



# Older Adolescent and Young Adult English Learners

A Study of Demographics, Policies,  
and Programs

Executive Summary



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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### Executive Summary

June 2016

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For U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education

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## Abbreviations

EL	English learner
OCTAE	Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education
OELA	Office of English Language Acquisition
CPS	Current Population Survey
ACS	American Community Survey
PUMS	Public Use Microdata Sample
IPUMS	Integrated Public Use Microdata Series
<i>ESEA</i>	<i>Elementary and Secondary Education Act</i>
PIAAC	Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
GED	General Education Development (diploma or test)

# Introduction



This document summarizes findings from an extensive analysis of survey data on English learners (ELs) that was undertaken in 2015 to inform the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) and Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) about the demographics and other characteristics of ELs ages 14–21. The analysis resulted in detailed findings on the demographic characteristics, education attainment, and employment and family status of ELs. A report titled *Older Adolescent and Young Adult English Learners: A Study of Demographics, Policies, and Programs* was produced for internal use by the U.S. Department of Education and provided extensive findings as well as implications for program, outreach, and service delivery strategies.

RTI International conducted this study under contract from the U.S. Department of Education (GS-10F-0348U/ ED-VAE-10-O-0102, Task Order 14).

# Background

As reported in the U.S. Department of Education's *The Condition of Education 2015*, an estimated 4.4 million ELs were enrolled in K–12 schools in the United States in school year 2012–13, representing 9.2 percent of all public school students (National Center for Education Statistics 2015). Additionally, approximately 42 percent of the 1.6 million adults receiving services from federally funded adult education programs were enrolled in EL programs in 2010–11, with as many as 133,000 (16 percent of those enrolled) between the ages of 16 and 24 (U.S. Department of Education 2013).

A growing number of these ELs are young adults who, due to a host of reasons, are unable to complete high school within the traditional time frame and are discharged or drop out before graduation. Many of these young ELs want to continue their education and are enrolling in adult education programs to earn a high school credential and acquire job and English language skills (Young 2005). For example, according to a Migration Policy Institute study, in the 2008–09 program year, 27 percent of adults enrolled in federally funded adult education programs in New York State were immigrants ages 16–24. Despite being eligible for traditional high school, those who were age 21 or younger were not enrolled for a variety of reasons: They were advised by school staff to drop out of high school and pursue an alternative high school credential or, when immigrating to the United States, they were either unsuccessful enrolling in high school or never intended to enroll (Lukes 2012).

With approximately 11.3 million young immigrants or children with immigrant parents in the United States today (Batalova and Fix 2011), a better understanding of the population is needed. A 2011 analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) and Current Population Survey (CPS) data found that young immigrants ages 16–26 were diverse in terms of their origin, legal status, English language skills, socioeconomic status, and family composition. The study also found that children of immigrants were more likely to have better education, workforce, and economic outcomes and stronger English language skills than their immigrant counterparts (Batalova and Fix 2011).

To expand this knowledge base, OCTAE supported an analysis of relevant data from the most recent ACS. The study was designed to document the education, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors related to the high school performance and education and career needs of ELs ages 14–21. The focus on 14–21-year-old ELs as a cohort is important for several reasons. Of particular concern is the large number of young ELs who are not completing high school. The latest figures available from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics indicate that, for school year 2011–12, the percentage of students with limited English proficiency that successfully completed high school in four years with a high school diploma was 57, which is well below the national average of 79 percent (Stetser and Stillwell 2014). While it is beyond the scope of this study to explore the reasons behind the poor education outcomes, the risk factors are many and continue to emerge in the literature. For example, in a



recent study in six Oregon school districts, researchers found that EL students were suspended or expelled at a higher rate than non-ELs in both middle school and high school (Burke 2015). Furthermore, ELs who were disciplined had lower scores on state assessments in reading and math than ELs who were not suspended or expelled.

Another reason the analysis focused on 14–21-year-olds is that the transition to adulthood happens at this age. Individuals are gaining education and labor market experience that will have a large impact on their future status as productive members of a working society. The paucity of information available on 14–21-year-old ELs warrants a detailed examination of this subpopulation.

