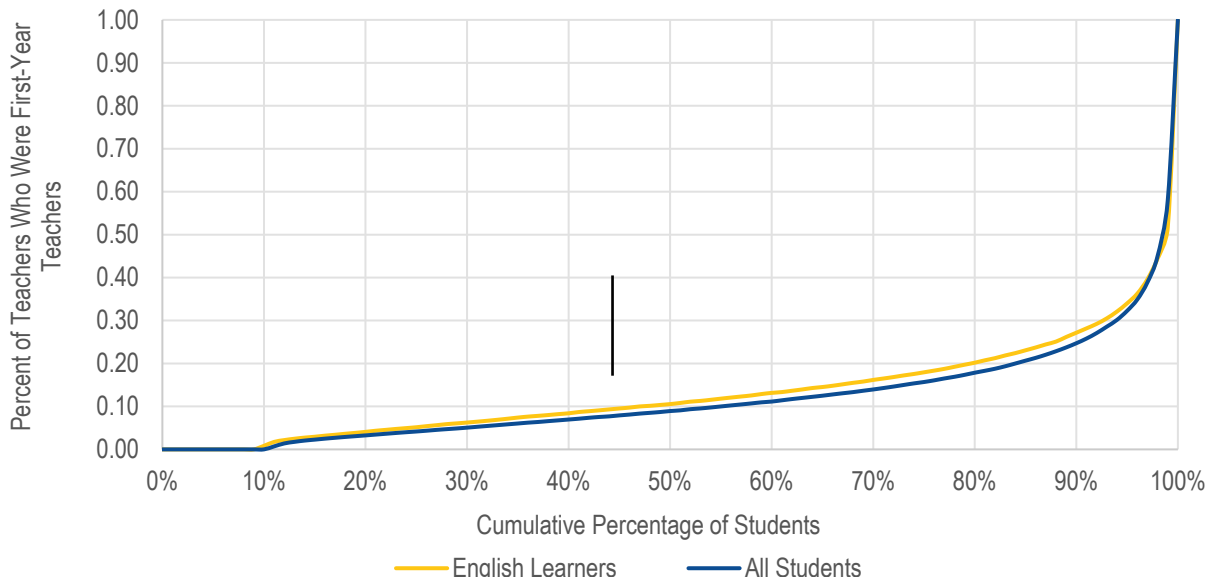
Teacher experience is an important predictor of teacher effectiveness, as teachers tend to strengthen their instructional effectiveness over time. Research has found that teachers with more experience teaching EL students are more instructionally effective with their current EL students.⁵⁵

In the CRDC data, the median EL student attended a school where 10.5% of teachers were in their first year.⁵⁶ In comparison, the median overall student attended a school where 8.9% of teachers were in their first year. Across the distributions of students overall and EL students, as graphed in Exhibit 4.2a, this difference is fairly consistent, meaning EL students at any point in the distribution attended schools with slightly more first-year teachers than students overall at the same point in their distribution. The only places where the distributions are similar are at the extremes: the proportion of first-year teachers is similar for ELs and for students overall in the schools with the very highest and very lowest percentages compared to others.

⁵⁵ Master, B., Loeb, S., Whitney, C., & Wyckoff, J. (2016). Different skills? Identifying differentially effective teachers of English language learners. *The Elementary School Journal*, 117(2), 261–284. <https://doi.org/10.1086/688871>

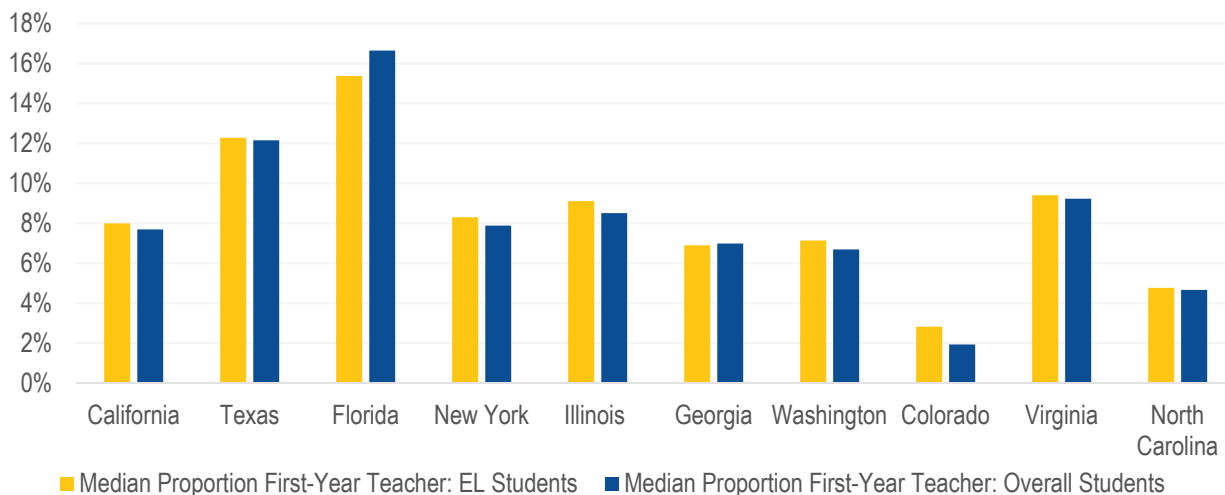
⁵⁶ The analytic sample is 76,212 schools after dropping schools that did not enroll EL students or were above the 99th or below the 1st percentiles.

Exhibit 4.2a. School Percentage of Teachers Who Were First-Year Teachers for English Learner Students and for Students Overall: School Year 2017–18



The median percentage of teachers who were first-year teachers within states that have large EL populations varied across states. Within states, however, there was little difference whether the median was calculated based on all enrolled students or just enrolled EL students. In SY 2017–18, the 10 states with the largest EL student populations were (in order of largest EL student population to smallest) California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, Georgia, Washington, Colorado, Virginia, and North Carolina. Exhibit 4.2b plots the median percentage of teachers who were in their first year when calculated just for schools that enrolled one or more EL students, as well as the median when calculated for all schools (i.e., those that enrolled EL students and those that did not) in these states. Differences were slight within all states (1.3 percentage points or fewer), and eight of 10 states had slightly higher median percentages when calculated just for the subset of schools that enrolled one or more EL students than for all schools.

Exhibit 4.2b. Median Proportion of Teachers Who Were First-Year Teachers in the 10 States with the Largest English Learner Student Populations: School Year 2017–18



Data Point 4.3: LEAs that enrolled one or more EL students tended to have slightly fewer counselors per student than LEAs generally.

Given the important role that school counselors play in student well-being, as of 2019 the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommended a ratio of one school counselor for every 250 students. Using NCES data, ASCA found that, nationally, there were far more students per counselor than recommended, with an average ratio of one counselor for every 424 students in SY 2019–20, and that over the past 35 years, the ratio has been shifting, with fewer students per counselor over time.⁵⁷

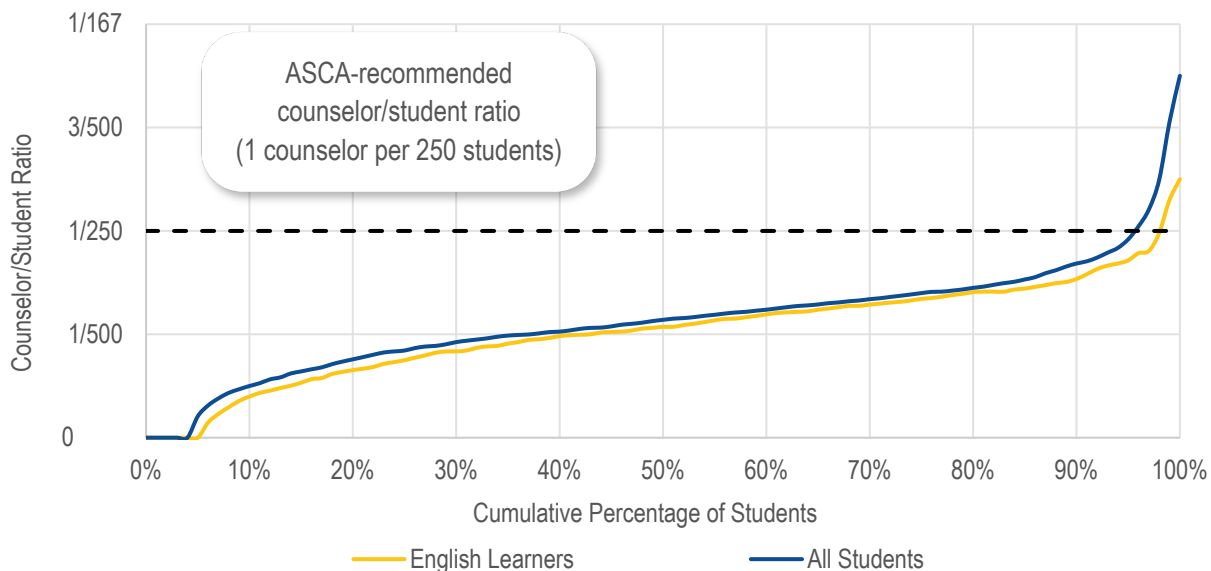
In the dataset for this chapter, the LEAs attended by the median EL student and the median overall student differed in their counselor-to-student ratios slightly, though for both there were far more students per counselor than ASCA’s recommended ratio.⁵⁸ Across all LEAs nationwide, the median EL student attended school in an LEA that employed approximately 753 elementary, secondary, and other guidance counselors to serve more than 350,000 total students—a ratio of approximately one counselor to every 465 students. This means that more than half of EL students attended school in LEAs with almost twice as many students for every counselor than ASCA recommends. The median overall student was enrolled in an LEA that employed approximately nine elementary, secondary, and other guidance counselors to serve nearly 3,849 students—a ratio of approximately one counselor to 428 students. While this was slightly fewer students per counselor than in the LEA attended by the median EL student, this was still far more students per counselor than the ASCA-recommended ratio. As seen in Exhibit 4.3, a very small percentage of EL students and students overall attended school in an LEA with a counselor-to-

⁵⁷ American School Counselor Association. (n.d.). *National student to school counselor ratio 1986–2020*. <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/6fce3243-2d8b-4efa-82e5-4f7b01049e7c/National-Ratios-1986-2021.pdf>

⁵⁸ The analytic sample for the counselor data point was 15,200 LEAs after excluding 1,511 observations due to missing data.

student ratio aligned with, or better than, the ASCA-recommended ratio. However, in the majority of LEAs, there were more students per counselor than were recommended by ASCA.

