

# English Learners and the Every Student Succeeds Act: A Tool for Advocates in Arizona

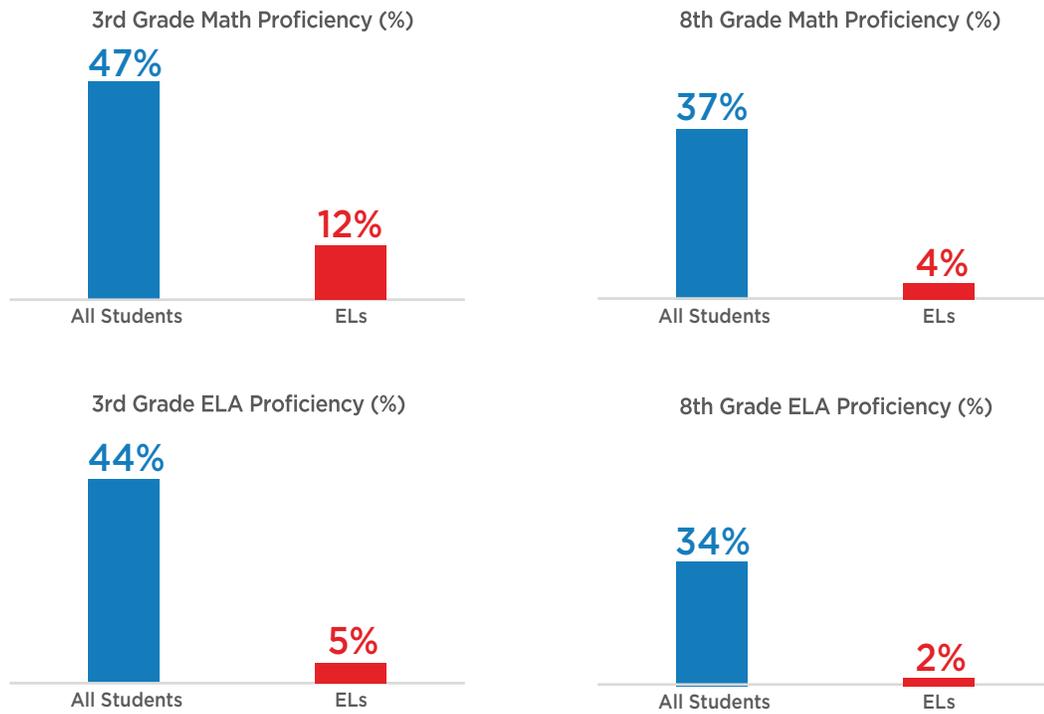
This report features components of Arizona's plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act that impact the 85,000 English learners in the state regarding testing, accountability, and stakeholder engagement. Advocates can use this information to engage administrators and policymakers around improving outcomes for English learners and ensuring they receive the high-quality education they deserve.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaced No Child Left Behind, was signed into law in December 2015. ESSA requires several long overdue changes for English learners (ELs) by emphasizing accountability for the progress of ELs and requiring state plans to focus on standardizing policies and closing achievement gaps.

**Notable changes include:**

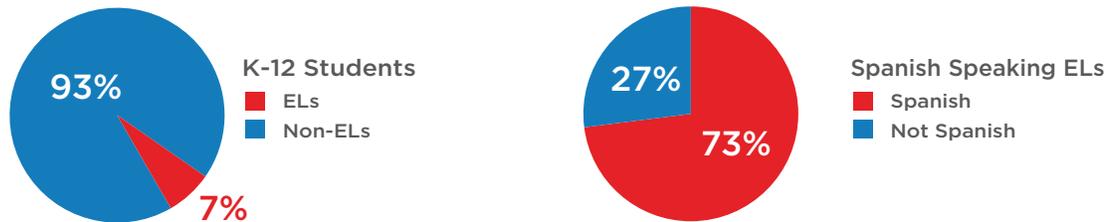
- States are now held accountable for ELs' progress toward English language proficiency under Title I instead of Title III.
- States must implement statewide standardized procedures for entering and exiting EL services.
- States must set ambitious long-term goals in subjects like English language arts (ELA) and math, including measures of interim progress (MIPs) toward those long-term goals.
- States must also set long-term goals for attaining English language proficiency.
- States are required to engage with stakeholders in developing the ESSA plan and on school improvement plans moving forward.

