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Summary

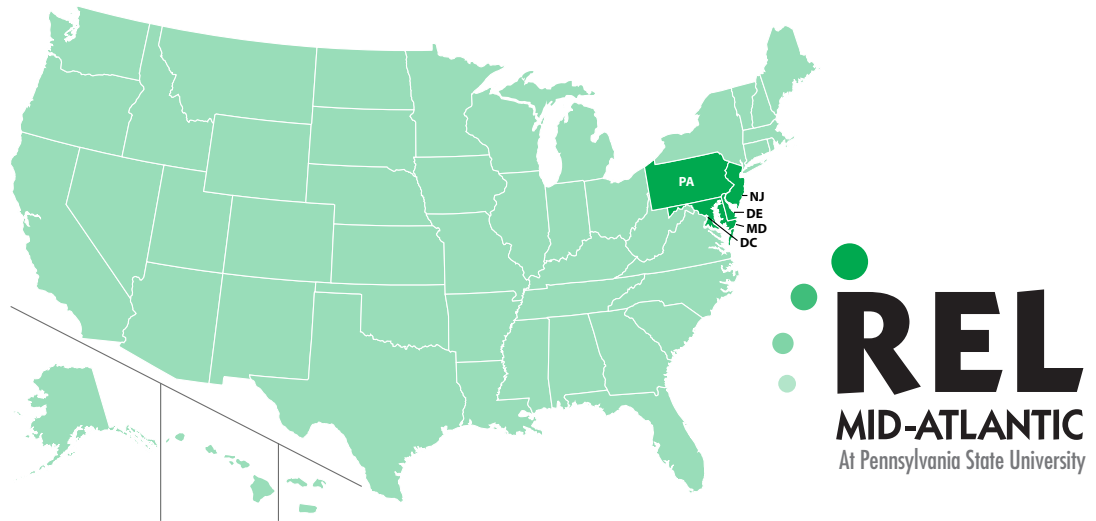
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# A descriptive analysis of enrollment and achievement among English language learner students in Delaware

**This study describes enrollment and achievement trends among English language learner (ELL) students in Delaware public schools between 2002/03 and 2008/09. It documents achievement gaps in reading, math, science, and social studies that narrowed in most elementary and middle school grades studied and were wider at higher grades in all subjects.**

English language learner (ELL) students are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. student population. According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (2011), approximately 5.3 million ELL students were enrolled in preK–12 in 2008/09, accounting for about 10.8 percent of all public school students in the United States. National enrollment of ELL 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 who are not enrolled in a language assistance program or a special education program). The number of ELL students has also been growing in Delaware,<sup>1</sup> where the foreign-born population rose from 44,898 in 2000 to 74,033 in 2009, making up more than 8 percent of the state’s population in 2009 (Migration Policy Institute 2010).

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

This study describes ELL student enrollment and achievement trends in Delaware public schools from 2002/03 to 2008/09. Two research questions guide this study:<sup>2</sup>

- How did the enrollment of ELL students in Delaware public schools change between 2002/03 and 2008/09?
- How did performance (the percentage scoring at the meets the standard, exceeds the standard, or distinguished level) on state assessments in reading and math in grades 2–10 and in science and social

studies in grades 4, 6, 8, and 11 compare between ELL and non-ELL students in Delaware public schools from 2002/03 to 2008/09?

To report changes in ELL student enrollment and performance, the study uses enrollment and assessment data available through the Delaware Department of Education website. The descriptive analyses of enrollment data track the number of ELL students statewide, ELL enrollment by grade level, and ELL enrollment by English language proficiency level, as well as the languages spoken by the highest number of ELL students statewide. The analyses of performance data present the percentage of ELL and non-ELL students who scored at the meets the standard, exceeds the standard, or distinguished level in reading, math, science, and social studies on the Delaware Student Testing Program.<sup>3</sup>

The study's main findings include:

On enrollment trends:

- Between 2002/03 and 2008/09, ELL student enrollment in Delaware public schools rose 91.7 percent, while total enrollment rose 7.7 percent. ELL student enrollment rose from 3.0 percent of the total student population in 2002/03 to 5.4 percent in 2008/09.
- Between 2002/03 and 2008/09, ELL students accounted for a larger share of total enrollment in elementary school (grades K–5) than in middle school (grades 6–8) and high school (grades 9–12). In 2008/09, ELL students accounted for 8.6 percent of the elementary school population,

3.3 percent of the middle school population, and 2.2 percent of the high school population.