The main purpose of the English learners study was to increase the current knowledge of the unique characteristics of older adolescent and young adult ELs ages 14–21, especially with regard to demographics, education attainment, and employment and family status. Findings, which are summarized in this Executive Summary, have provided OCTAE and OELA with a better understanding of the education needs of this group. Findings are also informing OCTAE's outreach and service delivery strategies and OELA's program priorities and technical assistance as the offices seek to strengthen and expand education and technical assistance services to meet the education needs of this population.

## Research Questions

The English learners study explored several sets of questions about the EL population, focusing on (1) demographic characteristics, (2) education attainment outcomes, and (3) employment outcomes. The demographic questions laid the groundwork for the rest of the study by describing characteristics of the older adolescent and young adult EL population in the United States today. The education questions measured the current state of education attainment for the EL population, focusing specifically on high school dropouts. Equivalent non-EL education attainment measures were included to serve as a point of comparison. The employment questions examined how well young ELs succeed in the labor market today. Understanding the current state of ELs' education and employment outcomes will help inform future EL adult education programs by providing a baseline for current EL achievement and employment.

# Methods

## Overview of the ACS Data

The data used in the study were from the ACS and were collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. The ACS is a yearly 1-percent random sample of American households. As such, there are approximately 3 million observations in the sample each year, with 2013 being the most recent year of data collection available at the time the research was conducted. Because ELs are such a small fraction of the overall population, and because the desire is to perform a detailed analysis subdividing this population further, for example, by education attainment or employment status, the study used a three-year sample of ACS data. The analysis file for the study combined observations from the 2011, 2012, and 2013 survey years, creating a sample with over 9 million observations. Although there was a trade-off with how current the data are, using the three-year sample allowed for the much larger sample sizes necessary to study small populations.

## Source of Data Used in This Analysis – Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

The ACS data are publically available on the U.S. Census Bureau website in Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files. Although the PUMS ACS data are easily downloaded from the website, they require cleaning and data manipulation. One reason for the data manipulation is that, over the years of the survey, some variable names and response options have changed. For example, between 2011 and 2012, coding of the variable that measures the language spoken at home was changed, as was the coding of the occupation variable.

Although many researchers use the PUMS ACS data from the U.S. Census Bureau website, significant work is needed to format the data before analysis can begin. To make the PUMS ACS data easier to use, a nonprofit group at the University of Minnesota cleans and formats the data, and then makes the revised data sets publically available (Ruggles et al. 2015). The resulting data sets are known as the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS). The IPUMS data are commonly used by researchers at the Migration Policy Institute and Pew Hispanic Center, among others, as well as researchers in many other fields. The IPUMS data are also commonly used in peer-reviewed journal publications (for a selection, please search the bibliography on <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>).

The analyses in the English learners study, summarized in this Executive Summary, were conducted with IPUMS data. As mentioned above, a three-year pooled sample of 2011–13 IPUMS data was used.<sup>1</sup> The same analysis can be conducted with PUMS data directly from the U.S. Census Bureau or with IPUMS data. The number of observations in each data source is the same. The underlying data for each observation are the same. The only difference is that the IPUMS data are precleaned and formatted and thus easier to use.

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<sup>1</sup> The source for the data used in these analyses is U.S. Census Bureau, 2011–2013 American Community Survey (ACS). Data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org).

# Definition of English Learner

## Self-reported Measure

To determine who in the ACS is an EL, a self-reported English ability question is used.<sup>2</sup> While there are some disadvantages to using a self-reported measure, the ACS is commonly used to measure English ability in research studies due to a lack of other data options.<sup>3</sup> The ACS data are also used by the U.S. Department of Education to allocate funds from the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title III-A (English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act)* across states.<sup>4</sup> The *Title III-A* formula, which is used to make grant allocations to the states based on the proportion of limited-English-proficient students in each state, is based on ACS and state-reported data. Additionally, a previous study by the Migration Policy Institute found a high correlation between self-reported English language skills (as measured by the ACS) and English literacy (as measured by the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies [PIAAC]).<sup>5</sup> Given that the ACS is the only national data set that includes information on English language ability, as well as a rich set of other demographic, education, and employment information, this data set is well suited to the current analysis.

## English Ability Question

In the English ability question in the ACS, respondents were first asked if they “speak a language other than English at home.” Only if they responded “yes” were they asked how well they speak English. The possible responses were “speak very well,” “speak well,” “speak not well,” and “does not speak English.” All respondents who reported that they spoke English less than “very well” were considered to be ELs. It should also be noted that the ACS is available in Spanish as well as English and that, because the survey is administered at the household level, family members can help correctly respond to the English ability question for other family members who struggle with the English language.