**Exhibit 4.3. Counselor/Student Ratio for English Learner Students and Students Overall:
School Year 2017–18**



Data Point 4.4: The majority of EL students and students overall attended schools where there were more students per school psychologist than the recommended ratio.

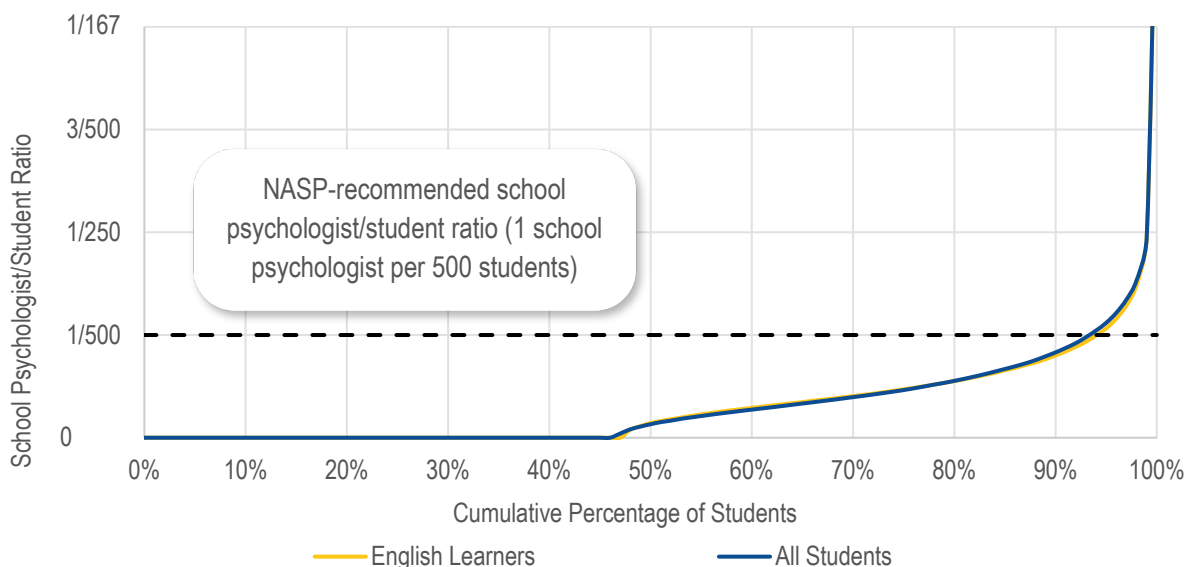
School psychologists play an important role in ensuring students have access to the appropriate and necessary supports and services in school. In 2020, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommended a ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students.⁵⁹

When schools were sorted by the ratio of school psychologists to students as plotted in Exhibit 4.4, the median student attended a school where there was one school psychologist for every 3,800 students.⁶⁰ Similarly, the median EL student attended a school where the ratio of school psychologists to students was one school psychologist for every 3,504 students. In both cases, this was more students per school psychologist than the recommended NASP ratio, and as seen by the distribution, the vast majority of students were in schools where there were many more students per school psychologist than was recommended by NASP. In addition, nearly half of all students, including nearly half of all EL students, were in schools where there was no school psychologist.

⁵⁹ National Association of School Psychologists. (2020). *Student to school psychologist ratio 2019–2020: Based on the U.S. Department of Education Common Core of Data.*

⁶⁰ The analytic sample is 94,276 schools after dropping those missing data on the number of school psychologists (10 observations) and trimming the 1st and 99th percentiles (942 observations).

Exhibit 4.4. School Psychologist/Student Ratio for English Learner Students and Students Overall: School Year 2017–18



Data Point 4.5: The majority of students overall, including EL students, were in schools that did not employ a school social worker.

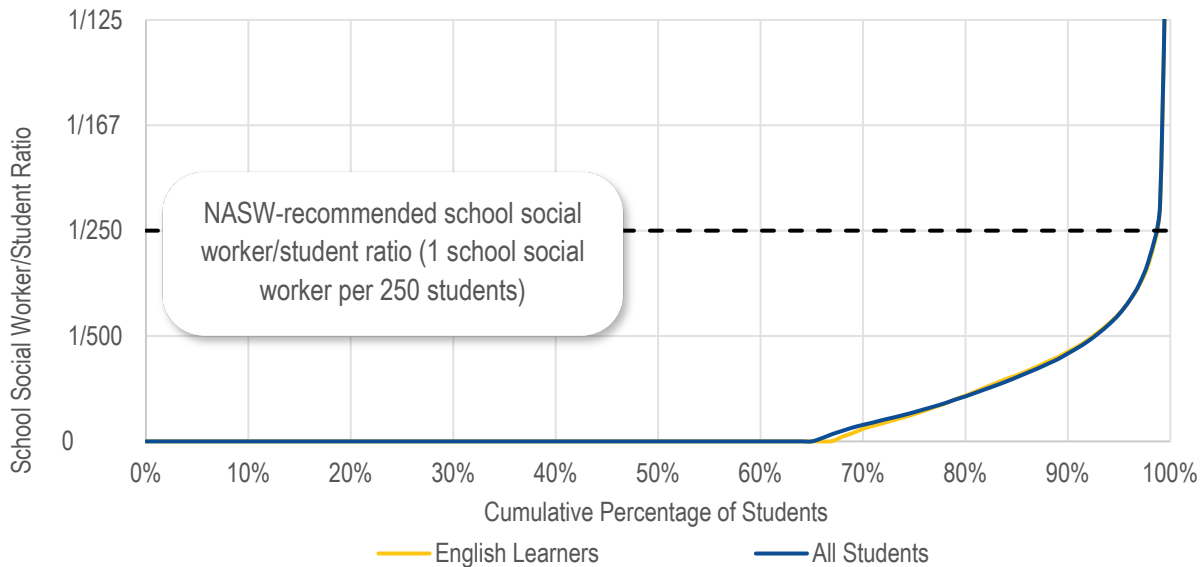
On the whole, the majority of students overall and EL students attended schools that did not employ a school social worker.⁶¹ This is of concern for students overall, and it may be particularly concerning for EL students given that many of them may face a complex set of social and structural barriers that school social workers are trained to support students and families in navigating.⁶² The ratio of school social workers to students was very similar across the cumulative distribution of students. As seen in Exhibit 4.5, only at the 99th percentile did the cumulative distribution of both EL students and students overall reach the ratio recommended by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW)—one school social worker for every 250 students.⁶³

⁶¹ The analytic sample is 94,276 schools after dropping those missing data on the number of school social workers (10 observations) and trimming the 1st and 99th percentiles (942 observations).

⁶² Potocky, M., & Naseh, M. (2020). *Best practices for social work with refugees and immigrants*. Columbia University Press.

⁶³ National Association of Social Workers. (2012). *NASW standards for school social work services*. <https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/NASW-Practice-Standards-Guidelines/NASW-Standards-for-School-Social-Work-Services>

Exhibit 4.5. School Social Worker/Student Ratio for English Learner Students and Students Overall: School Year 2017–18



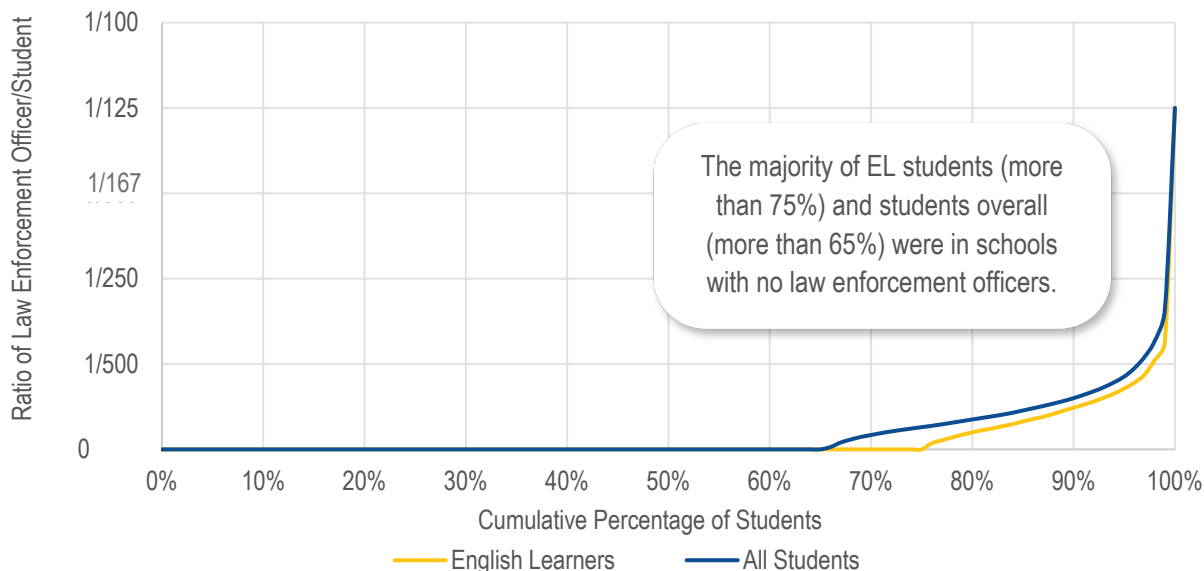
Data Point 4.6: The majority of EL students were enrolled in schools that did not employ a law enforcement officer.

