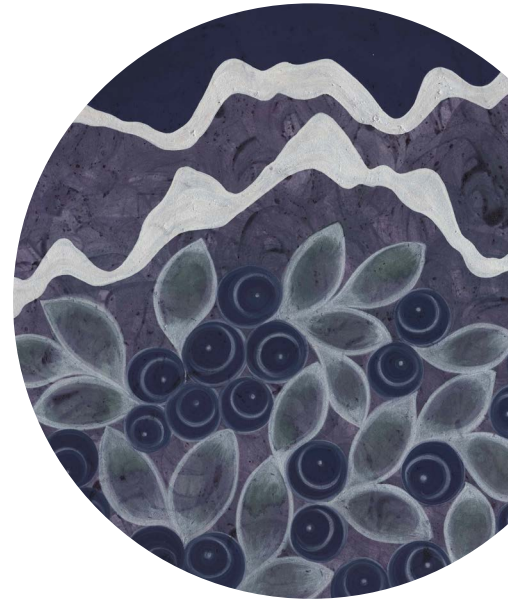


# Understanding the needs and experiences of Alaska Native English learner students

Most research on English learner (EL) education has centered on immigrant-origin students, and little research has examined the needs and experiences of Indigenous EL students in the United States or Alaska.<sup>1</sup> Indigenous and non-Indigenous students differ in their eligibility for EL services: Indigenous EL students may speak English as their primary language, but non-Indigenous EL students must speak a primary language other than English.<sup>2</sup> Rooted in a historical pattern of forced cultural assimilation and heritage language<sup>3</sup> deprivation, many Indigenous communities have faced—and continue to face—critical barriers to accessing culturally and linguistically sustaining, adequately resourced, and equitable schooling,<sup>3</sup> including EL services.

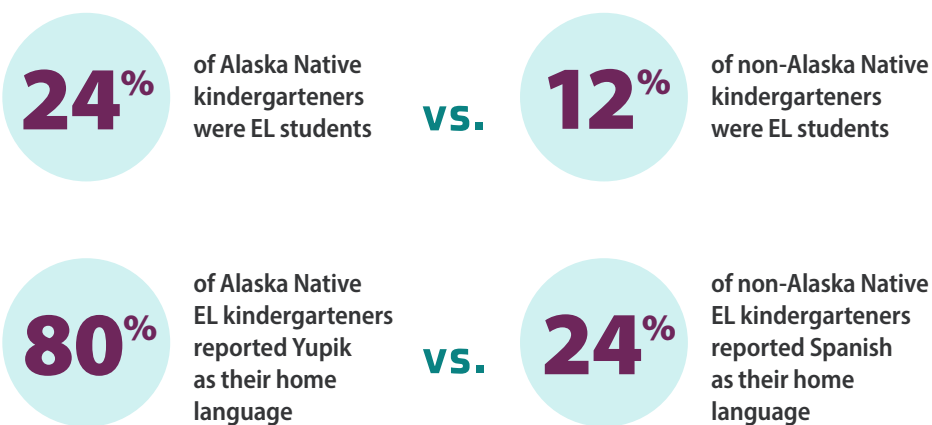
The Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest conducted **a study of Alaska EL policy and practice** as it relates to Alaska Native students to examine student characteristics and patterns in identification as an EL student, EL service provision, and reclassification<sup>b</sup> from EL to non-EL student. This infographic presents information from the study that may guide future policy and research to ensure that Alaska Native EL students receive culturally sustaining, high-quality education to support their academic progress, as well as the development of both their heritage and English language skills.



## Characteristics of Alaska Native EL students

### WHO ARE ALASKA NATIVE EL STUDENTS?<sup>c</sup>

From 2011/12 to 2018/19,



In spring of their kindergarten year, EL students were assessed on Standard American English proficiency. When compared with non-Alaska Native EL kindergarteners, Alaska Native EL kindergarteners on average had lower Standard American English proficiency levels across study years.

### WHERE ARE ALASKA NATIVE EL STUDENTS?

#### Rural remote schools

Alaska Native EL students represented **23 percent of kindergarteners in rural-remote schools**, which are schools in small, off-road communities. In urban, urban fringe, and rural hub/fringe locales, they represented **6 percent or less of kindergarteners**.

#### Economically disadvantaged schools

Alaska Native EL students represented 27 percent of kindergarteners in schools where **75 percent or more of the population was economically disadvantaged**,<sup>d</sup> compared to 6 percent or less in schools with lower percentages of economically disadvantaged students.

#### Schools without English as a second language (ESL) teachers

Alaska Native EL students represented **11 percent of kindergarteners in schools without ESL teachers**, compared to 3 percent or less in schools with one or more ESL teacher.

<sup>a</sup> Heritage language in this context refers to the Indigenous language spoken historically and/or currently by the Indigenous group to which an individual belongs/identifies.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>b</sup> Reclassified students are former EL students who have transitioned from EL status to fluent English proficient status based on meeting a set of criteria, typically determined by the state and based on assessment performance.

<sup>c</sup> This study focused on kindergarten cohorts to allow analysis of Alaska Native students as they first enter school and are evaluated for EL classification.

<sup>d</sup> Students who were ever eligible for the National School Lunch Program during the study period, as defined in a cash-based economy. This may not align with economic well-being as understood from a subsistence economy perspective, where families may draw on natural or collective resources, such as fish, game, and berries, for their livelihood.<sup>5</sup>

