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RETHINKING ENGLISH LEARNER DATA

Illinois' Plans Under the
Every Student Succeeds Act

JANUARY 2018

About the Author



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Acknowledgments

This work would not be possible without generous support from the Stone Foundation along with the Heising-Simons and McKnight Foundations. I thank New America colleagues Elena Silva, Lindsey Tepe, Jenny Muñiz, and Sabrina Detlef for their valuable insights and suggestions on this project; and Tyler Richardett, who directed layout and publication. Thanks to Ben Boer, Paige Williams, Elliot Regenstein, Joyce Weiner, and Libia Gil as well as New America-Chicago colleagues, Daniel Lurie and Harish Patel, for their thought partnership on this project. I am especially grateful to Karen Garibay-Mulattieri and Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro for sharing their expertise in feedback on an earlier draft.

Terminology

This paper uses the term English learner (EL) to refer to students between the ages of 3–21 enrolled in the PreK–12 educational system who have a native language other than English and who are in the process of developing their academic English language proficiency. This definition aligns with that used in a recent consensus report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*.

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INTRODUCTION

Illinois—and Chicago in particular, as the “Big Apple of the Midwest”—has long been a hub for newcomers to the country.¹ In 1870, 48 percent of Chicago’s population was foreign-born, a larger proportion than any other city in North America, with waves of arrivals from Germany and Ireland followed later by those from Italy, Russia, and the Slavic region.²

Today, the state’s foreign-born demographics continue to grow and shift. Across the region, recent immigrants from Asia and Latin America have helped offset population loss from native-born residents, providing “a demographic lifeline,” as a recent report from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs described.³ In October 2017, new census data showed Latinos, mostly of Mexican descent, had become the largest minority group in the Chicago metropolitan area, constituting nearly one-third of its population.⁴ At the same time, in addition to their dominant presence within city lines, new Latino immigrant enclaves in surrounding and downstate suburbs are growing rapidly.⁵

Reflective of these demographics, Illinois has become home to the fifth largest population of K–12 English learners (ELs) in the U.S.⁶ Around one in ten students in the state are classified as EL, a figure that has grown 83 percent over the last 15 years.⁷ Thirty percent of ELs attend school in Chicago and 60 percent in the Windy City’s

suburbs.⁸ The vast majority speak Spanish as their native language (80 percent), followed by Arabic (3 percent), Polish (3 percent), and Urdu (1 percent), and are concentrated in the early years, 60 percent enrolled in grades PreK–3.⁹

Illinois’ story illustrates trends playing out in school communities across the country as migration patterns change and immigrants start or settle their families in new areas. Some communities, most dramatically in the Southeast and other parts of the Midwest, are dealing with ELs for the first time.¹⁰ Others have a long history of trying to serve ELs but have struggled to do so equitably. In Illinois, both of these realities are simultaneously at play.

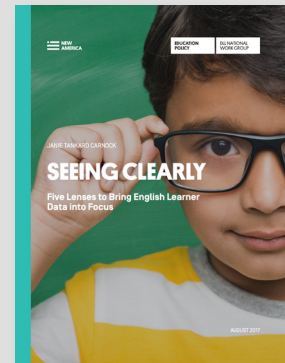
Now, federal policy is reshaping how public education systems must respond to these learners. In light of the latest reauthorization of federal K–12 education law under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, state leaders face increased autonomy and decision-making related to EL students. Moving the core of EL accountability from the law’s Title III to more heavily-funded Title I has increased the visibility of EL data collection, reporting, and use in accountability systems to flag the lowest-performing schools for ELs.

Illinois’ state plan for ESSA was approved in late August 2017 by the U.S. Department of Education.¹¹

Related Reading

A 2017 report, *Seeing Clearly: Five Lenses to Bring English Learner Data into Focus*, offers these considerations to improve the collection, use, and interpretation of EL data:

1. The EL subgroup is not static.
2. Learning a language takes time—but not forever.
3. ELs at different stages progress at different rates.
4. English skills impact academic performance.
5. Poverty affects most ELs and, as a result, their educational outcomes.



