

# IDAHO AT A GLANCE



## Education for Idaho's English Learners

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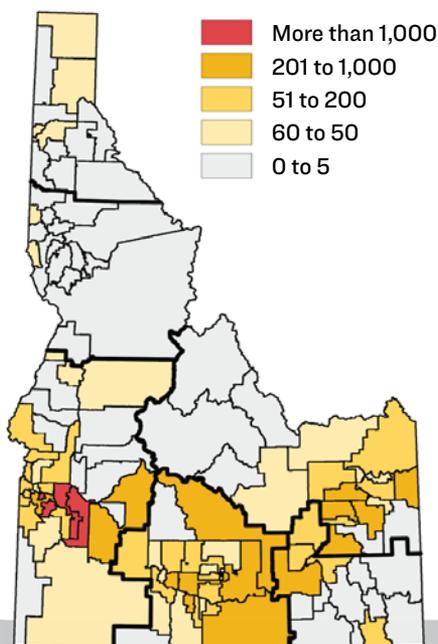
### INTRODUCTION

The total number of Idahoans who speak a language other than English as their primary language is growing. In 2016, 170,008 Idahoans age 5 and older were foreign-language speakers, an increase from 136,755 ten years earlier. At both points in time, this group made up about 10% of all Idaho residents, about 75% spoke Spanish as their primary language and many (61%) spoke English “very well.”<sup>1</sup>

The goal of the Idaho State Department of Education’s (ISDE) English Learner (EL) Program is to **provide school-age youth who are not proficient in English with the language skills they need to be successful** in the classroom and beyond, including postsecondary education and the workforce. **Achieving full English proficiency is a process that takes many years** and often continues after students exit the EL Program. Meanwhile, English Learners (ELs) cannot wait until they achieve English proficiency to learn grade-level content in core subjects. Thus, there is often unrealized academic potential among ELs due to their continuous need to catch up to other students.

Research has shown that **high-quality English acquisition programs help ELs become more proficient at speaking English and perform better in school.**<sup>2</sup> To meet challenges like teacher shortages and the diversity of languages spoken by Idaho’s ELs, educators use a variety of curricula and teaching strategies to help students learn English, succeed in school and unlock their full potential.

**Number of English Learners**  
2016-2017



### WHO IS AN ENGLISH LEARNER?

An English Learner is any student whose primary language is not English, whose English skills are not sufficient to be successful in the classroom and who has not yet tested proficient in English. Once a student meets Idaho criteria for exiting from EL services, they are no longer considered an EL. Not all of Idaho’s ELs are Spanish speakers, immigrants or refugees, and many of them have U.S. citizenship. In the 2016-17 school year, **16,177 Idaho students - or 5.3% of all students - qualified as ELs.**<sup>3,4,5</sup>

## IDAHO'S ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENTS

About half of Idaho's 16,177 ELs live in southwestern Idaho (ISDE's Region 3), and another fourth live in southcentral Idaho (ISDE's Region 4). While ELs make up 5% of Idaho's public K-12 students, ELs make up about 9% of K-12 enrollment nationwide.<sup>3,5</sup>

**One-half of Idaho's ELs attend school in seven school districts in the Treasure Valley and southcentral Idaho:**

- Boise Independent (2052 ELs)
- Nampa (1511)
- West Ada (1253)
- Caldwell (1027)
- Vallivue (825)
- Twin Falls (713)
- Jerome Joint (699)

Other districts with a large number of ELs include Cassia County Joint (643), Idaho Falls (628) and Blaine County (584).<sup>3</sup>

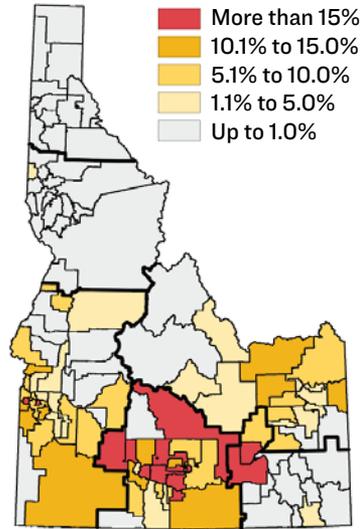
While ELs make up a very small percentage of enrollment in most school districts, they make up a sizable share of enrollment in the following districts:

