



Research Report

Executive Summary: English Language Learners (ELL) Categorical Funding

This study is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Act 57 of the Second Extraordinary Session of 2003, amended by Act 1204 of 2007. Those acts require the Legislature to conduct an adequacy study each biennium to assess needs related to providing an adequate education for all Arkansas K-12 students.

This report is about English Language Learners (ELL) funding, the Arkansas categorical funding program that supports students who are not proficient in English. These students face the challenge of learning a new language in addition to the challenge of mastering academic subject matter being taught in that language.

Arkansas's Hispanic population grew 3.7% between 1998 and 2008, according to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). That percentage increase was the 6th highest among the 16 SREB states. By comparison, Texas' Hispanic population increased 7.1%, while West Virginia's Hispanic population increased only 0.9% for the same time period.

Adequacy: In FY2008-09, ELL expenditures totaled \$12.5 million in 132 districts. With 27,589 ELL students in the state, that equates to \$453 per ELL student which may be compared with the categorical funding level of \$293 per ELL student for FY 2008-09. For the 87.6% of ELL students who also are eligible for free and reduced priced lunch, schools received \$6,665, \$7,161, or \$7,657, depending on the concentration of students in poverty. The primary federal source of funding for ELL students is Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title III, Part A as Amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 or English Language Acquisition State Grants. Federal funding for this program (Title III) totaled \$2.8 million in 36 districts for FY2008-09.

State and Federal Requirements: ADE Rules Governing the Distribution of Student Special Needs Funding define ELL students as those not proficient in the English language based upon approved English proficiency assessments that measure oral, reading, and writing proficiency and are administered in the fall of the current school year. The funding formula law and related Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) rules dictate the eligible uses of ELL funding in the schools.

There are two areas of state-level requirements that impact the manner and quality of ELL instruction in the classroom. According to Dr. Andre Guerrero, State Director of Programs for ELLs, Arkansas has no full English as a Second Language (ESL) Certification for teachers. Arkansas has an ELL endorsement. Guerrero reports there are several thousand holding such endorsement, but no records of how many are teaching ELL students. Other states offer full ESL Certification. Another requirement that affects the instruction of ELL students is the state law requiring English to be the official language of instruction.

Federal requirements address civil rights issues for ELL students. They also stipulate that ELL students must be tested each year using a federally designated test known as the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA). Federal law also requires districts to monitor the

achievement of students who exit from ELL status for two years after the student's exit. The state is required to establish Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) that set targets for ELL students on the ELDA and for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) improvements for the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) subpopulation. The federal government uses the state's AMAOs to monitor the state's progress with ELL students.

Selected District and School ELL Activities: In FY2008-09, 87 school districts did not have any ELL students. ELL students compose 40% of the Springdale school district which has the largest ELL percentage and raw number of ELL students in the state. Twenty districts concentrate ELL students in one school to more efficiently offer resources and support. In most schools surveyed, 80% or more ELL students spoke Spanish as their native language. Four times as many districts reported teaching Level 1 ELL students in separate classrooms as Level 2 students. The Language Academy in the Springdale school district is an example of an intensive program for high school level ELL students.