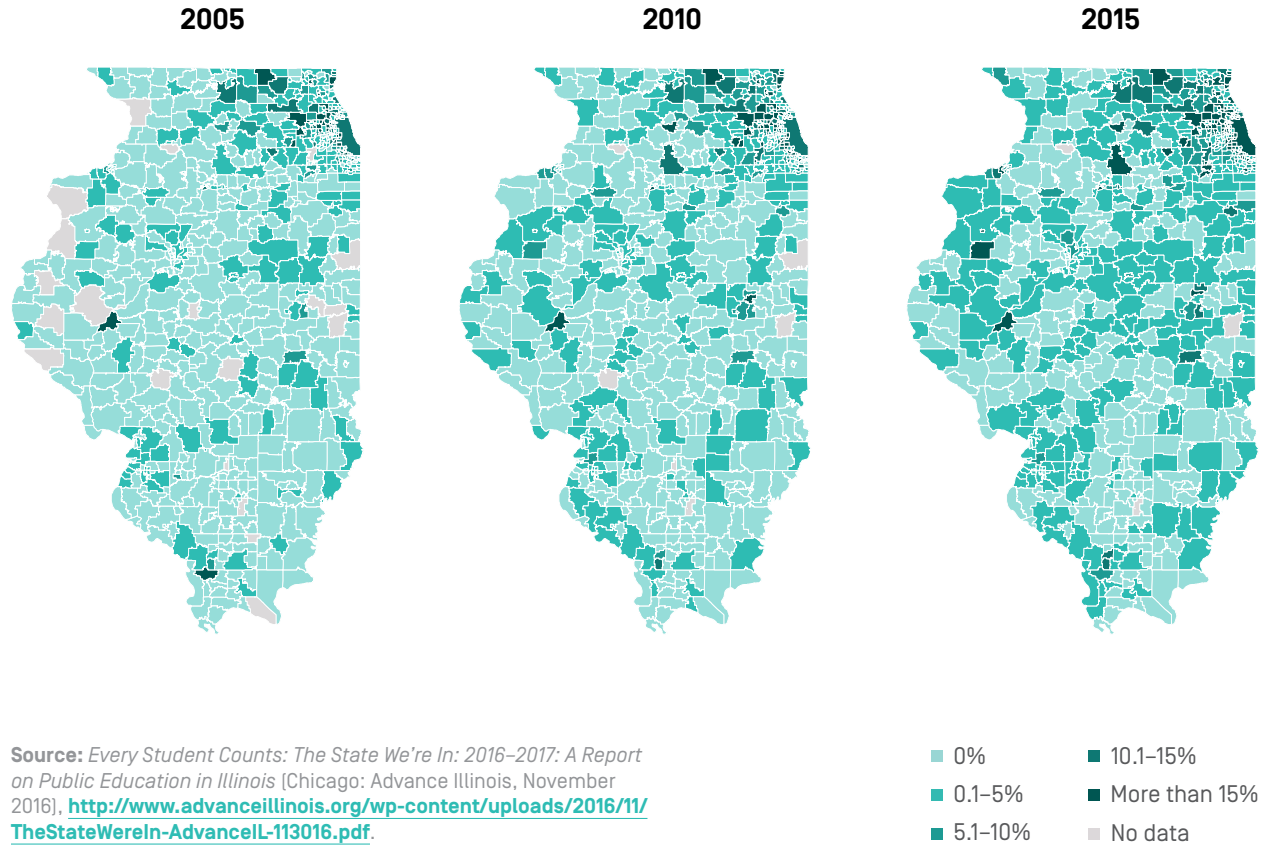
The state’s ideas on English learner data metrics and reporting, in particular, represent a bright spot in the national context. There are a host of compelling, research-based strengths to commend, even as other components could benefit from further refinement and consideration.

To a large extent, the strengths of Illinois’ proposed EL data policies under ESSA reflect an active, rooted community of advocacy and community-based groups. In particular, with limited staffing capacity, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) leveraged a key partnership with the Latino Policy Forum, a Chicago-based non-profit organization, who helped advise on EL decision-making.¹² The state’s ESSA efforts for ELs also received a boost with the hire of Libia Gil, former head of the federal Office of English Language Acquisition, who joined ISBE as its chief education officer in April 2017.¹³

Overall, Illinois’ approach to EL issues represents a compelling example of trying to navigate data quandaries thoughtfully with a commitment to elevating ELs as a historically marginalized group. EL data issues are complex, context-dependent, and—as with data and accountability decisions in general—representative of a set of inherent trade-offs. There is not one clearly-lit, prescriptive approach to follow.

What follows is an analysis of Illinois’ strengths and shortcomings with EL data, structured around a five-point framework from a recent New America report.¹⁴ It aims to illustrate one example that leaders in other states can use as a touchstone for their own EL-related plans under ESSA.

Figure 1 | The Growing Percentage of English Learners in Districts Across Illinois, 2005–2015



APPLYING KEY LENSES FOR EL DATA: ILLINOIS' APPROACH TO METRIC DESIGN

In August 2017, New America published a new report with five considerations to improve the collection, use, and interpretation of EL data. The following analysis is an application of these lenses to Illinois' ESSA plan.



1. The EL subgroup is not static.

- **Problem:** EL outcomes are a moving target in data systems, which biases data interpretations against current ELs.
- **Related data points:** Current EL academic achievement, graduation rates.
- **Solution:** Report all EL outcomes disaggregated by former and current EL status to track the progress of students previously identified as ELs from grades K–12.