- Wendell (29%)
- Shoshone Joint (27%)
- American Falls (23%)
- Valley (19%)
- Jerome Joint (18%)
- Blaine County (18%)
- Aberdeen (17%)<sup>3</sup>

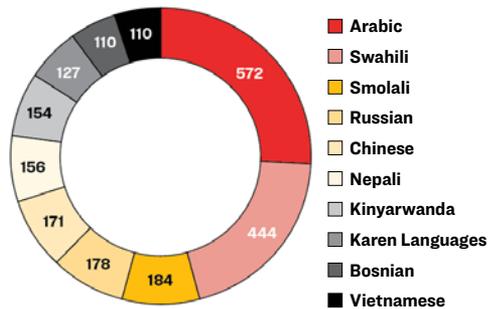
**LANGUAGES SPOKEN.** In 2016-17, 87% of Idaho's ELs (or 14,125) spoke Spanish as their primary language. However, **Spanish is just one of 105 languages** from all over the world spoken by Idaho's ELs. Other than Spanish, languages spoken by at least 100 ELs include Arabic, Swahili, Somali, Russian and others from Asia, Africa and Europe (see chart at right).<sup>3</sup>

**The number of languages spoken by Idaho's ELs presents a challenge for EL teachers, especially in districts with few EL resources.** The number of languages spoken by ELs varies across Idaho's six education regions, ranging from 13 languages in Region 2 to 82 languages in Region 3. For successful English acquisition, however, it is **more important that teachers have professional skills to help students gain proficiency** than it is for them to speak and understand the wide variety of students' primary languages.<sup>3,6</sup>

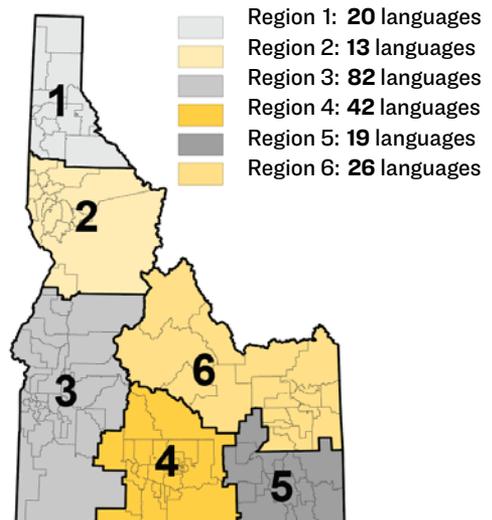
English Learners as a percentage of all students  
2016-2017



Top 10 languages other than Spanish spoken by Idaho's English Learners  
2016-2017



Number of languages spoken by EL students, by education region  
2016-2017



## THE ENGLISH LEARNER PROGRAM

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Title III of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, mandates that state departments of education **must support the educational needs of all English Learners**, and school districts **must provide equal educational opportunities** to every student regardless of English language proficiency. **Idaho's EL population continues to grow** due to an increase in the number of Idahoans who speak languages other than English combined with a more rigorous assessment of English language proficiency that must be met before students exit the program. ISDE's English Learner Program supports school districts as they develop academic programs to meet the needs of this growing population, with a goal of helping students learn English while simultaneously meeting state academic standards.<sup>1,3,7,8</sup>

The ESSA requires states to establish and implement standardized processes and procedures statewide for timely identification of potential ELs. ELs are identified through a Home Language Survey that is given to all newly enrolled students in any Idaho school district or charter. While all qualified ELs must be assessed for language proficiency annually, parents have the option of waiving EL services for their children.<sup>9</sup> Of Idaho's 16,177 identified ELs, **98% participated in the EL Program in 2016-17**. The ESSA also requires states to establish standardized statewide exit criteria for determining when ELs are ready to leave the program.<sup>3,4</sup>