In the summary of the key findings, the outcomes of ELs are sometimes compared with those of non-ELs. Non-ELs are simply defined as everyone who is not an EL. Non-ELs are thus everyone who speaks only English or who speaks English “very well.” The non-EL numbers reported in the analysis serve as a point of comparison and are helpful in evaluating how ELs are faring compared with equivalent non-EL peers.

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<sup>2</sup> The English ability question is described as “self-reported” because individuals are not administered a test to evaluate their English ability. However, because the ACS is a household-level survey, it is often completed by one member of the household. Therefore, the English ability question is technically household reported (not necessarily self-reported), meaning that the person answering the English ability question for each individual may be the person him- or herself or another household member.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see [http://ncela.ed.gov/files/fast\\_facts/OELA\\_FastFacts\\_AsianLanguages.pdf](http://ncela.ed.gov/files/fast_facts/OELA_FastFacts_AsianLanguages.pdf) or <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2007/06/06/ii-introduction-7/>.

<sup>4</sup> See [http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/crsreports/crsdocuments/R42154\\_01182012.pdf](http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/crsreports/crsdocuments/R42154_01182012.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/through-immigrant-lens-piaac-assessment-competencies-adults-united-states>.

# Key Findings

Of the 1.6 million adults receiving services from federally funded adult education programs, approximately 42 percent are ELs, some of whom did not complete high school within the traditional time frame and were discharged or dropped out before graduation. Dropping out of high school placed these students at high risk for experiencing negative socioeconomic outcomes as adults (Stark and Noel 2015). There are a number of challenges inherent in being an older adolescent or young adult EL. When these challenges are combined with such risk factors as dropping out of high school and detachment from the labor force, these students have limited options for improving their situation later in life.

Key findings from the English learners study are described below. A sample of these findings also appears in the accompanying infographic. The findings focus exclusively on ELs who are 14–21 years of age. Because one would expect that education and employment outcomes may vary based on an individual's age, the statistics for these outcomes are shown separately for 14–18-year-olds and 19–21-year-olds.

1. **There are approximately 1.5 million 14–21-year-old ELs in the United States.** The ACS data used in this study indicate that, as of 2013, there are over 25 million ELs nationwide. Of those, about 779,000 are 14–18 years of age; and 675,000 are 19–21 years of age.<sup>6</sup>
2. **The population of ELs is demographically diverse.**
  - ELs ages 14–21 are 55 percent male (798,000 individuals), 45 percent female (657,000 individuals), 15 percent white (216,000 individuals), 5 percent black (71,000 individuals), 37 percent Hispanic (545,000 individuals), 18 percent Asian (262,000 individuals), and 25 percent other or more than one race (361,000 individuals).
  - Some 43 percent of 14–21-year-old ELs are U.S. born (622,000 individuals), 8 percent are naturalized citizens (110,000 individuals), and 50 percent are not citizens (722,000 individuals).
3. **The education attainment of ELs is significantly lower than that of non-ELs.** Approximately 13 percent of 14–18-year-old ELs (102,000 individuals) are not enrolled in either secondary or postsecondary education. The corresponding percentage of non-ELs is approximately 6 percent. Similarly, the percentage of 19–21-year-olds not enrolled in any education is 56 percent for ELs (376,000 individuals) and 40 percent for non-ELs.

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<sup>6</sup> As a point of comparison, as of 2013, there were 33.7 million 14–21-year-old non-ELs in the United States.