Across schools, the median EL student and median overall student were both enrolled in a school that did not employ a law enforcement officer.⁶⁴ As seen in Exhibit 4.6, a larger proportion of EL students were in LEAs without law enforcement officers than were students overall.

Approximately 65% of students overall were enrolled in LEAs without law enforcement officers, and nearly 75% of EL students were enrolled in such LEAs. Given that a majority of EL students would be considered students of color (see Data Point 3.4), this finding runs counter to other findings suggesting law enforcement officers are more prevalent in schools with high numbers of students of color. Of the 94,276 schools in the chapter’s dataset, a subset of the CRDC data, 23,099 (25%) reported employing at least one law enforcement officer.

⁶⁴ The analytic sample is 91,758 schools for students overall (after excluding schools with missing data [1,605 observations] and trimming the top and bottom percentiles [923 observations]), 74,152 of which enrolled EL students.

Exhibit 4.6. Law Enforcement Officer/Student Ratio for English Learner Students and Students Overall: School Year 2017–18

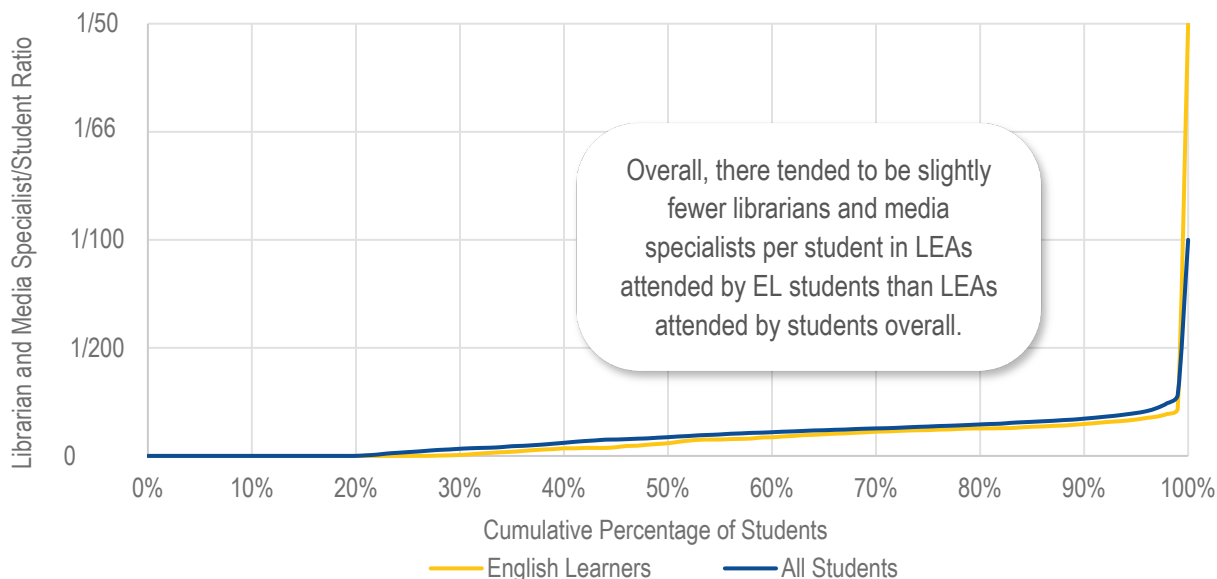


Data Point 4.7: More EL students than students overall were enrolled in LEAs where there were fewer support librarians and media specialists per student.

As seen in Exhibit 4.7, across the distribution of cumulative EL students and students overall, EL students, more so than students overall, tended to be enrolled in LEAs where there were fewer librarians and media specialists per student. Of the LEAs that enrolled EL students in the dataset, the median EL student was in an LEA where the ratio of librarians and media specialists to students was 0.0006.⁶⁵ This equates to approximately one librarian or media specialist for almost every 1,700 students. In comparison, the median overall student attended school in an LEA with a ratio of one librarian or media specialist for nearly every 1,150 students (0.0009). While the difference in the ratios themselves seems small and is hard to discern visually, this represents a large difference in the number of students that librarians and media specialists support across the school attended by the median EL student and the median student overall.

⁶⁵ Due to data irregularities, data were trimmed below the 1st percentile and above the 99th percentile, a total of 1,533 observations. The analytic sample for EL students was 11,562 LEAs, and for students overall it was 15,178 LEAs.

Exhibit 4.7. Librarian and Media Specialist/Student Ratio for English Learner Students and Students Overall: School Year 2017–18



Takeaways: Educators and Instructional Programs for EL Students

The data points from this chapter suggest that, in some cases, EL students as compared to students overall tended to be enrolled in LEAs and schools where there were fewer important staff in relation to the student population, although in some cases those differences were minimal. However, in many cases where minimal differences were observed, both students overall and EL students tended to be in LEAs and schools where staffing levels were below the levels recommended by professionals.

According to the data on school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers, the vast majority of students overall, as well as EL students, were enrolled in LEAs and schools where the ratio of staff in those roles to students was much lower than recommended. This suggests an opportunity for schools and LEAs to evaluate their current staffing situation and needs. It may be important to work with staff in these important roles to ascertain whether current staffing levels allow staff in those roles to provide the supports they feel are appropriate and needed in schools. A critical piece of the staffing puzzle is resources. These descriptive findings may encourage conversations about the necessary resources, including funding levels, to strengthen staffing in schools to support all students while recognizing that schools serving high EL student populations may have acute staffing needs given the nexus of challenges EL students often face.

Along these lines, the findings on law enforcement officers in schools are mixed. Despite findings from other studies that law enforcement officers are more prevalent in schools with many students of color, federal data suggest that most EL students (most of whom are Hispanic, Latino, or Asian; see Data Point 3.4) do not attend schools with law enforcement officers on staff and that they are less likely to attend schools with such officers compared to students overall.

Given findings that the presence of law enforcement officers in schools may be negative for some students, decisions about whether to add such officers to a school's staff should be addressed carefully and in conversation with the community to understand their priorities.

In addition, EL students tended to be in LEAs and schools where there were more students in relation to each teacher, while they also tended to be in LEAs and schools where there were slightly fewer guidance counselors per student. Both teachers and counselors are valuable supports for students. Being in settings where teachers and counselors are serving higher numbers of students may lead to challenges for EL students, who likely benefit from having teachers and counselors who can provide more individualized attention to meet their unique needs.⁶⁶

Finally, although the differences were somewhat small, EL students tended to be in LEAs and schools where a higher percentage of teachers were in their first year. While teacher effectiveness and ability vary widely, a higher proportion of first-year teachers may mean that a higher percentage of EL students compared to the overall population were in schools and LEAs employing teachers who were still in the early years of developing their skills. This possibility aligns with research that finds EL students are assigned to teachers with lower instructional effectiveness.⁶⁷ These findings may be an opportunity to provide more resources to these schooling environments to support teachers in their first year, as well as to provide resources and training focused on teacher retention.

Additional Resources

The following resources provide research-based practices and recommendations for EL instruction. These resources may be of interest to educators, policymakers, or parents who wish to learn more about or improve instructional quality and learning opportunities for EL students.

- [Perspectives on English Language Learning: Aída Walqui in Conversation with Leading Scholars](#) (webinar series by Quality Teaching for English Learners and the National Research and Development Center to Improve Education for Secondary English Learners)
- [Supporting Multilingual and English Learner Students During Distance Learning](#) (webinar series by the Region 15 Comprehensive Center)
- [Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students: Research to Practice](#) (webinar series by the Region 15 Comprehensive Center)
- [Supporting Multilingual and English Learners](#) (webinar series on distance learning by the Region 13 Comprehensive Center)
- [Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School](#) (Institute of Education Sciences practice guide)

⁶⁶ Theoharis, G., & O'Toole, J. (2011). Leading inclusive ELL: Social justice leadership for English language learners. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 47(4), 646–688. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11401616>

⁶⁷ Gibney, D. T., & Henry, G. (2019). Who teaches English learners? A study of the quality, experience, and credentials of teachers of English learners in a new immigrant destination. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 90. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.102967>

- [NCELA Teacher Resources](#)
- [*Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*](#) (Consensus Study Report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine)

Chapter 5: Academic Access and Opportunity

This chapter focuses on academic content learning opportunities and environments for EL students.

Learning Opportunities and Course Access for EL Students

Two defining principles of EL status include providing EL students with supports and instruction to help them learn English and ensuring that students classified as ELs are not excluded from the same learning opportunities as other students.⁶⁸ These principles, which are rooted in civil rights, are meant to be mutually reinforcing—that is, the English language supports should function in part to ensure that EL students are learning the same academic content as other students while they are still building their English proficiency.

Experts in content learning and pedagogy argue that the best way to achieve these principles is to take an ecological or sociocultural approach to learning.⁶⁹ Such an approach posits, among other things, that language and content are closely connected constructs that must be developed simultaneously and that the best way for students to develop both is by engaging in the practices of a given discipline in language-rich ways—for example, by engaging in mathematical reasoning with peers or by developing, articulating, and testing hypotheses in science class.