**AzMerit Test Results**



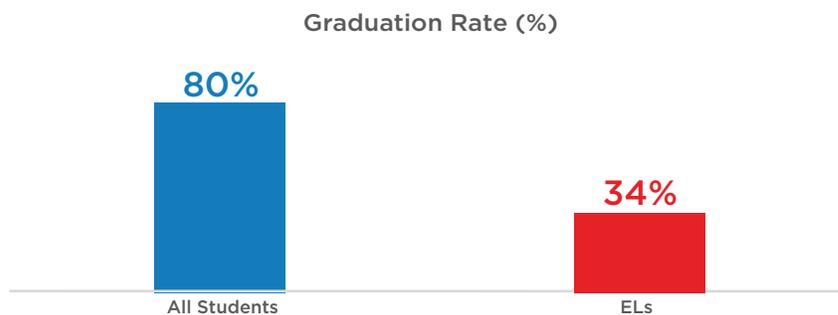
Source: Data shown includes the combined students' performance results from the fall 2016 and spring 2017 administrations of the AzMERIT statewide assessment and the Multi-State Alternative Assessment (MSAA) alternative statewide assessment. The results are based on all school types. <http://www.azed.gov/accountability-research/data/>

**English Learner Data**



Source: Arizona Department of Education Office of English Language Acquisition, "EL Demographics 2013-2014" <http://www.azed.gov/oelas/el-demographics-2013-2014/> (accessed December 2017).

**Graduation Rate**



Source: Arizona Department of Education, "Accountability & Research, Graduation Rates" <http://www.azed.gov/accountability-research/data/> (accessed December 2017).

**Why ESSA Matters in Arizona:** There are around 85,000 ELs in Arizona, making up about 7% of the K-12 student population in the state.<sup>1</sup> The majority of Arizona's ELs speak Spanish. According to 2017 Arizona AzMERIT assessment results, double-digit achievement gaps exist between ELs and the all-student group in English language arts and math content areas. ELs are also graduating high school at much lower rates than their peers.



## Standardized Entrance and Exit Procedures

States must set uniform entrance and exit procedures for EL services across the state. ELs must be identified within 30 days of enrollment. States should have a clear description of how they define English language proficiency.

- Arizona uses a home language survey within 30 days of enrollment to identify students to be assessed for EL services.
- For identification and placement, the state uses the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA).
- To exit EL services, or to become reclassified, a student must “score proficient as a total combined score, proficient in the reading domain, and proficient in the writing domain.”<sup>2</sup>

**Advocate Questions:** How long after being identified will students begin receiving EL services? Does the school or district plan on engaging families in reclassification, and if so, how? In addition to AZELLA test scores, what other factors, if any, should be taken into consideration for reclassification?



## N-size for Accountability and for Reporting

States are required to establish an n-size, the minimum number of students in a school needed to form a student subgroup for federal reporting and accountability purposes. States may set a different n-size for accountability and reporting purposes.

- Arizona set the n-size at 20 for reporting and accountability.
- Arizona will report student data for subgroups greater than or equal to 20 students.
- While this information will be reported for all subgroups, Arizona's A-F grading system for accountability does not always include subgroups in the calculation of a school's grade.

**Quick Fact:** Studies show that an n-size of 10 captures the most students while still maintaining students' privacy.<sup>3</sup> In Arizona, if the n-size were reduced to 10, 323 additional schools would include English learners in their reporting and accountability systems.

**Advocate Questions:** Why was an n-size of 20 decided over an n-size of 10? Does the plan address how schools will be held accountable when they have less than 20 students in a subgroup? Did the state consult stakeholders when deciding the minimum n-size? How can subgroups be better incorporated into the A-F grading system?



## Long-Term Goals for Academic Achievement and Graduation Rate

States are required to set ambitious, long-term goals and measures of interim progress for reading/language arts, math, and high school graduation rate for all students and for each student subgroup.

- Arizona has set two long-term goals for academic achievement:
  - Close proficiency gaps by at least 50% by 2028.
  - All students and subgroups must reach at least 90% proficient by 2040.
- Arizona's long-term goal is a 90% four-year graduation rate, for all students and subgroups of students, by 2030.
- Arizona is redefining its methodology for calculating EL graduation rate. Previously, any high school senior classified as an EL at the time of graduation was included in the EL subgroup graduation rate. Now, any EL student who was ever classified during high school are included.

**Advocate Questions:** Are the goals both ambitious and attainable? Did the state provide sufficient historical data to justify the goals? How will schools provide appropriate support for ELs, one of the subgroups needing to make the most gains?



## Long-Term Goal for Attaining English Language Proficiency

States must also set ambitious, long-term goals and measures of interim progress for ELs making progress toward English language proficiency. The state must establish a timeline to proficiency.

- Arizona's long-term goal is 60% of ELs making progress toward English language proficiency by 2028.
- The 2016 baseline data show that 30% of ELs are currently making progress toward English language proficiency.
- The plan does not set a timeline for ELs to reach English language proficiency.

**Quick Fact:** Research shows that it takes around four to seven years to be classified as "proficient" in English.<sup>4</sup>

**Advocate Questions:** What is the state-determined timeline for English language proficiency? Is the set goal of 60% of ELs making progress toward English language proficiency ambitious and attainable? Did the state consult with stakeholders who have expertise in attaining English language proficiency to determine these long-term goals?