4. **The percentage of ELs ages 14–21 who drop out of high school is substantially higher than that of non-ELs.**
  - Overall, 8 percent of 14–18-year-old ELs drop out of high school (61,000 individuals). The corresponding percentage for non-ELs is only 3 percent.
  - Of 14–18-year-old ELs not currently enrolled in any education, 60 percent do not have a high school credential. The corresponding percentage for non-ELs is only 43 percent.
  - Overall, 22 percent of 19–21-year-old ELs drop out of high school (151,000 individuals). The corresponding percentage for non-ELs is only 6 percent.
  - Of 19–21-year-old ELs not currently enrolled, 40 percent do not have a high school credential. The corresponding percentage for non-ELs is only 14 percent.
5. **Although ELs make up only 4 percent of 14–21-year-olds nationwide, they make up 14 percent of 14–21-year-old high school dropouts.<sup>7</sup>** Compared with high school completers, ELs who drop out of high school are more likely to be male (64 vs. 53 percent), more likely to be Hispanic (48 vs. 33 percent), more likely to be noncitizens (73 vs. 53 percent), and more likely to live below the poverty line (40 vs. 33 percent).
6. **Nationwide, approximately 202,000 16–21-year-old ELs are not enrolled in school and also are not employed.**
  - Some 57 percent of nonenrolled 16–18-year-old ELs are not employed (51,000 individuals), while another 13 percent are employed only part time (12,000 individuals).<sup>8</sup>
  - Some 40 percent of nonenrolled 19–21-year-old ELs are not employed (151,000 individuals), while another 15 percent are employed only part time (56,000).
  - These percentages of nonenrolled and non-employed ELs are similar or even lower than the corresponding percentages for non-ELs. Some 64 percent of nonenrolled 16–18-year-old non-ELs are not employed, and 20 percent are employed only part time. Some 42 percent of nonenrolled 19–21-year-old non-ELs are not employed, and another 23 percent are employed only part time.
7. **Approximately 89,000 ELs are not employed, are not enrolled in education, and never earned a high school credential.** Among 16–21-year-old EL high school dropouts, 44 percent are not employed. The corresponding non-EL percentage is 70 percent, indicating even less employment for non-EL older adolescents or young adults with no high school credential.

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<sup>7</sup> Some 4 percent of 14–21-year-olds are categorized as ELs in the ACS data. There are several reasons the ACS data on ELs may be different from other data sources. For a detailed explanation of the differences between ACS and other data sources, see the Definition of English Learner section.

<sup>8</sup> In the ACS, employment questions are presented only to individuals who are at least 16 years of age. Approximately 496,000 ELs are between 16 and 18 years of age, and 18 percent are not currently enrolled in either secondary or postsecondary education. Part time is defined as working less than 35 hours per week.

In summary, **ELs have considerably lower education attainment than non-ELs.** ELs are less likely to be enrolled in any secondary or postsecondary education programs, and they are also significantly more likely to drop out of high school. However, those ELs who are not currently enrolled have better employment outcomes than non-ELs. ELs are more likely than non-ELs to be employed. Of those without a high school credential, ELs are particularly likely to be employed. **Across the country, there are approximately 89,000 ELs who are not employed, are not enrolled in education, and never earned a high school credential.**

It should be noted, however, that there are several confounding explanations for the seemingly better employment outcomes measured for ELs. First, employment outcomes in the English learners study were reported separately by enrollment. Given that 14–21-year-old ELs are much more likely not to be enrolled, it is possible that differential selection into enrollment across the two groups is driving the employment findings.<sup>9</sup> Second, a simple measure of employment does not capture an individual's future earnings prospects. For example, perhaps more non-ELs without high school credentials are not employed because they are studying to earn a GED® (General Education Development) or other high school equivalency credential. Additionally, perhaps non-ELs search for jobs longer, and are thus more likely to be not employed, but may have jobs with higher earnings potential or opportunity for advancement when they finally take a job. Lastly, because individuals discontinued their education at different points in time, they have varied amounts of work experience, which affects the likelihood of employment. ELs may have more attachment to the labor force in their late teens and early 20s, but that does not necessarily mean higher lifetime earnings, or that they are on a career pathway, especially in our increasingly knowledge-based economy, where higher education is associated with better later-life employment outcomes.

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<sup>9</sup> Differential selection means that the characteristics of ELs who are not enrolled may be different from the characteristics of non-ELs who are not enrolled.

## Recommendations for Further Research

The English learners study was a broad overview of demographic, education, and employment outcomes of ELs 14–21 years of age. The study could be extended in several ways. First, the primary outcome variables could be explored by additional demographic variables. The education outcomes are summarized separately by sex, but they could also be summarized separately by race, foreign-born status, parental characteristics, language spoken at home, or any of the other demographics included in the study. Likewise, the employment outcomes were calculated separately by sex and enrollment, but they could also be investigated separately by the other demographic variables included in the study.