Illinois deserves praise for its commitment to long-term data collection and reporting on ELs. Each year, students move through EL status like a revolving door, with some entering the subgroup to receive extra language services while at the same time others are exiting the subgroup. Under its ESSA plan,

Illinois decided to create a distinct subgroup category of “former ELs” in addition to the other subgroups required by ESSA.¹⁵ The state will collect and report data on these students through grade 12, beyond the four-year monitoring window required under ESSA. Tracking outcomes more longitudinally—after students exit EL services—is vital for getting a fuller picture of how ELs fare in the long run. Nationally, Illinois appears to be one of the only states planning to report former EL data in such an overt way.¹⁶

Leaders decided *not* to combine former ELs with the subgroup of current ELs for accountability, which ESSA allows states to do for up to four years after ELs exit.¹⁷ Many states are using this option, including those with sizable EL populations, like California, New York, and Texas. Instead, Illinois will keep the current and former EL subgroup distinct and use both separately for accountability purposes on all relevant metrics.

Combining current and former ELs into the one subgroup for accountability systems—ones that, in theory, trigger increased assistance and/or intervention from the state—is a subject of lively debate between various groups of EL researchers and advocates. On one hand, including former ELs helps to address the “moving target” nature of the EL subgroup, wherein schools do not get credit for

their most academically successful ELs who exit the status. Discounting such success can be extremely demoralizing to classroom educators.¹⁸ But others view former EL inclusion in terms of “masking:” the inclusion of former ELs will “mask” current EL performance and skew the data in the opposite way, obscuring the needs of struggling ELs.

EL experts Pete Goldschmidt and Kenji Hakuta note the divide between “two conceptions” of this issue in recent guidance for the Council of Chief State School Officers. Ultimately, they conclude that “the potential for [a masking] effect to change inferences about schools (and trigger subsequent action) is relatively small,” and note that “including [former ELs] into the EL subgroup has fairly consistent, positive effects and helps states and schools monitor language development, particularly for ELs on academic language arts and mathematics assessments administered in English.”¹⁹ Since Illinois chose to keep the two groups distinct in its Title I accountability structure, there will be no potential for masking current EL performance. However, this also means that current ELs—if held to the same academic proficiency bar as all other subgroups—will face a definitionally unattainable goal (for more on this idea, see the fourth point on page 8).



2. Learning a language takes time—but not forever.

- **Problem:** It is unrealistic to set a one-size-fits-all timeframe for language acquisition.
- **Related data points:** Reclassification rates, or English language proficiency (ELP) achievement.
- **Solution:** Differentiate timeframes for language acquisition. Use reclassification data with extreme caution. Monitor and report on ELs who have not exited after five to seven years.

Illinois establishes a reasonable timeframe for most ELs to attain English proficiency, although

it should further consider its data metrics and reporting in this area. Research suggests that reaching academic proficiency in a new language takes four to seven years on average, based on a variety of contextual factors.²⁰ Illinois has decided to set a rigorous goal of a five-year timeframe for ELs to achieve ELP. This timeframe starts in first grade, when students are first legally mandated to attend school in Illinois, or at the grade of entry for EL students who arrive later.²¹

Illinois’ uniform expectation for language learning, five years maximum, is a simple, straightforward goal which has the benefit of transparency for all. However, this five-year expectation may not be realistic for all ELs, particularly those with disabilities, those with limited or interrupted education, or in certain bilingual models. Research suggests that these groups take longer, on average, to reach English proficiency. It is possible to differentiate timelines for different EL students, an approach that Oregon is pursuing under ESSA, with timelines ranging from five to nine years.²² At the same time, this is a tradeoff, since such an approach does increase overall complexity.

In addition to the five-year timeline, state leaders plan to “provide technical assistance to districts to concentrate ongoing goals that identify long-term English learners.”²³ However, the ESSA document does not explicitly mention plans to report numbers on long-term ELs. The long-term EL category is a data point that several states, such as California and New York, have published in recent years to create greater visibility for EL students who are stagnating in services.²⁴

Finally, Illinois prudently does not plan to track a “reclassification rate,”²⁵ the percentage of kids who exited EL status in a prior year (formerly Title III’s Annual Measurable Achievement Objective 2 under No Child Left Behind). Reclassification rates are a blunt approach to data tracking that can create perverse incentives for schools to rush ELs to reclassification before they are ready to thrive in mainstream settings. Few states appear to be emphasizing reclassification rates under ESSA.



3. ELs at different stages progress at different rates.

- **Problem:** It is unrealistic to set one-size-fits-all expectations for year-to-year English language proficiency (ELP) growth.
- **Related data points:** ELP growth.
- **Solution:** Use growth models that account for contributing factors, like initial ELP level and grade level.

Illinois laudably takes into account the developmental realities that impact different ELs’ trajectories for language acquisition. Researchers

have widely noted a “lower is faster, higher is slower” rule for English development: on average, ELs in lower grades and lower ELP levels make more yearly growth than ELs in higher grades and higher ELP levels.²⁶ In recognition of this nonlinear nature to language growth, Illinois’ model incorporates initial ELP level and grade level to differentiate interim targets for individual ELs.