Some current practices suggest, however, that many education systems continue to view language and content as separate skills that must be taught and assessed independently. At the classroom level, research shows that content teachers often have lower expectations for their EL

Box 5.1: What is in the *Biennial Report*?

Chapter 5 of the SY 2016–18 *Biennial Report* provides participation and achievement information for current and former EL students in grades three to eight and high school on assessments of English language arts, mathematics, and science.

All biennial reports are publicly available on the NCELA website: <https://ncela.ed.gov/biennial-reports-on-title-iii-state-formula-grants>

⁶⁸ U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, & U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2015, January). *Dear colleague letter, English learner students and limited English proficient parents*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>

⁶⁹ See, for example, Erath, K., Ingram, J., Moschkovich, J., & Prediger, S. (2021). Designing and enacting instruction that enhances language for mathematics learning: A review of the state of development and research. *ZDM – Mathematics Education*, 53(2), 245–262. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11858-020-01213-2>; Shepard, L. A., Penuel, W. R., & Pellegrino, J. W. (2018). Using learning and motivation theories to coherently link formative assessment, grading practices, and large-scale assessment. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 37(1), 21–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/emip.12189>; Walqui, A., & Heritage, M. (2018). Meaningful classroom talk: Supporting English learners' oral language development. *American Educator*, 42(3), 18–39. <https://www.wested.org/wested-bulletin/insights-impact/supporting-english-learners-oral-language-development/>

students.⁷⁰ This belief may lead educators to provide less rigorous content instruction for their EL students (e.g., by attempting to cover less content within a unit or school year, by offering simpler assignments and lessons compared to those offered to non-EL students, or even by teaching content from younger or earlier grades to EL students). At the systems level, this approach can lead to situations in which LEAs employ leveled or exclusionary tracking practices that impact EL students' access to learning opportunities.⁷¹ Leveled tracking practices may result in EL students having constricted access to more rigorous, higher-level courses, and exclusionary tracking practices may prevent EL students from taking a full, credit-bearing, grade-level course load.

The teaching and course assignment situations described above may arise unintentionally, or the rationale may stem from good intentions on the part of educators (e.g., an intention to “protect” students from feeling inadequate in the face of challenging content). However, research has shown that practices that narrow EL students' access to rigorous, grade-level content have negative consequences for achievement. A study in Texas, for example, found that the best predictor of achievement for current and former EL students is not their EL status or language proficiency, but rather the level of rigor of the courses they take or are allowed to take.⁷²

For this reason, it is relevant and important to examine EL students' participation in grade-level and advanced courses as a proxy for their access to these kinds of learning environments and opportunities to learn. If EL students participate in these kinds of courses at lower rates than would be expected given their presence in the student population, this may suggest that EL students either are not being fully prepared to participate in these learning environments or are being excluded from said environments.

This chapter's focus on specific grade-level and advanced courses (such as Algebra I or Advanced Placement [AP] courses) necessarily requires a focus on EL students in grades six to 12 since these are the students who are potentially eligible to take such courses. Here, it is important to note that the population of students who are ELs in secondary grades is typically smaller than in elementary grades. Across all LEAs that offer grades six to 12, the median EL enrollment was just 3.1% of all students. EL students in secondary grades also typically have a different profile than ELs in earlier grades. Specifically, EL students in secondary grades tend to fall into one of two categories:

⁷⁰ Umansky, I. M., & Dumont, H. (2021). English learner labeling: How English learner classification in kindergarten shapes teacher perceptions of student skills and the moderating role of bilingual instructional settings. *American Educational Research Journal*, 58(5), 993–1031. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831221997571>

⁷¹ Umansky, I. M. (2016). Leveled and exclusionary tracking: English learners' access to academic content in middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(6), 1792–1833. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216675404>; Vazquez Cano, M., Umansky, I. M., & Thompson, K. D. (2021). *How state, district, and school levers can improve the course access of students classified as English learners in secondary schools*. WestEd. https://region7comprehensivecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/8-b374f2fd02733c6aacc06c025c48a190f/2021/07/Levers-for-Course-Access.pdf

⁷² Callahan, R. M. (2005). Tracking and high school English learners: Limiting opportunity to learn. *American Educational Research Journal*, 42(2), 305–328. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312042002305>

- Long-term ELs who have been receiving services for many years (typically defined as more than five or six years) without yet being reclassified; or
- Newcomer ELs who were initially classified as ELs for the first time in late elementary school or later as arrivals from outside the U.S. school system.⁷³

For different reasons, students in these two groups may have gaps in their foundational knowledge and skills that impact their educational experiences. For example, while newcomer EL students come from a diversity of backgrounds and educational settings, some may arrive having experienced interruptions in their formal education.⁷⁴ Schools may face challenges in providing appropriate access to rigorous, grade-level content coursework for these students.⁷⁵ Long-term EL students also represent a diversity of educational experiences, but some may have been provided with a constricted curriculum or weak language instruction earlier in their academic journeys, leading to academic challenges in secondary school.⁷⁶

The purpose of this chapter is to examine patterns in access to certain learning opportunities among EL students in secondary grades as measured through enrollment in specific courses or types of courses.

Data Notes for This Chapter

The data points for this chapter are based on the CRDC, which collects detailed participation information for a variety of different subgroups—including EL students—for various advanced courses and exams such as Algebra I, chemistry, and AP courses. Because these courses are offered only to students in middle or high school grades (depending on the exact course), the dataset for this chapter was narrowed to include only schools that enrolled students in the relevant grades. The exact sample size varied for each data point depending on the relevant grades for the course(s) being described.

Overarching Question

What do we know about opportunities and enrollment in rigorous, grade-level learning for EL students and for students overall during SY 2017–18?

⁷³ There is no federal definition for either long-term or newcomer ELs, and states vary in exactly how they define these groups, if they define them at all.

⁷⁴ Office of English Acquisition. (2023). *Newcomer toolkit*. U.S. Department of Education. https://ncela.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/NewcomerToolkit-06222023-508_OELA.pdf

⁷⁵ Umansky, I., Hopkins, M., Dabach, D. B., Porter, L., Thompson, K., & Pompa, D. (2018). *Understanding and supporting the educational needs of recently arrived immigrant English learner students: Lessons for state and local education agencies*. Council of Chief State School Officers. <https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2018-04/Understanding%20and%20Supporting%20the%20Educational%20Needs%20of%20RAIELs.pdf>

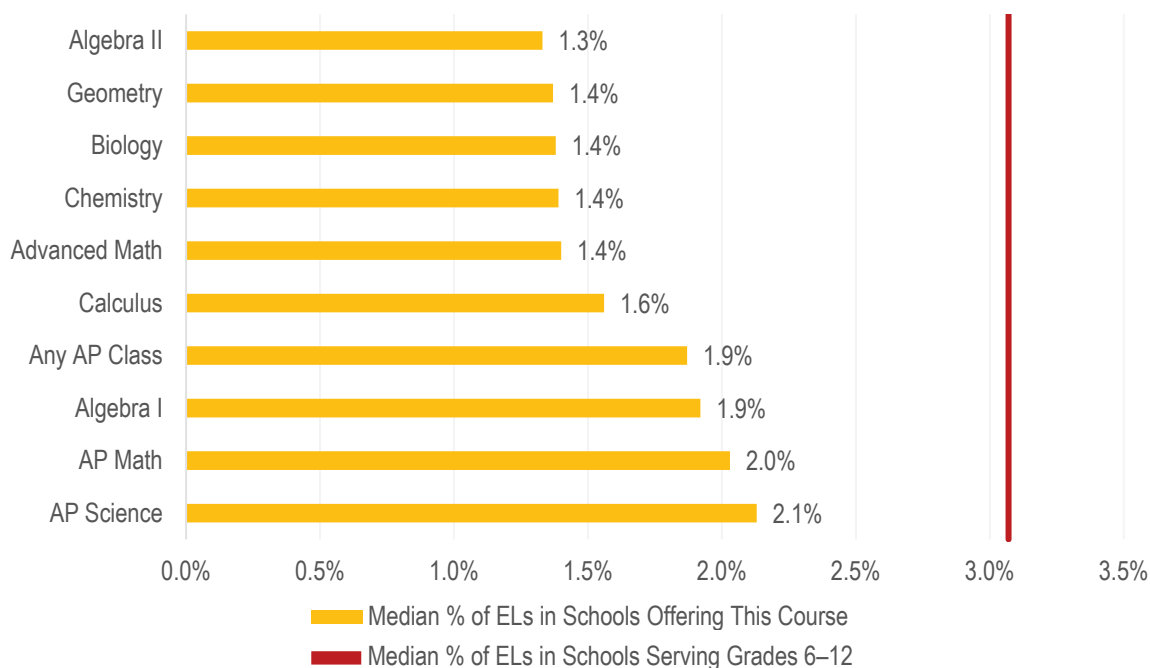
⁷⁶ Thompson, K. D. (2015). Questioning the long-term English learner label: How categorization can blind us to students' abilities. *Teachers College Record*, 117(12), 1–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811511701203>; Menken, K., Kleyn, T., & Chae, N. (2012). Spotlight on “long-term English language learners”: Characteristics and prior schooling experiences of an invisible population. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 6(2), 121–142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2012.665822>

Data Point 5.1: In SY 2017–18, EL students were underrepresented in schools that offered certain math, science, and AP coursework.

One way to measure access to learning opportunities is to look at whether enrollment differs across schools that provide certain rigorous or advanced learning opportunities. Comparing the median proportion of students who are classified as ELs in schools that offer certain course-taking opportunities to the median EL enrollment across all schools can provide evidence of underrepresentation in schools that offer rigorous course-taking opportunities.