Second, the study could be extended to include other ages or other years of data. The focus of the English learners study was on 14–21-year-olds, but it would be interesting to compare them to slightly older ELs, perhaps those 22–30 years of age. The study could also be extended to include additional years of data. For example, replicating the study on data from 2005–07 or 2008–10 would allow for analysis of trends in these outcomes before and after the 2007–09 Great Recession.

Third, the study could be extended to look specifically at changes in states that experienced growth or decline in their EL populations over time. One potential research question could investigate labor market changes or immigration trends that occurred in states with significant gains in EL numbers. Another potential research question could examine changes in laws at the state level that led to decreases in the EL population. For example, laws that made it more difficult for noncitizens to enroll in school and/or obtain work could have large effects on the EL population of a given state. It also may be helpful to compare the education policies and practices in states that have lower dropout rates among their young EL populations with states that have high dropout rates.

Fourth, the investigation could benefit from exploring longitudinal or qualitative data, not just cross-sectional survey data. This analysis would need to be performed with data other than the ACS, however, because the ACS does not include any longitudinal or qualitative components. The ACS provides a snapshot of individuals' outcomes at one point in time, but there is no way of knowing how any of these outcomes are evolving over time. For instance, perhaps some individuals in the ACS would have been counted as ELs in previous years but have taken actions to improve their English language skills and are no longer ELs. It would be very interesting to understand how the population of former ELs differs from the population of current ELs and what steps former ELs took to improve their English skills. Additionally, it would be interesting to investigate how outcomes of ELs are evolving over time. For instance, there is a large population of EL high school dropouts, but perhaps, over time, some of them eventually earn a GED® or other high school equivalency credential. It would be interesting to know the characteristics of EL high school dropouts that eventually earn a high school credential and what steps they take to complete this credential. Additional variables of interest could be respondents' literacy level in their native language and whether they applied for and received federal financial aid, both of which might explain variation in education and employment outcomes. To our knowledge, no longitudinal data set of ELs at the national level exists to answer these research questions. As such, a survey to study ELs over time would need to be created, perhaps with qualitative questions to explore the mechanisms and motivations behind various EL outcomes.

# Knowledge Gained and Implications

## Knowledge Gained From the Study

The ACS analysis indicated that, while the EL population in the United States grew between 1990 and 2000, the rate of growth has slowed considerably in the last decade. This decrease in the EL population can be seen at the state level as well and is especially evident in the 14–18-year-old group. More recent data show that there are now approximately 1.5 million 14–21-year-old ELs in the United States. The states with the largest numbers of 14–21-year-old ELs are California (324,100), Texas (213,300), and New York (138,600).

A comparison of EL and non-EL demographic characteristics indicated that older adolescent and young adult ELs are different from their non-EL counterparts. ELs have the following characteristics:

- more likely to be male, Hispanic, and Asian
- more likely to be noncitizens and less likely to be U.S. born
- more likely to be in the lower income quartiles and to be below the poverty line
- more likely to have less educated parents who are noncitizens and non-natives

Data also showed that ELs speak Spanish predominantly and are fairly recent arrivals to the United States (only one-fifth of non-native ELs have been in the United States for more than 10 years). In fact, over half of non-native 14–21-year-old ELs came to the United States when they were older than 10 years of age.

Overall, the study indicated that older adolescent and young adult ELs generally have lower education attainment than their non-EL peers. Specifically, ELs are less likely to be enrolled in school. About 13 percent of 14–18-year-old ELs and 56 percent of 19–21-year-old ELs are not receiving any formal schooling. Among those not enrolled, more than half in the younger cohort and over a third in the older cohort did not complete a high school credential. However, despite their poor education outcomes, ELs have equivalent, or sometimes even stronger, employment outcomes. ELs, especially males, are more likely to be employed if not enrolled in school, and they have equivalent, if not slightly higher, yearly earnings.



## Implications


The detailed knowledge gained from the English learners study provided a better understanding of ELs ages 14–21 and how best to serve them through adult education programs, the K–12 system, and associated support services such as workforce development and social services.

Adult education programs may need to update or restructure their programming to accommodate a younger population of ELs whose background and education and career goals may be different from those of other participants. Also, as noted by prior research (Young 2005), adult education instructors who serve younger ELs may benefit from courses on adolescent development and mentoring techniques that address the specific needs of adolescent ELs.