Over the five-year timeframe, Illinois plans to use a “growth-to-proficiency” model that establishes a series of interim targets for each student to make year to year based on his or her entry level performance data. Students are considered “making progress” if they score at or above their yearly targets (see **Table 1**).²⁷ In Illinois, a score of 4.8 out of 6 on WIDA’s ACCESS 2.0 exam equates to proficiency.

Table 1 | Illinois’ Differentiated Growth-to-Proficiency Model and Goals for Percent of ELs Making On-Target Annual Progress*

Year in EL Services	ELP Score Targets for Sample Student A†	ELP Score Targets for Sample Student B†	Year	Goal for Percent of ELs On-Target
Year 1 (initial ELP level)	1	2.6	2016	63.0
Year 2	2	3.2	2017	22.1
Year 3	2.9	3.7	2020	35.7
Year 4	3.9	4.3	2023	49.3
Year 5	4.8	4.8	2026	62.9
			2029	76.5
			2032	90.0

† In Illinois, a score of 4.8 out of 6 on WIDA’s ACCESS 2.0 exam equates to proficiency.

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 27–8.

*Illinois is currently transitioning to ACCESS for ELLs 2.0, the latest, more rigorous ELP exam developed by the WIDA consortium and also used by its 35 other member states. With the ACCESS 2.0 administered for the first time in 2017, state leaders face a dearth of data for setting appropriate goals under ESSA based on the new test. At the same time, recent scoring changes by WIDA earlier this year—the first in more than a decade—require ELs to demonstrate higher language skills to earn the same proficiency scores (on a scale of 1.0–6.0) that they would have in years past.²⁸ With a harder test and harder scoring standards, ELs suddenly have a much higher bar to clear to demonstrate ELP. Due to these changes, ISBE plans to revisit and amend ELP progress goals once three years of ACCESS 2.0 data are available.

Many states are moving towards “growth-to-proficiency” models like Illinois’ under ESSA, which overall provide a fairer, more valid model for measuring EL progress. The inevitable trade-off is that greater sophistication in metric design tends to reduce comprehensibility overall. As a contrast to Illinois, some states like California and Texas have decided to use a more basic system where any EL student is considered “making progress” if he or she moves up one level on the ELP test. But this model, while perhaps more transparent, does not account for the nonlinear nature of language acquisition.

Illinois plans to report performance on the EL growth-to-proficiency metric with the following descriptors: “schools making better than expected growth,” “schools making adequate growth,” and “schools making less than adequate growth.”²⁹ Its goal over the next 15 years is for 90 percent of ELs to be “making adequate growth.” In contrast to academic math and reading proficiency measures (as will be discussed below), a goal of 90 percent is at least hypothetically attainable for current ELs. In the coming years, this growth-to-proficiency measure will be a critical one for practitioners and advocates to evaluate how well schools are serving ELs.



4. English skills impact academic performance.

- **Problem:** Below a certain threshold of English proficiency, it is impossible to make valid claims about academic proficiency in English.
- **Related data points:** Current EL academic achievement, graduation rates.
- **Solution:** In general, use academic achievement data with extreme caution. Emphasize academic growth models for current ELs. Set different academic targets based on ELP level.

For all students, Illinois leads with a strong emphasis on academic *growth*: the academic growth indicator is weighted over two times as much (50 percent) as

the achievement indicator (20 percent) for math and reading.³⁰ Originally, ISBE proposed equal weighting of the growth and achievement indicators. However, comments during the required 30-day review period stressed that growth was of greater importance.³¹ The move towards academic growth models—in contrast to the achievement targets under No Child Left Behind—is more motivating to students and educators in perennially low-performing schools, including those serving ELs. For students still learning English, academic growth measures can be more helpful than one-size-fits-all proficiency bars, one that are impossible for ELs to meet on par with non-ELs due to emerging English skills.

For its academic proficiency measure, Illinois has set a goal for 90 percent of ELs in grades 3–8 to meet or exceed grade-level expectations in academic achievement for reading and math by 2032. In 2016, only 10 percent of ELs met expectations in reading and 13 percent did so in math (compared to 39 percent and 34 percent of non-ELs, respectively).³²

On its face, the goal of 90 percent may appear a rigorous example of holding all students to high expectations. But the EL subgroup is a fundamentally different category. Unlike most other subgroups under ESSA, such as those related to racial and ethnic identity, EL status is temporary and defined in developmental terms. *By definition*, current EL academic scores should lag in comparison to English-proficient peers. Coupled with the non-static, “revolving door” nature of EL status, setting a one-size-fits-all academic proficiency bar biases results against ELs because typically they start to exit just as they are reaching ELP levels where a language barrier does not interfere with their math and reading performance.³³

These developmental realities and data systems make tracking EL academic performance problematic for all states. Clearly, leaders should avoid holding students to academic goals that are impossible to achieve. However, it is still important to monitor how ELs are progressing academically, even at nascent English levels.