## Measures of Interim Progress for English Learners

States must outline measures of interim progress (MIPs) toward achieving the long-term goals for academic achievement, graduation rate, and progress toward English language proficiency. MIPs are short-term goals that ensure a student group is on track to meet the long-term goals.

- Arizona sets MIPs in academic achievement every three years and they vary among the subgroups. For example, the percentage of ELs testing proficient on the eighth-grade English

language arts assessment should increase by 10.5 percentage points, on average, every three years.

- The percentage of ELs making progress toward English language proficiency should increase three percentage points annually.
- Arizona did not establish MIPs for the graduation rate of ELs since the methodology for calculating the rate for this group has changed.

**Quick Fact:** MIPs are often referred to as targets or short-term goals, which are different than long-term goals. With MIPs, subgroups may have different targets/short-term goals because they are working from a different baseline and need to make more accelerated progress to meet the same long-term goal for all students.

**Advocate Questions:** Does the plan describe the research-based practices for determining MIPs? How do the MIPs align with AZELLA’s performance levels (pre-emergent, basic, etc.) for progress toward English language proficiency? Are the measures of interim progress ambitious and attainable? How will schools be held accountable for ELs making these goals?



## English Language Proficiency Indicator

States must have an English language proficiency (ELP) indicator, among other indicators, in their accountability system for all ELs in grades 3-8, and those who are assessed in grades 9-12.

- Arizona’s ELP indicator is composed of both proficiency and growth on the AZELLA and has been assigned a weight of 10% of the overall letter grade for K-8 and 9-12 schools.
- Both ELP proficiency and growth on AZELLA are weighted at 5% each in the A-F grading system.
- For this indicator to be included in Arizona’s A-F accountability plan, there must be at least the minimum n-size of 20 full academic year ELs at the school.

**Advocate Questions:** How will schools without 20 full academic year ELs be held accountable for ELP progress? Is the 10% weight assigned to the ELP indicator sufficient? Did the state engage with diverse stakeholders to determine this weight assignment?



## Annual Meaningful Differentiation

States must create a system of annual meaningful differentiation\* based on all the indicators for all students and each student subgroup.

- Arizona will use an A-F grading system for all schools. The grades will be based on four indicators for K-8 schools and five indicators for 9-12 schools.
- “Subgroup improvement” is an optional measure for K-8 schools. Schools may or may not select this measure as part of their acceleration/readiness indicator to include in their accountability system with a maximum weight of 6% of the overall grade. There is no option for high schools to include this in their accountability system.

\* The system of differentiation must be based on the performance of at least 95% of students at the school on each of the indicators and afford much greater weight to the proficiency, growth, and ELP indicators than the acceleration/readiness indicator or the college- and career-readiness indicator. The system may take the form of an A-F grade, star rating, or dashboard, for example. It will inform the state’s methodology for identifying schools for comprehensive and target support. United States Department of Education, Accountability Under Title I, Part A of the ESEA, Frequently Asked Questions. Washington, DC 2017.

**Advocate questions:** How will schools be held accountable for the performance of subgroups? Is the A-F grading system a good reflection of how schools are serving all students?



## Identification for Comprehensive and Targeted Support and Improvement

States must identify schools in need of comprehensive support and improvement, and schools in need of targeted support and improvement, and provide necessary support to identified schools.

- Arizona will identify a school for comprehensive support if any of the following three statements are true:
  - o It is in the lowest-performing 5% of all Title I schools.
  - o It has a 67% graduation rate or lower.
  - o It has been identified for targeted support and hasn't exited this designation after four years.
- Arizona will identify a school for targeted support if:
  - o There are one or more subgroups consistently underperforming. Arizona defines consistently underperforming as "having one or more significant achievement gaps between subgroups and any low-achieving subgroups for three consecutive years."

**Quick Fact:** ESSA defines schools in need of targeted support when a school has one or more subgroups consistently underperforming. ESSA defines schools in need of comprehensive support when a school performs in the lowest 5% of all Title I schools in the state, has a high school graduation rate lower than 67%, or has previously been identified for targeted support and has not exited that status within a state-determined number of years.

**Advocate Questions:** How would targeted support be different if low-achieving subgroups were compared to all students as opposed to their same subgroup? How will diverse stakeholders be meaningfully engaged on improvement plans for identified schools? Are the state-determined identification criteria sufficient to identify all schools in need of additional supports?



## Recently Arrived English Learners

States have three options to assess recently arrived English learners (RAELs), that is, ELs who have been enrolled in a school in the United States for fewer than 12 months. States can exclude one administration of the English language arts assessment or assess the student, but exclude the results of the assessments in the accountability system for that year. States can also choose to assess recently arrived English learners in their first year, include a measure of growth on the assessments in their second year, and include proficiency on assessments in their third and subsequent years. States can also implement a combination of the first and second options.

