

Issue Brief 4: English Language Learners

The attached brief was developed to introduce and frame key issues under discussion by the Funding Formula Working Group.

These briefs do not address every issue that affects public education funding. By focusing on concise introductions to important and complicated topics, some detail and nuance has been intentionally omitted.

We welcome your feedback on these briefs or on any other topic related to Rhode Island's Funding Formula, which you may submit to edfundingri@ride.ri.gov.

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Issue Summary

English language learners (ELLs) are students who are actively learning English and are entitled to language support services. As a group, ELLs are complex and heterogeneous, ranging from students who have had formal education in their home country to students with little-to-no experience with literacy or numeracy in any language. Contrary to popular opinion, ELLs are not uniformly students of color, immigrants, living in our core urban cities, or living in poverty.

Federal requirements heavily influence ELL instruction and include:

- (1) Pro-active identification of potential ELLs as early as possible;
- (2) Providing a sound educational program led by a qualified teacher that supports language and academic content acquisition;
- (3) Regular monitoring and the ability to exit upon demonstration of English proficiency; and
- (4) 2 years of monitoring after exit to ensure that they are making expected academic gains.

High quality ELL services can take many forms including dual language programs, supported inclusion of ELLs in general education classrooms, and targeted interventions. Regardless of their form, high-quality programs offer:

- (1) A joint focus on content knowledge **and** language acquisition;
- (2) Approaches that use students' native language as a strength;
- (3) Provide students a strong foundation in conversational and academic vocabulary;
- (4) High expectations and challenging, age-appropriate academic content; and
- (5) Qualified and well-trained educators.

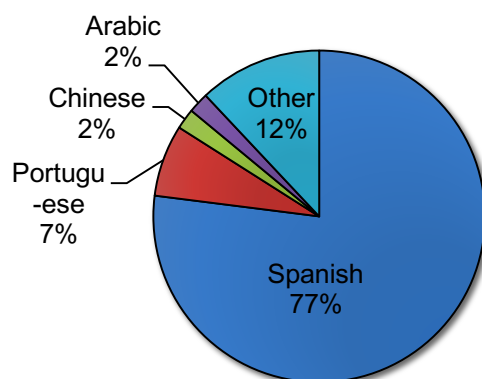
Rhode Island Context and Data

In the 2014-2015 school year in Rhode Island, ELLs were 7% of total students (10,229). Of these students, 88% were enrolled in free or reduced-price lunch programs and 75% lived in the four core cities.

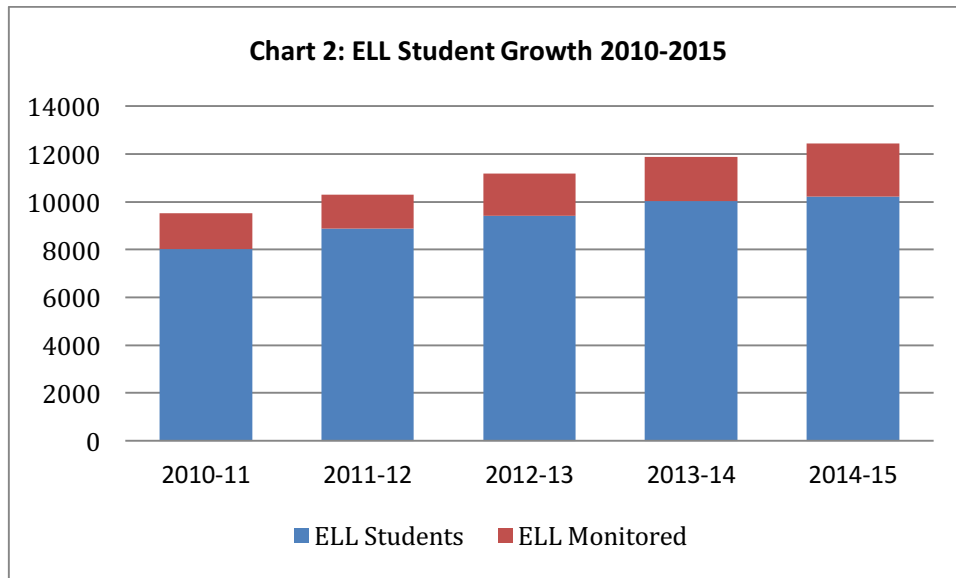
ELL students in Rhode Island speak over 90 different languages, the most prevalent of which are presented in Chart 1.

While ELLs represent a relatively small percentage of our overall school-age population, they are one of the fastest-growing demographic groups. Chart 2 provides a five-year view of ELL student growth. The students represented in blue in the chart are ELLs current in program; they are complemented by the students represented in red, who have recently exited and are in monitoring status.

Chart 1: Language Distribution of English learners, 2015



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In addition to examining the statewide growth in English language learners, it is helpful to better understand their concentrated growth in the core urban communities, which is presented in Table 2, below.

Change in ELL Population		
	2010	2015
Statewide	5.7%	7.3%
Providence	16.6%	23.1%
Pawtucket	12.2%	10.3%
Woonsocket	7.2%	8.8%
Central Falls	22.2%	25.6%

National Practice and Examples

Currently, Rhode Island is one of only four states that do not have an ELL- specific state funding mechanism for ELLs. Of the states that do have one, there are primarily three mechanisms used:

1. **Categorical funding:** Nine states disperse funding for ELLs through a categorical fund;
2. **Reimbursement:** Three states reimburse districts for a portion costs of specific ELL programs
3. **Formula funding:** Thirty-four states fund through their funding formula, the majority through student weights that fall between .1 and .25 per student.

Most states' ELL funding is discretionary once passed on to districts so there is no requirement that districts will use those extra dollars for ELL services.