Exhibit 5.1 displays the median percentage of EL students in schools that offered a given course among 10 different math, science, and AP courses, with a line denoting the overall median percentage of EL students in schools that served grades six to 12.⁷⁷ Across all 10 courses represented, schools that offered those course-taking opportunities uniformly had a lower median EL enrollment rate than the overall median EL enrollment rate across the sample. The disproportionality increases when the focus shifts from access to enrollment. Among 10 math, science, and AP courses examined, geometry and biology, 0.5% and 0.7%, respectively, had the highest median EL student enrollments. Thus, EL students were underrepresented both in schools that offered these course-taking opportunities and as a proportion of students enrolled in these courses.

Exhibit 5.1. Median English Learner Enrollment in Schools Overall and in Schools Offering Select Course-Taking Opportunities: School Year 2017–18



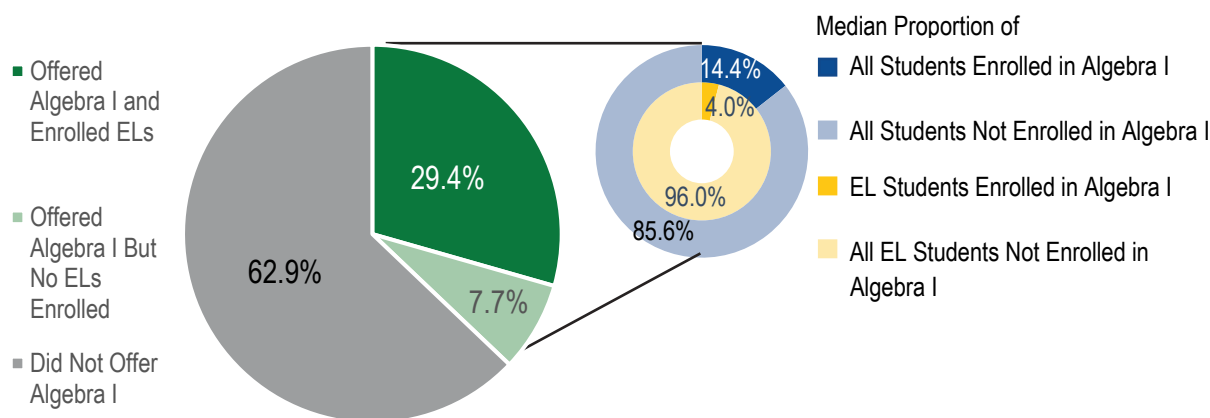
⁷⁷ For full definitions for each course type, please refer to the CRDC master list of CRDC definitions, which can be found at [Master List of CRDC Definitions \(ed.gov\)](#).

Data Point 5.2: EL students tended to enroll in Algebra I courses at lower rates than the overall student population.

Algebra I is an important gatekeeper and predictor of future access and achievement—both in math, specifically, and in school, generally.⁷⁸ As such, examining enrollment in Algebra I is an important measure of access to learning opportunities among students. Comparatively lower enrollment rates may indicate barriers to access.

CRDC data suggested that EL students did not enroll in Algebra I at rates comparable to other students. Of the 95,385 schools in the CRDC data, 35,394 offered Algebra I, and nearly 20% of these schools (7,331) did not enroll any EL students. Among the subset of schools that both enrolled EL students and offered Algebra I (28,063 schools), the median Algebra I enrollment rate of students overall was 14.4%. Among EL students, however, the median enrollment rate was only 4%.

Exhibit 5.2. Median Proportion of English Learners Enrolled in Algebra I in Schools That Enroll English Learner Students: School Year 2017–18

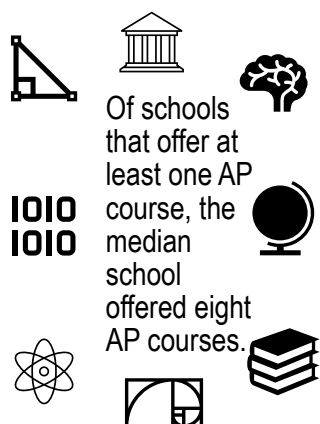


Data Point 5.3: EL students participated in AP and International Baccalaureate courses at lower rates than other students.

In the CRDC data, there is information on different types of courses that can be college credit-bearing, including AP and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. AP classes are considered rigorous, college-level coursework. Students have the option to take an exam after participating in an AP course; if they pass the exam, they may receive college credit for the class. IB courses

⁷⁸ LaFave, A. (2019). *Algebra I coursetaking and postsecondary enrollment. Data Point. (NCES 2019-154)*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. https://eric.ed.gov/?q=Algebra+i&ffl=dtvSince_2012&id=ED595190; Lee, S. W., & Mao, X. (2021). Algebra by the eighth grade: The association between early study of Algebra I and students' academic success. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 19(6), 1271–1289. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10763-020-10116-3>

are also considered advanced and rigorous. In some instances, especially in grades nine to 12, students may accrue college credit through IB classes.



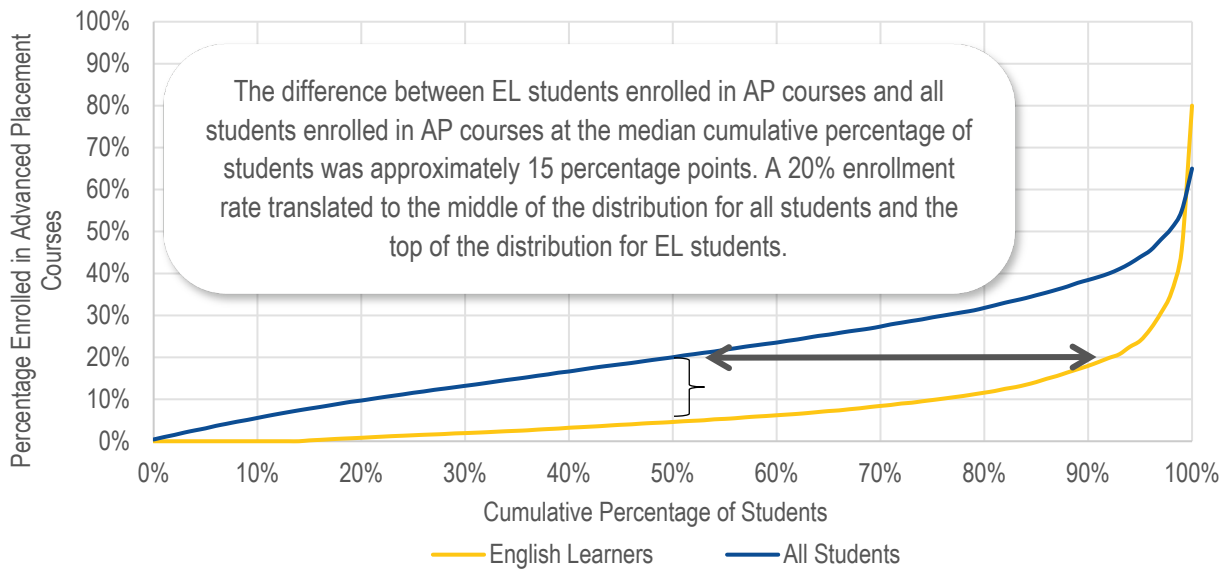
EL students were not well represented in college credit-bearing opportunities in high school as compared to their peers. There were 13,205 total schools in the data sample that offered at least one AP course.⁷⁹ Exhibit 5.3a plots the cumulative distribution of EL students, as well as students overall, when schools were sorted from the lowest proportion enrolled in AP courses to the highest. The exhibit shows that, across the distribution, a smaller proportion of EL students were enrolled in AP courses compared to students overall. The blue line shows the distribution of the 13,205 schools that offered AP courses, and it shows that, in schools in the middle of the distribution, roughly 20% of all students were enrolled in some kind of AP course. The yellow line shows the distribution of the 11,160 schools that both

offered AP courses and enrolled EL students (these schools are a subset of those shown in the blue line).⁸⁰ In the middle of the distribution of these schools, only about 5% of ELs were enrolled in some kind of AP course. Schools with EL enrollment rates that are comparable to the median for all students (i.e., 20% enrolled in AP courses) are near the top of the distribution (the 90th percentile) for ELs.

⁷⁹ Because of data irregularities, these data were trimmed to exclude schools below the 1st and above the 99th percentiles (n=264).

⁸⁰ Because of data irregularities, these data were trimmed to exclude schools below the 1st and above the 99th percentiles (n=113).

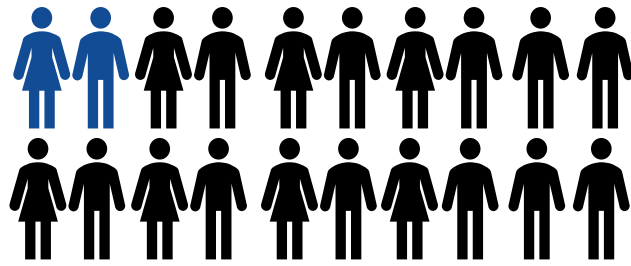
Exhibit 5.3a. Percentage Enrolled in Advanced Placement Courses for English Learner Students and for Students Overall: School Year 2017–18



A similar pattern was observed for IB courses. Only 893 schools in the sample offered IB courses, with a median overall student enrollment in IB courses of 8.6%.⁸¹ Across these schools, EL students were underrepresented. As shown in Exhibit 5.3b, the median EL enrollment in IB courses was 0%, in contrast with a median EL enrollment of 4.1% overall.