- The percentage of ELL students classified in the three lowest levels of English proficiency dropped from 73.4 percent in 2005/06 to 48.1 percent in 2008/09.
- ELL students in Delaware spoke 81 languages in 2008/09, up from 60 in 2002/03. In 2008/09, Spanish (spoken by 77.2 percent of ELL students in the state) had the most speakers, followed by Creole (4.2 percent), Chinese (2.0 percent), and Gujarati (1.5 percent). ELL students speaking “other” languages (languages other than the 12 most common in the state) accounted for 7.2 percent of the ELL student population in 2008/09.
- The number and percentage of ELL students speaking Spanish, Gujarati, and “other” languages increased between 2002/03 and 2008/09. During this period, the number of ELL students speaking Creole and Chinese increased, but the percentage decreased.

On achievement trends:

- Between 2005/06 and 2008/09, ELL students' performance in reading increased 6.6–37.5 percentage points in grades 3–10 but decreased 1.2 percentage points in grade 2.
- Between 2005/06 and 2008/09, ELL students' performance in math increased 2.9–32.4 percentage points in grades 3–9

but decreased 3.4–3.7 percentage points in grades 2 and 10.

- Between 2002/03 and 2008/09, ELL students' performance in science increased 4.7–18.1 percentage points in all grades studied (grades 4, 6, 8, and 11).
- Between 2002/03 and 2008/09, ELL students' performance in social studies increased 11.5–27.6 percentage points in grades 4, 6, and 8 but decreased 5.6 percentage points in grade 11.
- Between 2002/03 and 2008/09, non-ELL students' performance in science and social studies was higher than that of ELL students in all grades. Between 2005/06 and 2008/09, non-ELL students' performance in reading and math was higher than that of ELL students in all grades except in grade 2 reading and math in 2005/06, grade 3 reading in 2006/07 and 2008/09, and grade 3 math in 2008/09.
- Between 2005/06 and 2008/09, ELL and non-ELL students' performance in reading and math was closer in elementary school (grades 2–5) than in middle school (grades 6–8) and high school (grades 9–10). During this period, the achievement gap in reading between ELL and non-ELL students widened in grade 2, narrowed in grades 4–10, and reversed in grade 3, and the achievement gap in math widened in grades 2, 9, and 10, reversed in grade 3, and narrowed in grades 4–8.
- Between 2002/03 and 2008/09, ELL and non-ELL students' performance in science and social studies was closer in elementary school than in middle school and high school. During this period, the achievement gap in science between ELL and non-ELL students narrowed in grades 4 and 6 and widened in grades 8 and 11, and the achievement gap in social studies narrowed in grades 4, 6, and 8 and widened in grade 11.

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### Notes

1. The Delaware Department of Education defines ELL students as “students with limited English proficiency . . . who, by reason of foreign birth or ancestry, speak a language other than English, and either comprehend, speak, read, or write little or no English, or who have been identified as English Language Learners by a valid English language proficiency assessment approved by the Department of Education for use statewide” (State of Delaware 2010).
2. This report is one in a series for jurisdictions in the Mid-Atlantic Region (which also includes the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania). The findings are presented in separate reports because each jurisdiction has different ELL student policies and definitions, and so it may be inappropriate to compare ELL student enrollment and achievement across jurisdictions. The available data also varied by jurisdiction.
3. Delaware uses five levels to describe student achievement on the state assessments: well below the standard, below the standard, meets the standard, exceeds the standard, and distinguished. Scoring at the meets the standard, exceeds the standard, or distinguished level indicates academic proficiency. Further details of the achievement categories are supplied in the main report and its appendices.



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