In contrast to academic proficiency, setting an expectation for 90 percent of ELs to make academic *growth* is hypothetically attainable and, as such, merits greater emphasis for ELs. Some EL experts have also argued that states could set differentiated academic expectations based on ELP and grade level.³⁴ This option is one that Illinois leaders, who are still in the process of determining how exact grade-level expectations will be set for accountability, could consider for ELs. Historically, setting differentiated proficiency bars based on student subgroup has been controversial, and federal law outlaws differentiating academic goals by student characteristic for both growth and proficiency. However, experts argue that ELP level counts as a “prior assessment result,” which is a factor permitted for setting academic growth models.³⁵

In any case, when tracking EL academic performance, Illinois’ “former EL” subgroup is a vital addition.³⁶ With outcomes on current and former ELs reported alongside each other, the current EL data will be contextualized within the fuller picture of how ELs do once they have exited and have the language skills necessary for success with grade-level content in English.



5. Poverty affects most ELs and, as a result, their educational outcomes.

- **Problem:** Without consideration of how poverty impacts the EL population, interpretations of EL data may misdiagnose root causes.
- **Related data points:** All.
- **Solution:** Report demographic needs data alongside outcomes data to highlight the realities of school and district needs.

Though its ESSA plans appear compliant with federal requirements, Illinois should continue to seek innovative ways to highlight how poverty impacts ELs in particular. Across Illinois, the number of districts serving students who live in poverty has swelled in recent years. In 2015, 43 percent of school districts enrolled populations where at least half of students were from low-income backgrounds, an increase from 13 percent of districts in 2005.³⁷ Within these broader trends, research shows that poverty impacts the EL population disproportionately: Fifty-three percent of young ELs in Illinois live in low-income families compared to 39 percent of non-ELs.³⁸

Poverty has a significant impact on learning for all students, including ELs. Low-income students often start school behind in emergent math and literacy skills and with higher incidences of trauma compared to wealthier peers. This background intersects with structural inequities present across education systems, including disparities in access to high-quality teachers and funding levels. Illinois has long been notorious for its antiquated school funding formula. In 2015, the national advocacy organization Education Trust ranked the state last in the country for its failure to account for low-income students in the dispersal of state dollars.³⁹ After much political upheaval, state legislators passed a new formula to provide poor districts with greater funds in August 2017, a promising, if overdue, reform.⁴⁰

To be sure, as stated in the ESSA plan, state administrators are mindful of “the need to reflect complex contextual factors” related to how poverty impacts student outcomes as they now move to implement ESSA requirements.⁴¹ The core accountability system includes “economically disadvantaged” as a federally-required subgroup, in addition to the EL and racial/ethnic groups, to reveal gaps in student performance. Leaders should consider disaggregating the data further to flag the performance of students who are both EL and low-income to further highlight the needs of students at this point of intersection.

LOOKING AHEAD: REPORTING EL DATA AND MAKING IT MATTER

Overall, Illinois' data systems for English learners under ESSA represent an emerging bright spot. The state is a national exemplar for its commitment to more longitudinal reporting on EL outcomes and its emphasis on academic growth metrics for all students. The state also laudably takes into account key developmental factors, ones that impact diverse EL growth trajectories, in the design of its ELP indicator. Still, it is unclear whether stated academic achievement goals will be attainable for ELs. Moreover, the state should further elevate the needs of this population by including clearer disaggregation of data on how poverty, homelessness, student mobility, and other factors impact EL students.

For all states, redesigning metrics to collect more accurate and complete data on ELs is a vital first step. States also need to ensure data are publicly available and intentionally disseminated to empower education leaders, families, advocates, and other community members invested in EL success.

ESSA requires all states to publish annual report cards with data available on all accountability indicators, including performance on annual tests disaggregated by race and ethnicity, family income, and language status.⁴² Because of the new requirements, for the first time, the ELP

“growth-to-proficiency” indicator will be included on Illinois' public report card in addition to EL academic scores in math and reading, which were previously included.

Illinois—like many other states—is grappling with how to publish data in the most user-friendly format, including through online data visualization. “A challenge when taking the data from the accountability system and creating a single summative designation,” Illinois leaders write in their ESSA plan, “is to do so in a way that is intuitive to the viewer yet meaningfully demonstrates the complexity of the work that occurs in schools each day.”⁴³

In response to this challenge, ISBE is developing a nested, three-layered system: 1) the “all students” summative view, 2) an aggregate subgroup view, and 3) subgroup performance on individual accountability indicators. Each successive layer represents greater data disaggregation, allowing users to drill down to information most meaningful to them (see **Example of Nested Data Visualization for Illinois' Report Card**). At all layers, each indicator will receive a color-coded rating: 1) blue for “exemplary,” 2) green for “commendable,” 3) orange for “underperforming,” and 4) red for “lowest-performing.”

Example of Nested Data Visualization for Illinois' Report Card

Page [1]: "All Students View"

Example Elementary School	Overall Designation
All Students	Tier 1: Exemplary School

Key

- Tier 1: Exemplary School
- Tier 2: Commendable School
- Tier 3: Underperforming School
- Tier 4: Lowest-Performing School

Note: In these examples, blank cells indicate that either there were no enrolled students in the subgroup or the n size was less than 10.