⁸¹ Because of data irregularities, these data were trimmed to exclude schools below the 1st and above the 99th percentiles (n=20).

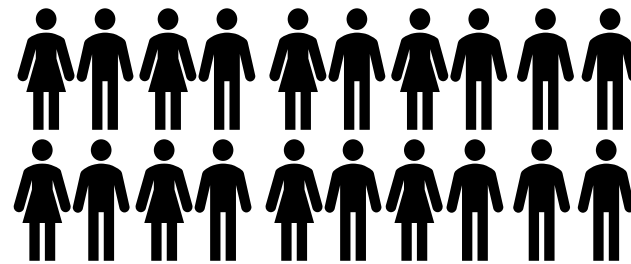
Exhibit 5.3b. Percentage of English Learner Students and Students Overall Enrolled in International Baccalaureate Courses: School Year 2017–18



Of schools offering IB courses, a median of **8.6%** of students enrolled in at least one course.



Median EL enrollment in those same schools was **4.1%**.



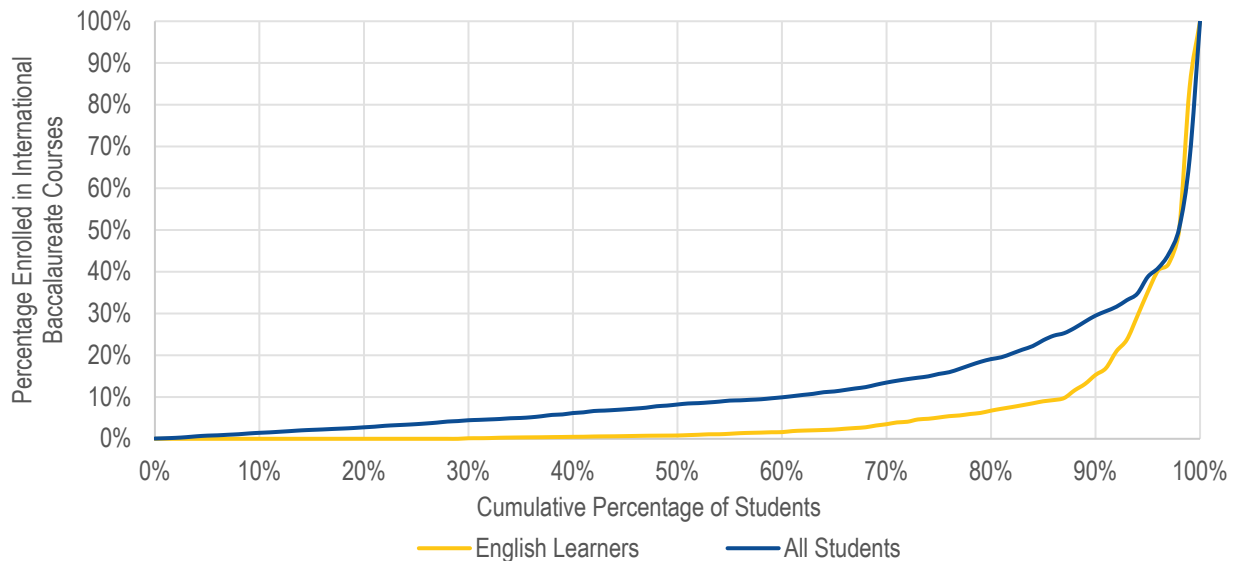
The median percentage of EL students in IB courses, both as a percentage of total school EL enrollment and of all IB students, was **0%**.

Looking at the distribution of median enrollment rates in IB courses for students overall and for EL students further underscores how participation is lower among EL students. Across schools that offered IB courses and enrolled EL students (813 schools out of 893 that offered IB courses at all), the median EL student attended a school where approximately 1% of all EL students were enrolled in IB courses.⁸² This means that at least 50% of EL students who attended a school where IB courses were offered were in a school where 1% or fewer EL students participated in

⁸² Because of data irregularities, these data were trimmed to exclude schools below the 1st and above the 99th percentiles (n=64).

these programs. In Exhibit 5.3c, the gaps between EL students and students overall run almost the full distribution, extending through the 95th percentile.

Exhibit 5.3c Percentage Enrolled in International Baccalaureate Courses for English Learner Students and for Students Overall: School Year 2017–18



Data Point 5.4: EL students were identified for gifted and talented education at lower rates than other students.

Federal law defines gifted and talented students as students with “evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.”⁸³ Participating in a gifted and talented education program is associated with improved academic outcomes.⁸⁴ Data indicate that certain student groups, including EL students, may not have equitable access to gifted and talented education programs.⁸⁵

When schools were sorted in the CRDC data by the proportion of students overall identified for gifted and talented education, the median student was enrolled in a school where 3.2% of students were identified for gifted and talented education.⁸⁶ In contrast, when sorted by the

⁸³ ESEA Section 8101(27).

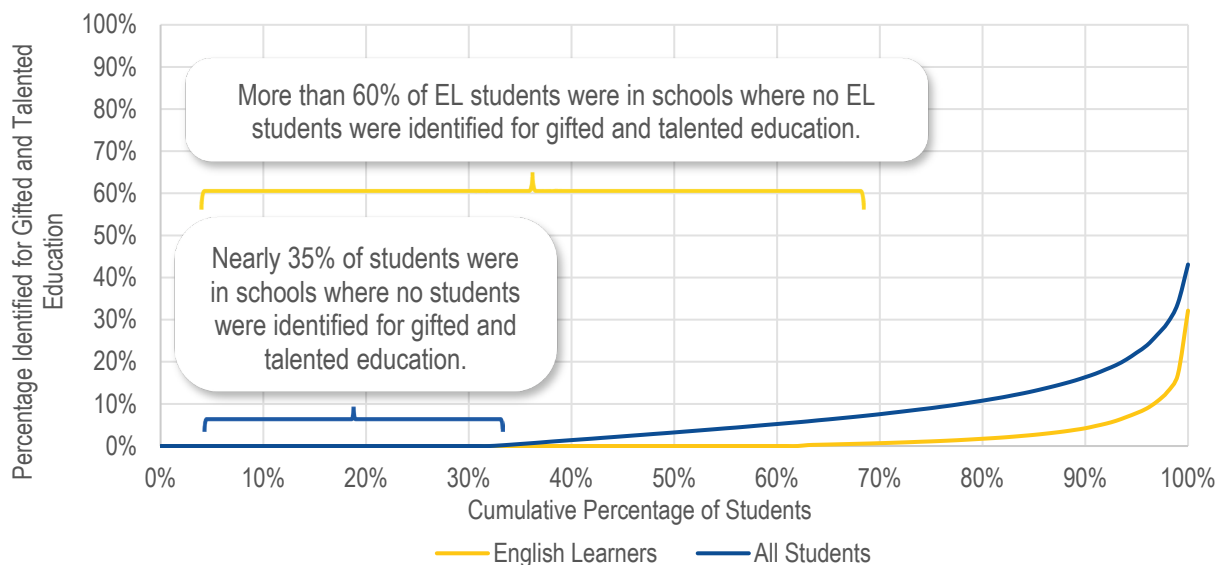
⁸⁴ Redding, C., & Grissom, J. A. (2021). Do students in gifted programs perform better? Linking gifted program participation to achievement and nonachievement outcomes. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 43(3), 520–544. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737211008919>

⁸⁵ National Center for Research on Gifted Education. (2018, June). *Exploratory study on the identification of English learners for gifted and talented programs*. University of Connecticut. <https://ncrge.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/982/2020/09/NCRGE-EL-Report.pdf>; Serrano, D., & Scardina, K. (n.d.). *Improving the identification of English learner students for talented and gifted programs*. Regional Education Laboratory, Northwest. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/el-tag-infographic.pdf>

⁸⁶ Because of data irregularities, these data were trimmed to exclude schools below the 1st and above the 99th percentiles (n=954), for a total sample of 94,431 schools.

proportion of EL students identified for gifted and talented education within schools that enrolled EL students, the median EL student was enrolled in a school where 0% of EL students were identified for gifted and talented education.⁸⁷ In fact, as the distribution in Exhibit 5.4 shows, more than 60% of EL students were in schools where no EL students were identified for gifted and talented education. By contrast, only approximately 35% of students overall were in schools where no students were identified for gifted and talented education.

Exhibit 5.4. Percentage Identified for Gifted and Talented Education for English Learner Students and for Students Overall: School Year 2017–18



Data Point 5.5: In some states, EL students made up significant proportions of retained students.

Many EL students and students overall attended schools where retention rates were low (fewer than 2%). Despite this general similarity, EL students at the higher end of the cumulative distribution tended to be in schools where more EL students were retained as compared to students overall.