While districts have flexibility in choosing the type of English acquisition program they use, they **must provide language support services that are evidence-based** and proven effective in increasing language proficiency as required by federal legislation and the Office for Civil Rights (OCR). Students must not be excessively segregated from their peers as they master the four domains of language acquisition: speaking, listening, reading and writing.<sup>4,8</sup>

**SERVING DISTRICTS WITH A SMALL NUMBER OF ELs.** ISDE's EL Program is supported by a mix of federal and state funds. State funding covers basic EL services, and federal Title III funding supports additional professional development for EL teachers and expanded learning opportunities for EL students. Districts must have a minimum number of ELs to qualify for a minimum \$10,000 Title III allocation based on a federal funding formula. In 2017, 36 districts qualified for their own federal Title III funding.

To better serve districts with a small number of ELs, **ISDE implemented the Title III Consortium** in 2014. The Consortium is a group of districts that join together voluntarily as a single entity to garner a Title III allocation. As a participating Consortium member, districts and charters qualify for technical assistance provided by four traveling EL coaches. In 2016-17, 44 districts and charters participated in the Title III Consortium, and another 36 received their own Title III allocation.<sup>7</sup> For more information about the Title III Consortium, please refer to *Idaho at a Glance* Vol. 9, No. 4.

## QUICK REFERENCE TO IDAHO'S

### **ISDE provides a variety of supports for districts:**

Professional development and technical assistance for educators, administrators and staff

Collaboration across ISDE programs to address special education, migratory and other needs of ELs

An advisory panel that conducts statewide planning and support

Evaluation assistance

State and national partnerships

State and federal funding

A Title III Consortium to provide support to districts with small numbers of ELs<sup>7</sup>

## TEACHER DEMAND

Teacher turnover and increasing student enrollment affect school districts' ability to serve ELs. The demand for Idaho teachers of all kinds is high as both student enrollment and teacher retirement and attrition are increasing. Between 2011-12 and 2016-17, **Idaho K-12 enrollment increased 6% and the overall teacher turnover rate was 20%**, with higher turnover rates in low-performing and high-poverty schools. To keep up with demand, much of the gap is filled by novice and early-career teachers and teachers with alternative authorization certificates. By 2016-17, **new teachers made up 24% of all Idaho teachers.**<sup>10,15</sup>

Many teachers in specialty areas like the EL Program have high caseloads, and many general education teachers do not have the training needed to address the needs of ELs. EL teacher caseloads are especially high in Idaho's

high-poverty and Community Eligibility Provision<sup>11</sup> schools. In these schools, the ratio of ELs to EL teachers was 38:1, compared to 9:1 in low-poverty schools in 2016-17. That same year

- 40% of schools with at least one EL had no EL teacher, and
- 23% of schools with at least 20 ELs had no EL teacher.<sup>10</sup>

**The shortage of EL teachers is widespread.** To provide equal opportunity education to the growing EL population, there is a need for increased professional development for all teachers (both pre- and in-service), additional financial support for districts and new strategies or policies to increase the number of EL teachers.<sup>10</sup> Based on increasing enrollment among ELs, ISDE estimates there is a **need for an additional 229 EL teachers in the next five years.**<sup>3</sup>

## ENGLISH ACQUISITION PROGRAMS FOR PRESCHOOLERS

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare's "Idaho Early Learning eGuidelines" **provides early childhood educators with research-based best practices** for serving children ages 0-5. Recommendations for improving learning opportunities and outcomes include accommodations for children with unique learning needs, with specific suggestions for children who do not speak English as their primary language. These recommendations and strategies can be **incorporated into any early childhood education center**