- Arizona has chosen the second option. They will assess RAELs in their first year and include results in the accountability system accordingly in the subsequent years.

**Quick Fact:** There is no one best option; the state should look at the characteristics of the RAELs to make this determination.

**Advocate Question:** How did the state decide on option two? Is that the best option given the characteristics of RAELs in Arizona? Does the state provide any data on RAELs that supports their choice?



## Former English Learners

States may include former ELs in the EL subgroup for up to four years after being reclassified.

- Arizona will include former English learners in the EL subgroup up to four years after being reclassified.

**Quick Fact:** Including former ELs who have been reclassified may mask the performance of current ELs. Providing historical data helps in determining whether former ELs should be included in the subgroup, and for how long.

**Advocate Questions:** How would the indicator results be different if schools included ELs who were reclassified for two or three years? Can the state monitor reclassified ELs as their own subgroup? Did the state provide any data to show that including former ELs will not mask the performance of current ELs?



## Native Language Assessments

States must define and identify languages other than English that are present to a “significant extent” and indicate what, if any, existing assessments there are in languages other than English and report any plan to develop additional assessments.

- Arizona has defined a language other than English present to a significant extent as a language that exceeds 10% of the total tested population.
- By that definition, there are no other languages present to a significant extent.
- Arizona state statutes designate Arizona as an English-only state. Furthermore, state law designates that assessments and instruction be given in English ([A.R.S. § 15-755](#); [A.R.S. § 15-752](#)). For this reason, Arizona does not currently utilize native language assessments and they do not have a plan to develop them.

**Advocate Questions:** Do Arizona’s current assessments accurately capture ELs’ performance in content areas such as math and science? What native language assessments would be most beneficial to ELs in Arizona? Does the English-only law serve ELs well?



## Stakeholder Consultation

States must engage with stakeholders on the development of the ESSA state plan and specific components such as the n-size, and the development of district and school improvement plans.

- Arizona did a month-long “road show,” online survey and 18 face-to-face meetings.
- Arizona engaged with the business community, educators, policymakers, and parents to determine long-term goals.
- Arizona created an A-F ad hoc committee consisting of parents, teachers, superintendents, board members, education policy members, and a charter representative.

**Advocate Questions:** Did they offer stakeholder engagement in multiple languages? Were the methods and opportunities for stakeholder engagement flexible enough for parents to participate in? How did they ensure feedback represented diverse populations? Does the A-F ad hoc committee represent diverse voices?

### What now?

- Have conversations about ESSA with parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, and elected officials. Bring up the “Advocate Questions” in the conversation.
- Engage parents and other stakeholders in your area by hosting an ESSA meeting at your school or a community-based organization.
- The Arizona State Board of Education hosts open houses for the public to attend. Check out the Arizona Department of Education website for meeting dates, times and locations. Their email address is [inbox@azsbe.az.gov](mailto:inbox@azsbe.az.gov).
- For more information about ESSA, visit [unidosus.org](http://unidosus.org).

## Further Reading

- Arizona's approved [ESSA plan](#)
- Ed Trust and UnidosUS: [Students Can't Wait: Setting New Accountability for English-Learner Outcomes in ESSA Plans](#)
- Migration Policy Institute: [Analyzing State ESSA Plans for English Learner Accountability: A Framework for Community Stakeholders](#)
- Migration Policy Institute: [Dual Language Learners: A National Demographic and Policy Profile](#)
- Council of Chief State School Officers: [Major Provisions of Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\) Related to the Education of English Learners](#)
- Arizona Department of Education: [English Language Learner Guide for Educational Agencies](#)
- US Department of Education [Feedback Letter for Arizona](#)
- Bellwether Review [Independent Review of ESSA State Plans: Arizona](#)

## Endnotes

- 1 Arizona Department of Education Office of English Language Acquisition. "EL Demographics 2016-2017" <http://www.azed.gov/oelas/el-demographics-2016-2017/> (accessed December 2017).
- 2 Arizona Department of Education Office of English Language Acquisition, English Language Learner Guide for Educational Agencies, <https://cms.azed.gov/home/GetDocumentFile?id=5541130daadebe0b186bcb7b> (accessed December 2017).
- 3 Alliance for Excellent Education, Ensuring Equity in ESSA: The Role of N-Size in Subgroup Accountability. <https://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/NSize.pdf> (accessed December 2017).
- 4 Hakuta, K., Butler, Y.G., & Witt, D. "How long does it take English learners to attain proficiency?" (Berkeley, CA: University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute) <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/13w7m06g> (accessed December 2017).