When schools were sorted by the proportion of students retained in grade, the median student was in a school where 0% of students were retained in grade.⁸⁸ When schools that enrolled EL students were sorted by the proportion of EL students retained in grade, the median EL student was also in a school where essentially 0% of EL students were retained in grade.⁸⁹ As shown in Exhibit 5.5a, a gap between the distribution curves becomes apparent after the 77th percentile,

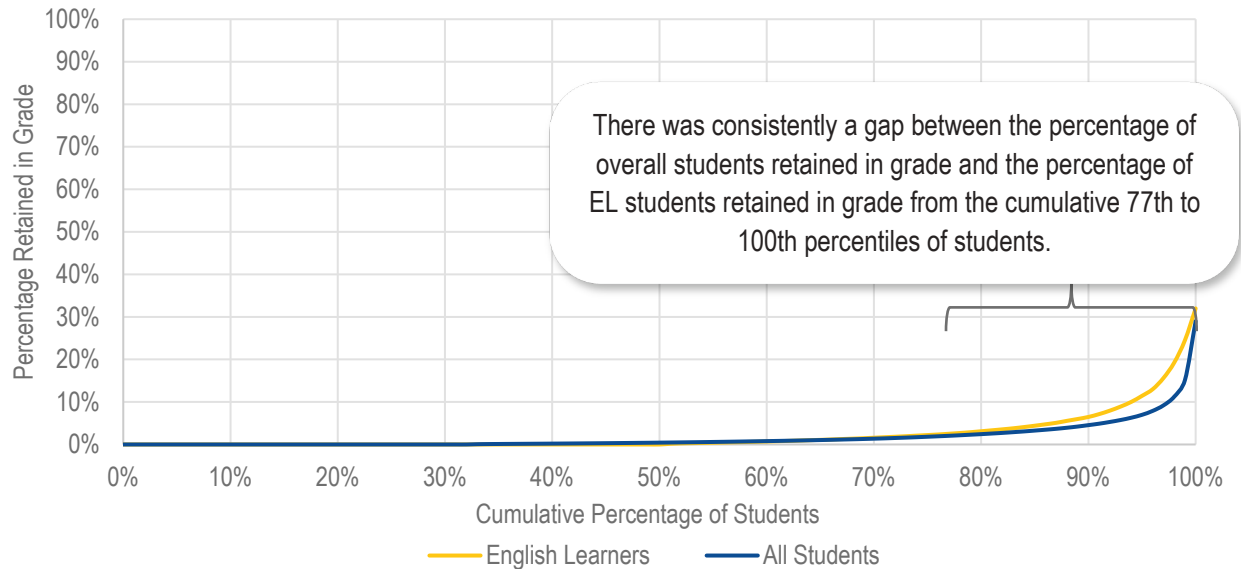
⁸⁷ Because of data irregularities, these data were trimmed to exclude schools below the 1st and above the 99th percentiles (n=765), for a total sample of 75,684 schools.

⁸⁸ Because of data irregularities, these data were trimmed to exclude schools below the 1st and above the 99th percentiles (n=954), for a total sample of 94,431 schools.

⁸⁹ Because of data irregularities, these data were trimmed to exclude schools below the 1st and above the 99th percentiles (n=765), for a total sample of 75,684 schools.

where EL students were in schools where a higher proportion of EL students were retained in grade, while students overall were in schools with lower proportions of students retained in grade.

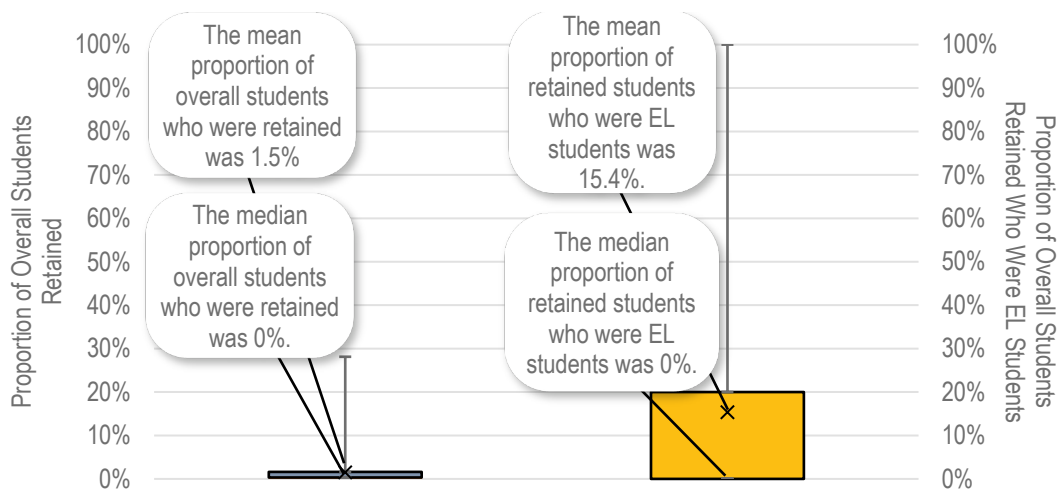
Exhibit 5.5a. Percentage Retained in Grade for English Learner Students and for Students Overall: School Year 2017–18



The data suggest that, while overall the proportion is low, in some contexts EL students made up a substantial proportion of retained students. As plotted in Exhibit 5.5b, across all sample schools that enrolled EL students and reported some retention in grade (47,588), the median percentage of EL students retained was 0%.⁹⁰ This means that EL students represented none of the students retained in more than 50% of schools that enrolled EL students and reported retention in grade. However, as represented by the “x” on Exhibit 5.5b, the mean of the same measure across schools was higher, at 15.4%. In comparison, the mean rate of student retention of all schools reporting any student retention in grade (95,385) was 1.5%. This means the mean rate of retention in grade for students overall was about 14 percentage points lower than the mean rate for EL students.

⁹⁰ Because of data irregularities, these data were trimmed to exclude schools below the 1st and above the 99th percentiles (n=131).

Exhibit 5.5b. Proportion of All Students Retained and Proportion of Students Retained Who Were English Learner Students: School Year 2017–18⁹¹



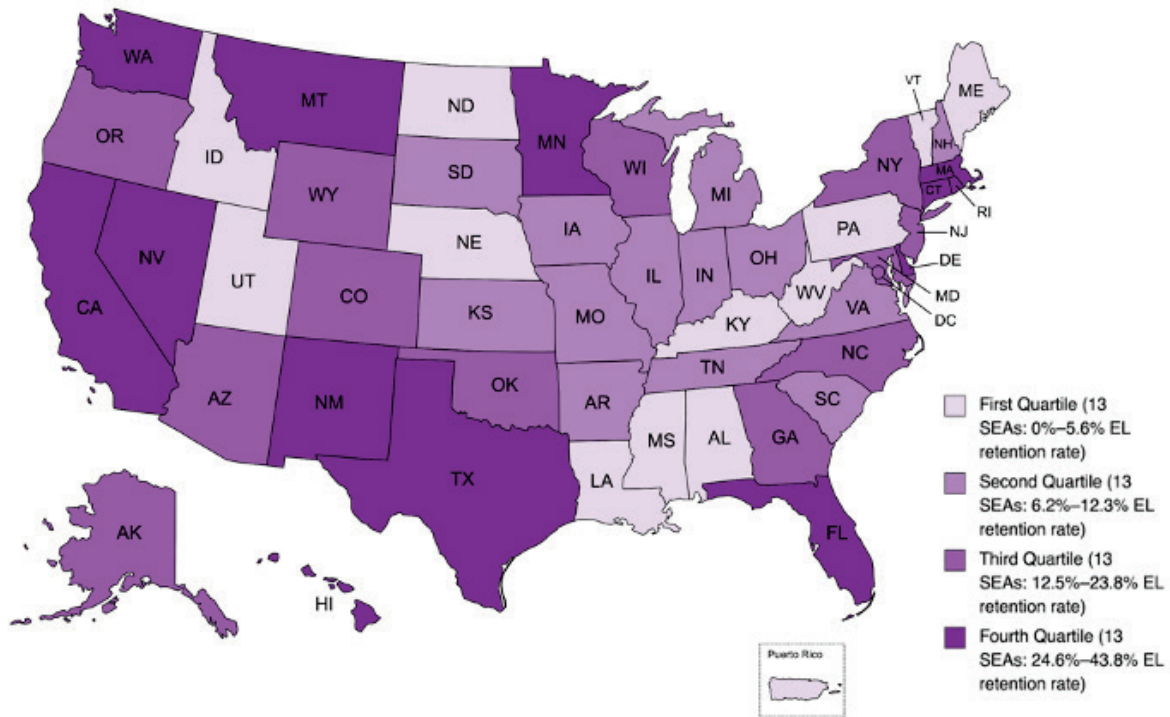
EL students were particularly likely to be retained in grade in elementary school, with mean retention rates between approximately 14–19% in K through fifth grade.⁹² The differences between median and mean values suggest that there were some contexts where EL retention-in-grade rates were very high, with these extreme values influencing the mean EL retention-in-grade value while not impacting the median value, which is less sensitive to extreme values. Indeed, certain states had noticeably higher rates of EL retention than others. As mapped in Exhibit 5.5c for third-grade retention, there were 13 states where ELs constituted a quarter or more of all retained students; Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, and New Mexico, were the five states where ELs comprised the highest proportion of students retained compared to other states. Although some of these states did have comprehensive third-grade reading and retention policies in place during SY 2017–18 (e.g., Nevada, Minnesota), the states with the highest proportions of ELs among retained students appear to represent a mix of policies overall.⁹³ For fifth-grade retention, displayed in Exhibit 5.5d, Rhode Island, Minnesota, California, Texas, and Washington, D.C., had the highest proportion of students retained who were EL students.

⁹¹ This exhibit plots two different outcome measures. For EL students, the exhibit plots the school-level proportion of retained students who were EL students. For students overall, the figure plots the proportion of students overall who were retained.

⁹² Because the percentage of EL students retained of all students retained in each grade is based on schools reporting at least one overall student retained in each grade, the *n* varies significantly from grade to grade. This may be due to differing policies across states and LEAs around retaining students in grades.