**or program to increase teachers' ability to enhance English acquisition.**<sup>12</sup> Families with low income can also take advantage of Head Start. The federal **Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007** includes provisions to ensure that young children who do not speak English as their primary language fully benefit from Head Start services. Participation rates among preschoolers who do not speak English as their primary language are increasing, with more children eligible than can be served by programs.<sup>13,14</sup>

## ENGLISH LEARNER PROGRAM

### Districts and charters with identified ELs must meet several obligations:

- Provide EL instruction and services
- Have adequate staff and basic resources
- Provide professional development for both educators and administrators
- Assess English language proficiency of ELs annually
- Monitor progress of exited students<sup>4,8</sup>

### Idaho's EL teachers use a variety of English acquisition methods:

- Co-teaching
- One-on-one intensive English instruction away from the general classroom
- Bilingual or dual language programs
- Intensive setting for students who are new to English
- Summer programs<sup>4,8</sup>

## EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND ATTAINMENT

Gaps in academic achievement and attainment are more likely for ELs. EL students learn to speak English at the same time as they are taught other subjects, and many of them miss classroom time if they are pulled out of class for EL instruction. Despite these gaps, **a large percentage of ELs graduate from high school and many go on to college or other postsecondary training.**

**STANDARDIZED TESTS.** The Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI) is a literacy skills assessment that is administered bi-annually, primarily in English, to Idaho's students in kindergarten through 3rd grade. In 2016-17, 34% of EL students scored at grade level on the IRI, compared to 61% among non-EL students.<sup>15</sup>

The Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) measures proficiency in science, language arts and math. The ISAT is administered annually in grades 3-8 and 10. Primary language supports are provided when appropriate. In 2017, ELs were less likely than non-EL students to have proficient or advanced scores in all tested subject areas.<sup>15</sup>

SELECTED EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS, IDAHO, 2016-2017		
	ELs	NON-ELs
<b>Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI) scores</b> (% of students with reading skills at grade level)		
Grades K-3	34	61
<b>Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) scores by subject</b> (% of students in grades 3-8 and 10 with scores that are proficient or advanced)		
Science	10	63
Language arts	7	55
Math	7	43
<b>High school graduation rate (%)</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>College-going rate among high school graduates (%)</b>		
Within one year of graduation	35	46
Within three years of graduation	52	60
<b>Enrollment in postsecondary institutions, by type of institution</b> (% of postsecondary students)		
In-state school	90	78
Public school	96	86
Two-year school	67	30

Note that graduation and go-on rates for ELs include students who have participated in the EL Program at any point before high school graduation.

## GRADUATION AND GO-ON RATES.

Students who have participated in the EL Program are **only slightly less likely than other students to graduate from high school: 75% compared to 80%, respectively.** **About a third of EL high school graduates (35%) go on to some form of postsecondary education within one year of graduation, compared to 46% among students who have never participated in the EL program.** ELs who go on to postsecondary education are more likely than other students to attend public, in-state and two-year institutions.<sup>15,16</sup>

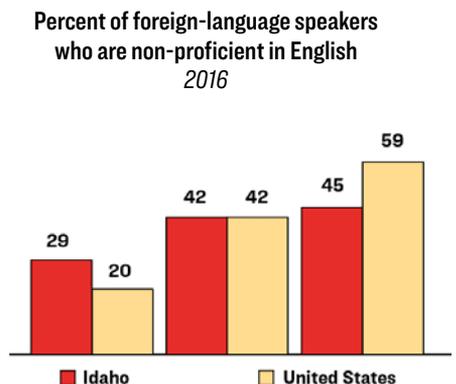
## CHARACTERISTICS OF IDAHO'S FOREIGN-LANGUAGE SPEAKERS

In 2016, Idaho had 170,008 foreign-language speakers (residents over the age of 5 who speak a language other than English at home). Compared to the rest of the nation, foreign-language speakers in Idaho

- Make up a **smaller share of the total population:** 11% in Idaho compared to 22% in the United States and
- Are **just as likely to be English proficient** (i.e., speak English "very well"): 61% in Idaho compared to 60% in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Only half (47%) of Idaho's foreign-language speakers are foreign born, and foreign-language speakers who are foreign born are less likely than those who are native born to be English proficient: 39% compared to 80%, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