Results from the study documented a major challenge facing young ELs and the programs that serve them: Many ELs do not persist in education programming long enough to earn a credential, and even fewer transition to postsecondary education. As highlighted in a 2011 Migration Policy Institute report, immigrant children and those from immigrant families need clear and accessible career pathways (Batalova and Fix 2011). Adult education programs serve as a strong bridge to these career pathways, which may include nondegree job training and for-credit postsecondary degree programs. Adult education programs are important resources for ELs and can provide the guidance and support needed for individuals to ensure successful transitions.

Although the study provided a wealth of information on ELs ages 14–21, more research is needed to provide context for these findings. For example, is there any correlation between changes in the labor market; political landscape; or federal and state resources for education, support, and employment services in the states that have experienced large fluctuations in their EL population? Can other causes be identified? Gaining a better understanding of why the young EL population is changing significantly in some states and not in others could help OCTAE (1) better anticipate future population fluctuations and (2) determine how best to allocate resources so that programs can effectively and efficiently address the diverse and changing needs of their student population.

It also would be helpful to compare the study's findings to changes in adult education enrollment by state. For example, have EL population increases or decreases affected program enrollment and the average age of adult education participants? Also, have programs seen any changes in the education and career goals set by their students and their persistence and completion rates? A future study could also examine the employment sectors in which these ELs are more highly represented as well as the education requirements of these occupations.



Additionally, the finding that ELs have equivalent, if not slightly better, yearly earnings than non-ELs cannot be used to indicate that the future earnings of ELs will be better than those of non-ELs. In the study, ELs were found to be less likely than non-ELs to be in high-wage occupations but more likely to be in high-wage industries. To explore this further, it would be helpful to complete a longitudinal study to get a better sense of long-term employment outcomes and how these outcomes may be affected by ELs' lack of education, their parents' lack of education, and the occupations they choose.

Finally, the finding that ELs have significantly lower education attainment than their equivalent non-EL peers raises these important questions: What can the K–12 system, as well as associated support services such as workforce development and social services, do to better serve this population? How can these different groups work together to retain ELs who are at a high risk of dropping out of high school? Future research should also explore alternative approaches for ensuring supported transitions and the ultimate attainment of credentials, such as partnerships with community-based organizations and other adult learning programs. Improving the education outcomes of ELs will have a meaningful effect on a population that is at high risk for difficult later-life outcomes.

# Education and Employment Characteristics of English Learners Ages 14–21 in the United States



## Summary of Infographic

This infographic describes the demographic characteristics, education attainment, and employment outcomes of older adolescent and young adult English learners (ELs) in the United States, focusing exclusively on ELs who are 14–21 years of age. The statistics in this infographic summarize findings from an extensive analysis of survey data on ELs that was undertaken in 2015 to inform the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) and the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA). An executive summary of the final report, *Older Adolescent and Young Adult English Learners: A Study of Demographics, Policies, and Programs*, is available online at <https://lincs.ed.gov/publications>. The data used in the analysis come from the 2011–2013 American Community Survey (ACS), which was conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau and can be downloaded from IPUMS-USA ([www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org)).

The middle three panels of the infographic detail how ELs ages 14–21 have considerably lower education attainment than non-ELs but are more likely to be employed. Specifically, ELs are more likely than non-ELs to drop out of high school. The first panel shows that, among 14–18-year-olds, 8 percent of ELs drop out of high school, compared to 3 percent of non-ELs. Among 19–21-year-olds, 22 percent of ELs drop out of high school, compared to 6 percent of non-ELs. ELs are also less likely to be enrolled in either high school or college than non-ELs. The second panel shows that 87 percent of 14–18-year-old ELs are enrolled compared to 94 percent of non-ELs. Some 44 percent of 19–21-year-old ELs are enrolled compared to 60 percent of non-ELs. While ELs have lower education attainment than non-ELs, they are more likely to be employed. The third panel shows that 43 percent of ELs ages 16–18 and 60 percent of ELs ages 19–21 are employed, compared to 36 percent and 58 percent of non-ELs, respectively.

The infographic concludes by describing the EL population in the United States by sex (45 percent female and 55 percent male), race (15 percent white, 5 percent black, 37 percent Hispanic, 18 percent Asian, and 25 percent other or more than one race), and citizenship status (43 percent U.S. born, 8 percent naturalized citizens, and 50 percent noncitizens).

