



English Language Learner Funding

Students who are not proficient in the English language face the challenge of learning a new language in addition to mastering academic subject matter taught in that language. To help school districts and charter schools support these students, the state provides additional funding known as **English Language Learner (ELL) funding**. This funding is distributed to districts and charter schools based on the number of ELL students they have enrolled.

In 2018-19, nearly 38,500 ELL students were enrolled in Arkansas public schools. ELL students make up about 8% of the state’s student population. About 51.5% of ELL students statewide were served by five school districts:

District	ELL Students
Springdale	8,241
Rogers	4,400
Fort Smith	3,265
Little Rock	3,038
DeQueen	935

In 2017-18, English language learners collectively spoke a total of 94 languages as their primary language. The home language of the vast majority of these students was Spanish.

Language	Student Count	% of ELL Students
Spanish	32,861	83.2%
Marshalllese	3,104	7.9%
Vietnamese	445	1.1%
Arabic	384	1.0%
Lao	286	0.7%

To identify ELL students, schools first administer a home language survey when a new student registers with a school district at any grade. The parents or guardians of all enrolling students complete the survey specifying whether the student’s native language is something other than English or if the student comes from an environment

in which a non-English language may have affected his or her English language proficiency.

Potential ELL students then take a placement test, known as a screener, to determine if they are not fully fluent in English. If the screener indicates a student is not fully English proficient, he or she is placed in the ELL program.

Each ELL student is assigned a group of teachers and/or school staff who serve as the student’s Language Placement and Assessment Committee (LPAC). The LPAC works closely with students to evaluate classroom performance, language proficiency assessment results, and academic content testing results. Each student’s LPAC must review and document the student’s progress annually or more frequently as needed.

Neither state nor federal law specifies particular English as a Second Language (ESL) curricula or programs districts must use, but federal law requires districts to follow three principles in their program design:

1. The selected educational approach must be “based on a sound educational theory.”
2. Districts must provide adequate staffing and resources to support the selected program.
3. The district must periodically evaluate and revise its program.

To determine ELL students’ progress in acquiring English-language proficiency and identify the ELL services needed for the next school year, school districts and charter schools assess ELL students’ language skills every spring,

using an assessment known as the ELPA21. The ELPA21 assesses students’ English language proficiency across four domains: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

To exit the English as a Second Language program, a student must score proficient in all ELPA21 domains and demonstrate academic content proficiency using two pieces of supporting evidence, such as scoring “ready” or “exceeding” on the ACT Aspire or a 19 on the ACT. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires districts and charters to monitor former ELL students for at least four years.

To ensure districts are able to provide ESL services, the state provides ELL state categorical funding. In 2018-19, districts received \$338 per ELL student. ELL funding provided to districts and open enrollment charter schools totaled about \$13 million statewide.

ELL funding, like other state categorical funding, is considered restricted, meaning districts can spend the money only for specific purposes. The following activities are eligible uses of ELL funding:

- Salaries for ELL instruction
- Professional development activities, to include released time for ELL curriculum development, workshops, and trainings
- Instructional and supplemental materials including computer-assisted technology and library materials
- Counseling services, community liaison staff with language and cultural skills appropriate to the ELL population
- Assessment activities
- Implementation of supplemental instructional services