Child Page [2]: "Aggregate Subgroup View," All Subgroups

Example Elementary School	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Overall Grade Level Aggregated Designation
Economically Disadvantaged Students	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 2: Commendable School
Children with Disabilities	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School
English Learners	Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School
Former English Learners			Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School
Students Formerly with a Disability				
Hispanic or Latino	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 1: Exemplary School
American Indian or Alaska Native				
Asian	Tier 2: Commendable School		Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 2: Commendable School
Black or African American	Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander				
White	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School
Two or More Races				
Student Who Has a Parent in the Armed Forces				
Children in Foster Care				

Grandchild Page [3]: "Subgroup Performance on Individual Accountability Indicators," English Learner Subgroup

English Learner Subgroup	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
ELA Proficiency	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School
Math Proficiency	Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 2: Commendable School
ELA and Math Growth (Combined)	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School
Progress in EL Proficiency	Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School
Chronic Absenteeism	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School
Climate Survey	Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 1: Exemplary School
Fine Arts	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 1: Exemplary School
Grade Level Rating	Tier 2: Commendable School	Tier 1: Exemplary School	Tier 1: Exemplary School

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 61–2.

The proposed data visualization system strikes a balance between providing users an overall, summative rating and providing access to more granular data. Going forward, ISBE should invest in communications strategies, such as through webinars or other events, to provide clarification around what each data metric means and how to navigate both online and printed reports.⁴⁴ For the EL community, translation of these reports into students' home languages is crucial to engaging families equitably. ISBE's website currently publishes the reports in English and Spanish.

Leaders should also consider publishing a separate, standalone EL report that compiles the data to highlight demographic factors (i.e., poverty, homelessness, student mobility, and others) and performance indicators for the EL population. Leaders in Oregon passed legislation mandating such an EL report in 2015, and the requirement has elevated EL students in policy and general public discussions.⁴⁵ From 1998 to 2014, Illinois published a similar report—with an increasing degree of detail over the years—that reported outcomes along with some demographic information, although none that noted students' economic background.⁴⁶ This report provided a relatively high degree of public transparency for EL data compared to most other states during most of the No Child Left Behind era. However, the reports have not been continued in recent years due to the state's limited capacity and, in specific, the departure of a key staff member who oversaw their publication. ISBE is currently seeking to hire staff to build bandwidth for EL issues.⁴⁷

Ultimately, beyond empowering public stakeholders with access to clear information, EL data metrics under ESSA are intended to trigger accountability—concrete action from the state in response to poor performers. Illinois' ESSA plan sets the ELP indicator as 5 percent in the overall accountability system that will flag schools.⁴⁸ Some advocates have questioned whether this threshold is high enough to ensure that EL performance is a priority. Across the country, the majority of states have proposed weights for this indicator ranging

from 5 to 10 percent with some laudable outliers, such as New Jersey at 20 percent and Idaho at 30 percent for K–8 schools.⁴⁹

Another key consideration in fostering districts' responsiveness to EL students is the required “*n* size,” the minimum number of students needed at a school to constitute a subgroup. If states set their *n* size too high, schools with smaller populations of ELs can be completely ignored in accountability systems. That is, in some schools and districts, the EL population is so small that its data would be masked if too high an *n* size is set.

After much deliberation, Illinois decided on an *n* size of 20 to balance statistical validity and reliability concerns with the desire to see the greatest number of students represented.⁵⁰ The Latino Policy Forum supported this figure, even as a National Center for Education Statistics report found states could reasonably set their *n* size at 10 or even as low as 5.⁵¹ That said, 20 is a marked improvement from Illinois' former *n* size of 45, which was one of the largest in the nation prior to the passage of ESSA.⁵²

Though it will be important to review and reflect on these policies in an ongoing way, taken together, Illinois stands as a leader on EL data issues. As multilingual student populations continue to evolve in new ways across the country, the state provides a model of EL data strategies under ESSA, ones with potential to bring greater visibility and establish more meaningful accountability for these diverse learners.

Satisfying new demands for EL data metrics and reporting is a difficult task to get right on the first try. So even after states' official ESSA plans are released and approved, leaders and advocates should push to improve their systems and make adjustments when needed as data are collected. To serve the EL population equitably, all states must have clear vision of EL students' needs and successes in order to evaluate the status quo accurately and respond strategically.

Notes

¹ Ruben O. Martinez, *Latinos in the Midwest* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2011); Rob Paral, *Looking Back to Forward: Lessons from the Immigration Histories of Midwestern Cities* (Chicago: The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2017), https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/report_lessons_immigration_history_midwestern_cities_170915.pdf.

² Rob Paral, “Chicago’s Immigrants Break Old Patterns,” *The Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute*, September 1, 2003, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/chicagos-immigrants-break-old-patterns>.