Source data for the infographic are presented in the Appendix on page 15 for low vision viewing.

# Education and Employment Characteristics of English Learners Ages 14–21 in the United States

English Learners (ELs) have considerably **lower** education attainment than non-ELs but are **more likely** to be employed.



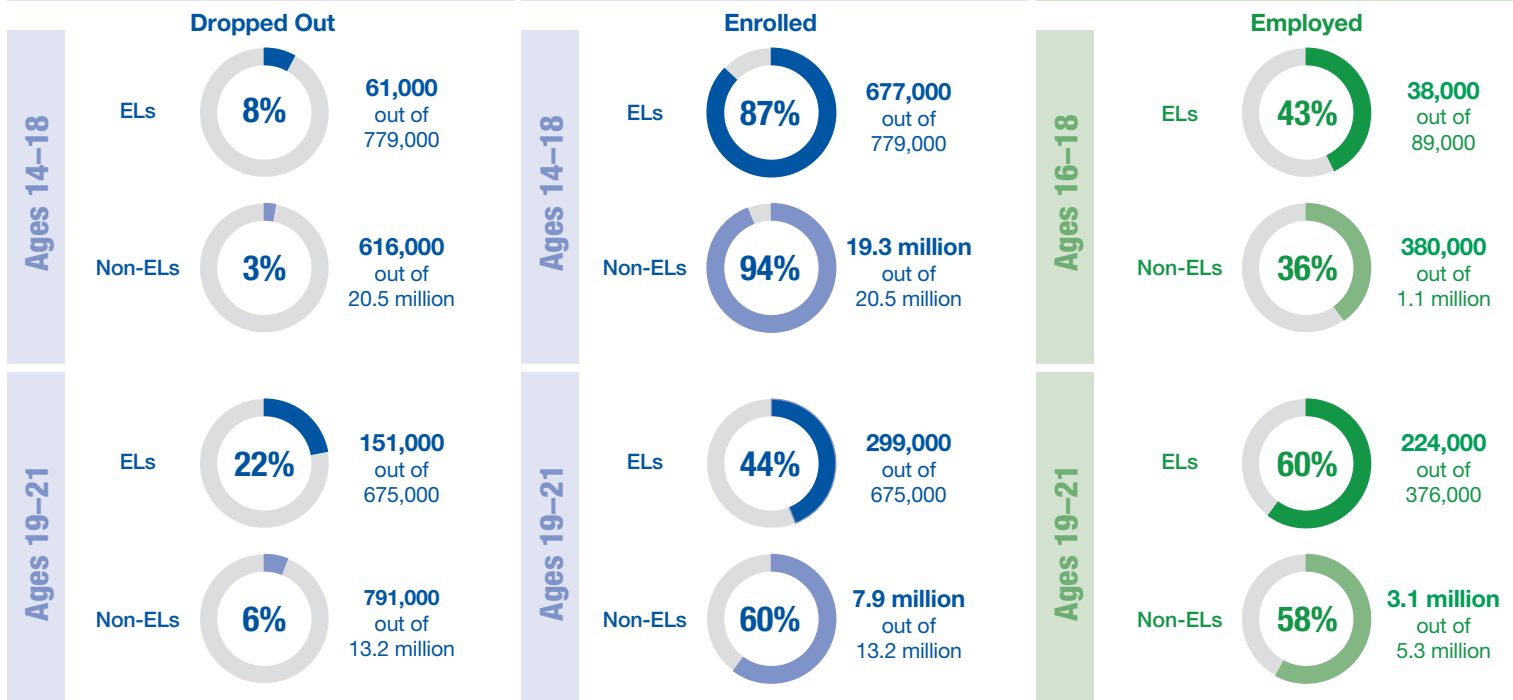
ELs are **more likely** to **drop out** of high school than non-ELs.