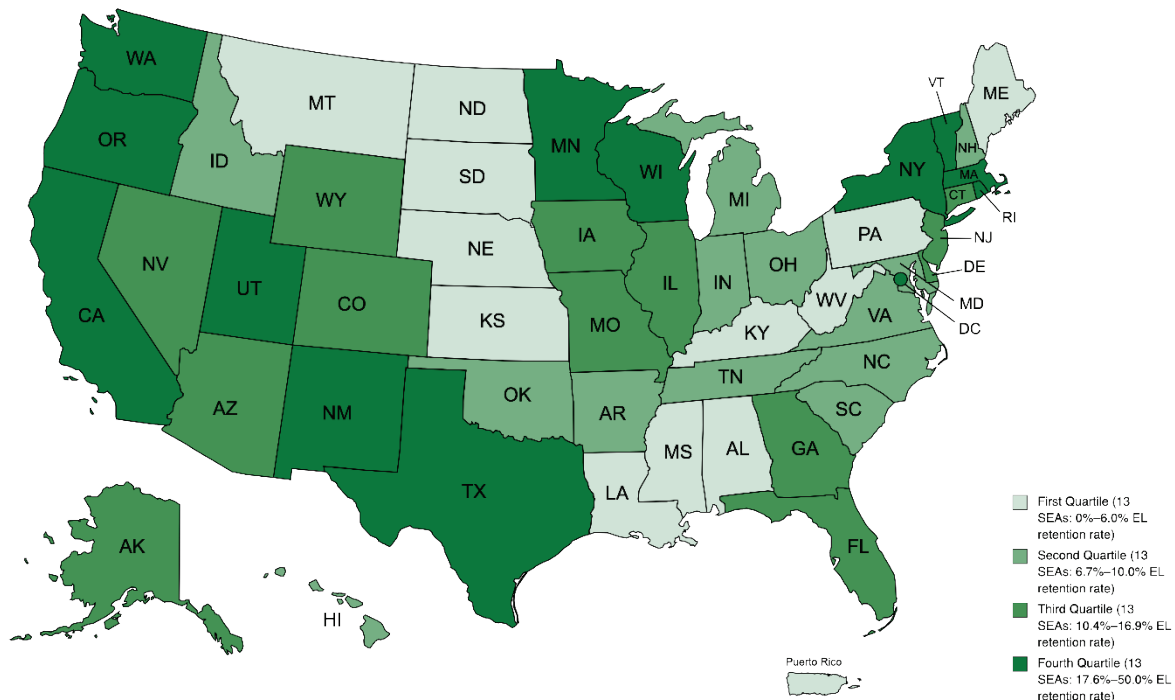
⁹³ Council of Chief State School Officers. (2019). *Third grade reading laws: Implementation and impact*. <https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/CCSSO%20CEELO%20third%20grade%20reading.pdf>

Exhibit 5.5c. English Learner Third-Grade Retentions as a Proportion of All Retentions by State: School Year 2017–18⁹⁴



⁹⁴ Because of data irregularities, these data were trimmed to exclude any school reporting more EL students retained than overall students retained in the third grade (n=95,326).

Exhibit 5.5d. English Learner Fifth-Grade Retentions as a Proportion of All Retentions by State: School Year 2017–18⁹⁵



Takeaways: Student Access to and Participation in Learning Opportunities

The data points from this chapter suggest that EL students were underrepresented in certain learning opportunities, including Algebra I, AP courses, and IB courses. In light of these data points, many schools and LEAs may be interested in adjusting certain policies or practices to ensure that EL students have equitable access to grade-level and rigorous instruction. The resources provided below may help do so.

The data points from this chapter also suggest that EL students were underrepresented in gifted and talented education programs. Again, the resources below may support practitioners in improving identification pathways for students to ensure equitable access.

Finally, descriptions of retention-in-grade rates suggest that there may be some schools and LEAs in which a high proportion of EL students were retained in grade or in which EL students made up a high proportion of students retained in grade. In these contexts, it may be useful to examine the process by which they are determining whether students should be retained in grade to ensure EL students are not systematically or structurally retained in grade because of their assessed English proficiency.

⁹⁵ Because of data irregularities, these data were trimmed to exclude any school reporting more EL students retained than overall students retained in the fifth grade (n=95,376).

Additional Resources

The following resources provide research-based practices and recommendations, as well as guidance on policies and practices that may improve ELs' access to rigorous learning opportunities. These resources may be of interest to educators, policymakers, or parents who wish to learn more about or improve instructional quality and learning opportunities for EL students.

- [15 Tips for Improving Identification of Gifted EL Students](#) (website with tips, documents, and research reports by the National Center for Research on Gifted Education)
- [How State, District, and School Levers Can Improve the Course Access of Students Classified as English Learners in Secondary Schools](#) (white paper by the National Research & Development Center to Improve Education for Secondary English Learners)
- [English Learners in STEM Subjects: Transforming Classrooms, Schools, and Lives](#) (Consensus Study Report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine)
- [Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School](#) (Institute of Education Sciences practice guide)
- [NCELA Teacher Resources](#), including the following:
 - [Integrating Language While Teaching Mathematics](#)
 - [Integrating Language While Teaching STEM: Integrating Language Into Early Childhood Education](#)

Appendix A: About the Data in This Report

Data Sources

The Department regularly collects data from SEAs and LEAs about various aspects of their services and students. Major data collection efforts include the following:

- Consolidated State Performance Reports (CSPRs)⁹⁶
- CRDC⁹⁷
- CCD⁹⁸
- EDFacts
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)⁹⁹
- Various surveys from NCES, such as the Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies, the Schools and Staffing Survey, and the National Household Education Survey¹⁰⁰

The primary purpose of these collections is to obtain and provide information that allows both the federal government and the general public to see how federal funds are being used to educate students, as well as to track student opportunities, learning, and achievement over time and across settings. Most of the data the government collects are available to the public to be explored and analyzed. The current report uses publicly available data from SY 2017–18 from two of the sources above: the CCD and the CRDC.

The Civil Rights Data Collection

The CRDC is a mandatory survey of data from public school districts and schools in the 50 states, Washington, D.C., and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. It collects data on leading civil rights indicators related to student access and barriers to educational opportunities from preschool through 12th grade. CRDC data are reported and disaggregated by race/ethnicity, sex, limited English proficiency, and disability. Data in this report are based on the publicly available CRDC dataset, which includes privacy protections for students and schools.

⁹⁶ For more information on the CSPR, please visit <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-administration/about-us/consolidated-state-performance-reports/>.

⁹⁷ For more information on the CRDC and to access CRDC data, please visit <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/>.

⁹⁸ For more information on the CCD and to access CCD data, please visit <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>.

⁹⁹ For more information on the NAEP, please visit <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.

¹⁰⁰ For a complete list of NCES surveys and program areas, please visit <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/>.

Box A.1: About the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)

The Department of Education Organization Act, 20 U.S.C. § 3413(c)(1), conveys to the assistant secretary for civil rights the authority to “collect or coordinate the collection of data necessary to ensure compliance with civil rights laws within the jurisdiction of the Office for Civil Rights.”

The civil rights laws enforced by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) for which the CRDC collects data include Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin; Title IX of the *Education Amendments of 1972*, which prohibits discrimination based on sex; and Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability.

The CRDC is an aspect of OCR’s overall enforcement and monitoring strategy to ensure that recipients of the Department’s federal financial assistance do not discriminate on the bases of race, color, national origin, sex, or disability. OCR uses CRDC data in case investigations to assist with determining whether a recipient is in compliance with federal civil rights law(s). OCR also uses CRDC data to identify potentially serious, systemic civil rights compliance concerns that warrant OCR’s initiation of proactive compliance reviews. Further, OCR uses CRDC data to determine whether to provide policy guidance and technical assistance to educational institutions, parents, students, and others.

The Common Core of Data/The Elementary/Secondary Information System

The Department’s primary database on public elementary and secondary education in the United States is the CCD. The CCD surveys are conducted annually and collect data about all public elementary and secondary schools, all LEAs, and all SEAs throughout the United States. The CCD contains three categories of information: general descriptive information on schools and school districts, data on students and staff, and fiscal data. The general descriptive information includes name, address, phone number, and type of locale; the data on students and staff include selected demographic characteristics; and the fiscal data cover revenue and current expenditures. The data in this report were organized and downloaded using the Elementary/Secondary Information System, an NCES web application that allows users to quickly view public and private school data and create custom tables and charts using CCD data.

Dataset Description

This report uses data from the CRDC and the CCD from SY 2017–18. The data from the two sources have been merged using NCES identification numbers to match LEA- and school-level information between the two surveys. Summary information about the characteristics of K–12 students, schools, and LEAs is provided in Box 1.2. However, it is important to note that the exact number of students or schools underlying a specific data point will vary chapter by chapter and sometimes within a chapter by data point. For example, information about access to AP courses or exams applies only to students enrolled in grades nine to 12, so a different sample is used than when considering per-pupil funding that applies to a whole school population. **Each chapter (and/or data point) thus clarifies the relevant sample of students, schools, and LEAs on which it is based.**

Characteristics of Unmatched LEAs and Schools

In merging the CRDC and CCD datasets, not all schools and LEAs could be included. First, because the EL label is used only for students in grades K–12, schools were omitted if they reported having no students, having only preschool students, or having more students in preschool than in their total preschool through grade 12 enrollment.¹⁰¹ Following these exclusions, 873 distinct LEAs could not be matched across the two datasets and were also excluded. These LEAs contained:

- 74,693 EL students (roughly 1.5% of all ELs in the country),
- 460,199 students overall, and
- 952 distinct schools belonging to a subset of the 873 distinct LEAs in the unmatched data.

Nearly all of the excluded LEAs (778, or 89.1%) came from California. The remaining 95 LEAs came from 11 other states, with no more than 25 LEAs excluded from any other state. In sum, the EL students excluded from this report make up only 1.5% of the K–12 EL population. The total students excluded represent only 0.93% of the total K–12 population.

¹⁰¹ Instances such as these are presumably data entry errors, though it is not possible for us to confirm that based on the information available in the federal dataset.