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⁷ Karen Garibay-Mulattieri and Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro, “English Learners and the Every Student Succeeds Act: Highlights of the Illinois Plan,” *Latino Policy Forum*, <http://www.latinopolicyforum.org/publications/reports/document/ELs-and-ESSA-Highlights-of-IL-Plan.pdf>.

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Latino Policy Forum, June 25, 2013, 4, http://www.latinopolicyforum.org/resources/webinars/document/Website_ELL-Demographic-Overview-6-25-13.pdf.

⁹ Illinois State Board of Education, Data Analysis and Accountability Division and English Language Learning Division, *Bilingual Education Programs and English Learners in Illinois SY 2014 Statistical Report*, August 2016, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/el-program-stat-rpt14.pdf>.

¹⁰ Janie T. Carnock, “Southeast is Fastest Growing Region for English Learners” *EdCentral* (blog), New America, June 8, 2017, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/southeast-els/>.

¹¹ Illinois State Board of Education, *ESSA State Plan for Illinois*, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/ESSA-State-Plan.aspx>.

¹² Partners for Each and Every Child, *Process and Protest: Have State Engagement Efforts Under ESSA Been Meaningful?* (July 2017), http://partnersforeachandeverychild.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/P4_ProcessandProtest_7.13.17.pdf, 45–6.

¹³ Gil developed the widely-disseminated EL Toolkit during her time at the U.S. Department of Education and has started to administer a series of webinars to train departmental staff and stakeholders across the state on its key principles.

¹⁴ Janie Tankard Carnock, *Seeing Clearly: Five Lenses to Bring English Learner Data into Focus* (Washington, DC: New America, August 2017), <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/seeing-clearly/>.

¹⁵ Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 18. See page 5 of *Seeing Clearly* for the legal requirements under Title III for EL data reporting. Under NCLB, states had to monitor “former ELs” for two years after they exited services.

¹⁶ Prompted by the passage of a 2015 state law, Oregon publishes an annual EL report that features a former EL subgroup through Grade 12. Prior to ESSA, states like Washington and New York had recently changed administrative rules to create an “ever-EL” category to

monitor former ELs over their entire K–12 careers after reclassification.

¹⁷ Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 18, 66; Jason Helfer (deputy superintendent, Illinois State Board of Education), e-mail to author, December 11, 2017.

¹⁸ Megan Hopkins, Karen D. Thompson, Robert Linqunti, Kenji Hakuta, and Diane August, “Fully Accounting for English Learner Performance: A Key Issue in ESEA Reauthorization,” *Educational Researcher* 42 (March 2013), 5.

¹⁹ Pete Goldschmidt and Kenji Hakuta, *Incorporating English Learner Progress into State Accountability Systems* (Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers, January 2017), 37–39.

²⁰ “Time It Takes to Learn English,” Policy Explainers, New America Education Policy Program, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-explainers/early-ed-prek-12/dual-language-learners/reclassification/time-it-takes-learn-english/>.

²¹ Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 27. In Illinois, to achieve ELP, students must demonstrate proficiency on the WIDA ACCESS 2.0 exam.

²² Janie Tankard Carnock, *Pioneering Change: Leveraging Data to Reform English Learner Education in Oregon* (Washington, DC: New America, August 2017), 14, https://na-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/Pioneering_Change.pdf.

²³ Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 123.

²⁴ New York State Education Department, *ELL Demographics & Performance 2015–2016*, http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/ell_demographicperformance_2017-ver-1516.pdf; Teresa Watanabe, “California Schools Step Up Efforts to Help ‘Long-Term English Learners,’” *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 2014.

²⁵ Pete Goldschmidt and Kenji Hakuta, *Incorporating English Learner Progress into State Accountability Systems* (Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers, January 2017), 16.

²⁶ H. Gary Cook, Tim Boals, Carsten Wilmes, and Martin Santos, *Issues in the Development of Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) for WIDA Consortium* (Madison: Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2007).

²⁷ Karen Garibay-Mulattieri and Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro, “English Learners and the Every Student Succeeds Act: Highlights of the Illinois Plan,” *Latino Policy Forum*, <http://www.latinopolicyforum.org/publications/reports/document/ELs-and-ESSA-Highlights-of-IL-Plan.pdf>; Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 27: “ELs must make annual progress towards the composite score of 4.8 or above on ACCESS 2.0 within five years. Students measure toward proficiency is individually based on entry level performance. [Students are] making progress provided that they score at or above their calculated interim target as shown in the chart below. The interim target is calculated by interpolating between the student’s entry level ACCESS 2.0 score and the minimum exit score of 4.8. In the example below, Student A needs to make approximately 1.0 point of growth per year to meet [his or her] target. Student B would need to make 0.6 points of growth per year to meet [his or her] target.”

²⁸ Corey Mitchell, “Thousands of English-Learners Fall Short on Test of Language Skills,” *Education Week*, July 17, 2017, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/07/19/thousands-of-english-learners-fall-short-on-test.html>.

²⁹ Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 48.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 46.

³² Ibid., 17–23.