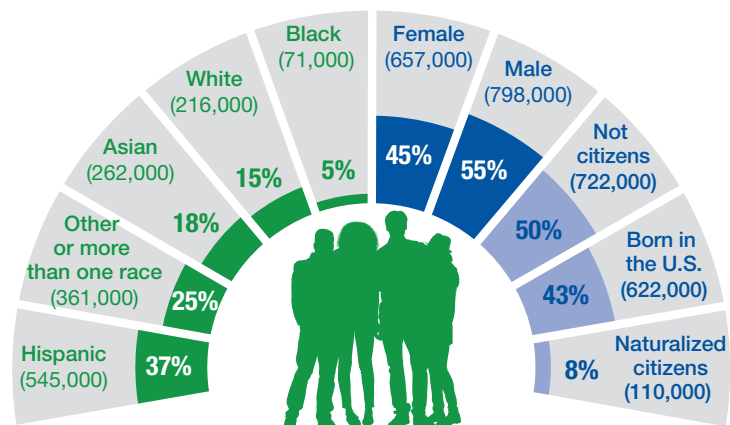
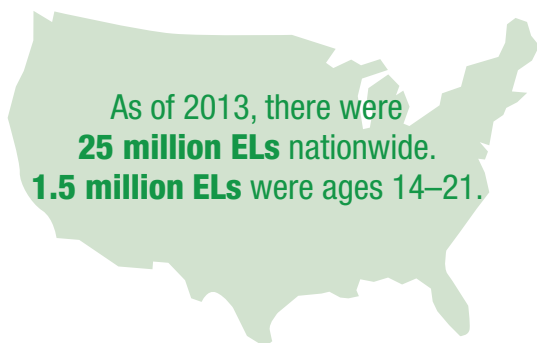
ELs are **less likely** to be **enrolled in high school or college** than non-ELs.



Among those not enrolled, ELs are **more likely** to be **employed** than non-ELs.



## Demographics of ELs ages 14–21



These findings are from an analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) data on English Learners (ELs) that was completed in 2015 to inform the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) and Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) as the offices seek to strengthen and expand educational and technical assistance services to meet the educational needs of this population. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011–2013 American Community Survey (ACS). Data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org). Note: Employment data on those less than 16 years of age were not collected in the ACS. The percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding. Percentages are calculated on unrounded counts of individuals.

## Appendix

The following data are illustrated in the infographic “Education and Employment Characteristics of English Learners Ages 14–21 in the United States” on page 14.

### **English Learners (ELs) have considerably lower education attainment than non-ELs but are more likely to be employed.**

ELs are more likely to drop out of high school than non-ELs.

Ages 14–18	ELs	8% Dropped Out	61,000 out of 779,000
Ages 14–18	Non-ELs	3% Dropped Out	616,000 out of 20.5 million
Ages 19–21	ELs	22% Dropped Out	151,000 out of 675,000
Ages 19–21	Non-ELs	6% Dropped Out	791,000 out of 13.2 million

ELs are less likely to be enrolled in high school or college than non-ELs.

Ages 14–18	ELs	87% Enrolled	677,000 out of 779,000
Ages 14–18	Non-ELs	94% Enrolled	19.3 million out of 20.5 million
Ages 19–21	ELs	44% Enrolled	299,000 out of 675,000
Ages 19–21	Non-ELs	60% Enrolled	7.9 million out of 13.2 million

Among those not enrolled, ELs are more likely to be employed than non-ELs.

Ages 16–18	ELs	43% Employed	38,000 out of 89,000
Ages 16–18	Non-ELs	36% Employed	380,000 out of 1.1 million
Ages 19–21	ELs	60% Employed	224,000 out of 376,000
Ages 19–21	Non-ELs	58% Employed	3.1 million out of 5.3 million

### **Demographics of ELs ages 14–21**

As of 2013, there were 25 million ELs nationwide. 1.5 million ELs were ages 14–21.

	Number	Percent
Hispanic	545,000	37%
Other or more than one race	361,000	25%
Asian	262,000	18%
White	216,000	15%
Black	71,000	5%
Female	657,000	45%
Male	798,000	55%
Not citizens	722,000	50%
Born in the U.S.	622,000	43%
Naturalized citizens	110,000	8%

These findings are from an analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) data on English Learners (ELs) that was completed in 2015 to inform the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) and Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) as the offices seek to strengthen and expand educational and technical assistance services to meet the educational needs of this population. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011–2013 American Community Survey (ACS). Data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org). Note: Employment data on those less than 16 years of age were not collected in the ACS. The percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding. Percentages are calculated on unrounded counts of individuals.

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