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Summary

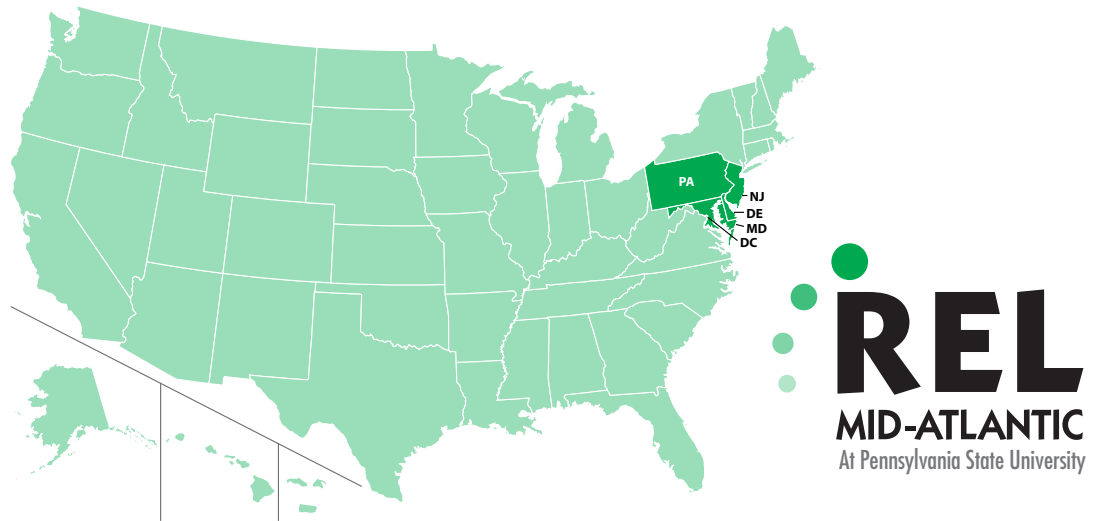
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A descriptive analysis of enrollment and achievement among limited English proficient students in New Jersey

This study describes enrollment and achievement trends of limited English proficient (LEP) students in New Jersey public schools between 2002/03 and 2008/09. It documents achievement gaps between LEP and general education students in language arts literacy and math. The achievement gaps in both subjects are wider at higher grades.

LEP students are the fastest growing segment of the student population in public schools in the United States, including in New Jersey. The New Jersey Department of Education (2008) defines LEP students as “students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12 whose native language is other than English and who have sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language, as measured by an English language proficiency test, so as to be denied the opportunity to learn successfully in the classrooms where the language of instruction is English.” (For definitions of key terms, see box 1 in the main report.)

According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (2011), approximately 5.3 million LEP students were enrolled in preK–12 in 2008/09, accounting for about 10.8 percent of public school students

in the United States. National enrollment of LEP students in public schools grew 57 percent between 1995 and 2009 (Flannery 2009)—almost six times the 10 percent growth rate in the general education population (students not enrolled in a language assistance program or a special education program). Similarly, the number of LEP students in New Jersey has been growing, in conjunction with a rise in foreign-born residents in the state. In 2009, people born in other countries accounted for over 20 percent of New Jersey’s population (Migration Policy Institute 2010).

Nationally, an achievement gap exists between LEP students and non-LEP students in all subject areas, particularly those with high language demands (Strickland and Alvermann 2004). On statewide assessments across the country, the percentage of LEP students who achieve proficiency (as defined by each state) is 20–30 percentage points lower than the percentage of non-LEP students who do (Abedi and Dietel 2004). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 requires states to implement accountability systems to assess the education of all students, including students from traditionally underserved populations such as LEP students. The goal of the NCLB Act is to have all students reach proficiency (as defined by each state) and to close the achievement gap by 2014 (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001).

This study investigates two research questions on this topic in New Jersey:¹

- How did the enrollment of LEP students in New Jersey public schools change between 2002/03 and 2008/09?
- How did performance (the percentage scoring at the proficient or advanced proficient level) on state assessments in language arts literacy and math in grades 3, 4, 8, and 11 compare among LEP, former LEP (FLEP), and general education students in New Jersey public schools from 2002/03 to 2008/09?

To report changes in LEP student enrollment and performance, the study used enrollment and assessment data from the New Jersey Department of Education website. The descriptive analyses of enrollment data track the number of LEP students, languages spoken by LEP students, and languages spoken by the greatest number of LEP students statewide.

The analyses of performance data present the percentage of LEP students and general education students who scored at the proficient or advanced proficient level on the New Jersey state assessments in language arts literacy and math.² To account for differences in performance between students who were enrolled in a language assistance program and students who had exited a language assistance program within the previous two years, performance data for LEP students and FLEP students are also presented.

The study's main findings include:

- From 2002/03 to 2008/09, LEP student enrollment in New Jersey public schools

increased 6.6 percent, whereas total student enrollment increased less than 1 percent. During that period, LEP student enrollment increased from 4.5 percent of total student enrollment in 2002/03 to 4.7 percent in 2008/09.

- LEP students in New Jersey spoke 187 languages in 2008/09, up from 151 in 2002/03. In 2008/09, Spanish (spoken by 66.8 percent of LEP students in the state) had the most speakers, followed by Arabic (2.6 percent), Korean (2.5 percent), and Portuguese (2.0 percent).
- From 2002/03 to 2008/09, LEP students' performance in language arts literacy increased in all grades studied (grades 3, 4, 8, and 11). The increase was higher for grades 3 (10.9 percentage points) and 4 (21.1 percentage points) than for grades 8 (4.4 percentage points) and 11 (6.2 percentage points).
- From 2002/03 to 2008/09, LEP students' performance in math increased in all grades studied (grades 3, 4, 8, and 11). The increase was higher for grades 3 (10.5 percentage points) and 4 (22.7 percentage points) than for grades 8 (6.9 percentage points) and 11 (3.9 percentage points).
- General education students' performance in both language arts literacy and math was higher than LEP students' performance every year from 2002/03 to 2008/09.
- From 2002/03 to 2008/09, the achievement gap between LEP students and general education students in grades 3 and 4

narrowed in both language arts literacy and math. The achievement gap in grades 8 and 11 narrowed in language arts literacy but widened in math.

- In all grades and years studied, FLEP students' performance in language arts literacy and math was higher than that of LEP students but lower than that of general education students.

Notes

1. This report is one in a series of reports for jurisdictions in the Mid-Atlantic Region (which

also includes Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania). The findings are presented in separate reports, as it may be inappropriate to compare LEP enrollment and achievement across jurisdictions because each jurisdiction has different LEP policies and definitions. The findings are also presented in separate reports because the available data varied by jurisdiction.

2. New Jersey categorizes student achievement into "partially proficient," "proficient," and "advanced proficient." Further details of the achievement categories are supplied in the main report and its appendices.

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