³³ Latino Policy Forum expressed concerns over the 90 percent goal set for attaining academic proficiency applied to the current EL subgroup for these reasons

related to attainability, according to Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro (manager of Education Policy and Research, *Latino Policy Forum*), e-mail to author, December 7, 2017.

³⁴ Megan Hopkins, Karen D. Thompson, Robert Linqanti, Kenji Hakuta, and Diane August, “Fully Accounting for English Learner Performance: A Key Issue in ESEA Reauthorization,” *Educational Researcher* 42 (March 2013), 5.

³⁵ Pete Goldschmidt and Kenji Hakuta, *Incorporating English Learner Progress into State Accountability Systems* (Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers, January 2017), 7.

³⁶ Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 18.

³⁷ *Every Student Counts: The State We’re In: 2016-2017: A Report on Public Education in Illinois* (Chicago: Advance Illinois, November 2016), 8, <http://www.advanceillinois.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/TheStateWereIn-Advancell-113016.pdf>.

³⁸ Maki Park, Anna O’Toole, and Caitlin Katsiaficas, *Dual Language Learners: A Demographic and Policy Profile for Illinois* (Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, October 2017).

³⁹ *Funding Gaps 2015: Too Many States Still Spend Less on Educating Students Who Need the Most* (Washington, DC: The Education Trust, March 2015), 4, <https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/FundingGaps2015-TheEducationTrust1.pdf>. Another, more recent, analysis from the Urban Institute also shows Illinois’ former education funding policy as one of the most regressive in the country. See Matthew Chingos and Kristin Blagg, “School Funding: Do Poor Kids Get Their Fair Share?” The Urban Institute, May 31, 2017, <http://apps.urban.org/features/school-funding-do-poor-kids-get-fair-share/>.

⁴⁰ Daarel Burnette, “In ‘Historic’ Compromise, Illinois Lawmakers Pass School Funding Formula,” *Education Week*, August 30, 2017, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2017/08/illinois_gov_expected_to_sign_into_law_new_school_funding_formula.html.

⁴¹ Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 71.

⁴² *Leveraging ESSA: Policy Opportunities for English Learners in Illinois* (Berkeley, CA: Partners for Each and Every Child, September 2016), 7, http://partnersforeachandeverychild.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/P4_IL_LeveragingESSA_ELL_10.19.16.pdf. In Illinois, the current report card for 2016–17 data includes ELs in math and ELA, not ELP, according to the Illinois State Board of Education, *Illinois Report Card Data*, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/ilreportcarddata>. According to non-regulatory guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, states should create report cards that are: 1) developed in consultation with parents, 2) concise, 3) understandable and uniform in format, 4) accessible, and 5) on a single web page. Administrative regulations detailing specific report card requirements were overturned under the Trump administration in November 2016. For more, see *Every Student Succeeds Act: State and Local Report Cards Non-Regulatory Guidance* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, January 2017), <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essastatereportcard.pdf>.

⁴³ Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 60.

⁴⁴ *Process and Protest: Have State Engagement Efforts Under ESSA Been Meaningful?* (Berkeley, CA: Partners for Each and Every Child, July 2017), 44, http://partnersforeachandeverychild.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/P4_ProcessandProtest_7.13.17.pdf.

⁴⁵ Janie Tankard Carnock, *Pioneering Change: Leveraging Data to Reform English Learner Education in Oregon* (Washington, DC: New America, August 2017).

⁴⁶ Illinois State Board of Education, *Bilingual Education Statistics*, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Bilingual-Education-Statistics.aspx>.

⁴⁷ Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro (manager of Education Policy and Research, *Latino Policy Forum*), e-mail to author, October 27, 2017; Libia Gil (chief education officer, Illinois State Board of Education), interview with author, October 24, 2017.

⁴⁸ Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 47. At the elementary level, indicators are weighted as follows: 10 percent academic

proficiency in reading, 10 percent academic proficiency in math, 50 percent academic growth in reading and math, 5 percent ELP growth, 5 percent chronic absenteeism, 5 percent school climate surveys.

⁴⁹ Conor Williams, “In Praise of New Jersey, Illinois, Louisiana—3 States Smartly Using ESSA to Help English Learners,” *The 74*, June 12, 2017, <https://www.the74million.org/article/williams-in-praise-of-new-jersey-illinois-louisiana-3-states-smartly-using-essa-to-help-english-learners/>.

⁵⁰ Illinois State Board of Education, *State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>, 66–7. Under

ESSA, states can set different n sizes for reporting and for accountability. So, the state could decide to set a lower n size for reporting and a higher n size for accountability.

⁵¹ Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Statistical Methods for Protecting Personally Identifiable Information in Aggregate Reporting*, December 2010, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011603.pdf>.

⁵² James Taylor, Brian Stecher, Jennifer O’Day, Scott Naftel, and Kerstin Carlson Le Floch, *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act: Volume IX—Accountability Under NCLB: Final Report* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, January 2010), <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED508912.pdf>.



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