**AGE-GROUP COMPARISON.** There are some distinct differences across age groups among foreign-language speakers. **In Idaho, foreign-language speaking youth (ages 5-17) are more likely than their national peers to be non-proficient in English, indicating that Idaho's foreign-language speaking youth are more likely to need help learning English.** The opposite is true among seniors (age 65 and older); Idaho's foreign-language speaking seniors are less likely than their national peers to be non-proficient in English.<sup>1</sup>



## POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE IDAHO'S ENGLISH ACQUISITION PROGRAMS

The success of Idaho's EL Program is especially important because **Idaho's foreign-language speaking youth are more likely than their national peers to need EL services.** The EL Program provides public school districts with support to identify ELs, meet their unique needs, reduce educational barriers and improve educational outcomes, all of which are important to EL student success. Providing a quality English acquisition program has its challenges, including a growing number of ELs who speak many different languages combined with a shortage in the number of teachers and staff with adequate training to serve them.

To improve educational outcomes for ELs, there is a need for more EL teachers, professional development for EL and general education teachers and staff, and funding for enhanced learning opportunities. ¡Colorin Colorado!, a national organization that serves EL educators, has many recommendations for improving EL education, some of which include:

- Expanding **evidence-based programs** with demonstrated success,
- Expanding access to **high-quality educational materials** including use of new technologies, especially in high-poverty schools and
- Implementing **English acquisition and bilingual programs in early childhood education programs.**<sup>17</sup>

Providing ELs with the language skills needed to meet academic standards is not only mandated by federal regulation; it is also an **ISDE priority**, as is preparing EL students for life beyond the classroom for postsecondary education and careers.



*“Our goal is to develop curricula and teaching strategies that embrace each learner’s unique identity to help break down barriers that prevent ELs from succeeding in school.”*

**Idaho State Department of Education,  
English Learner Program**

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### SOURCES AND NOTES

<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2016 Single-year Estimates and 2012-2016 Five-year Estimates; note that data on ability to speak English are self-reported

<sup>2</sup> Maria Millard, 2015, State funding mechanisms for English language learners, Education Commission of the States

<sup>3</sup> Idaho State Department of Education, Consolidated State Performance Report: Part I, 2016-17

<sup>4</sup> Idaho State Department of Education, communications with the State EL and Title III Coordinator

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Facts: English Language Learners

<sup>6</sup> Education Commission of the States, The Progress of Education Reform, English Language Learners, December 2013

<sup>7</sup> Idaho State Department of Education, Idaho Consolidated State Plan, 2018

<sup>8</sup> Idaho State Department of Education, State EL Guidance for School Districts

<sup>9</sup> Idaho State Department of Education, English Learners in Idaho: EL Exit and Monitoring

<sup>10</sup> Idaho State Department of Education, Idaho’s Educator Landscape: How is the State’s Teacher Workforce Responding to its Students’ Needs?

<sup>11</sup> Community Eligibility Provision allows schools with at least 40% of students eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch during the previous school year to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students

<sup>12</sup> Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Idaho Early Learning eGuidelines: In the Preschool Classroom (Second Edition)

<sup>13</sup> Idaho Head Start Association, Annual Report: Program Year 2016-2017

<sup>14</sup> Community Council of Idaho, 2017 Annual Report

<sup>15</sup> Idaho State Department of Education, Migrant Student Information System

<sup>16</sup> Idaho State Board of Education, Go-on Rates, 2017

<sup>17</sup> ¡Colorin Colorado!, Signposts: ELL Policy Recommendations for Policy Makers



The University of Idaho's James A. and Louise McClure Center for Public Policy Research was founded in 2007. The Center's approach to addressing society's complex issues sustains Senator McClure's legacy of thoughtfully pursuing bipartisan collaborations and sound public policy.

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