



# Virginia Must Address Its Lack of Support for English Learner Students

Every child should have access to an excellent education. In Virginia, it is written into the state constitution that the legislature will seek to ensure “an educational program of high quality.” Yet year after year, the state underfunds students who are learning English (EL), resulting in lower achievement in graduation, testing, and higher education enrollment outcomes for this fast growing student population. The barriers that EL students face have been exacerbated by the pandemic, and data suggests they have been hardest hit by the disruptions.

A collection of policies can support EL students holistically. And it is time for state leaders to make significant changes in how Virginia funds EL staffing and services to meet the promise of providing a high-quality education to all students.

## English Learner (EL) Students

EL students are officially designated within schools as students who are not fully proficient in English and need additional services. Students can place out of the EL designation once they demonstrate proficiency.



Around 10% of Virginia students are learning English, come from a variety of backgrounds, and are more likely to speak a language other than Spanish compared to EL students nationally.



Virginia EL students have been hardest hit by learning disruptions and experienced the greatest academic losses.



EL students were more likely to live in households that experienced economic hardship and heightened anxiety.



Inadequate state funding limits specialized instructors, resources, and trained general education teachers to support EL students in schools.

## Persistently Inadequate State Support for English Learner Students Shapes Outcomes

Many factors contribute to an EL student’s achievements in school, including state and local funding, diversity of language, density of EL students within school divisions, state support services provided for immigrant families, school structures and available courses, and strength of community-based organizations to name a few.

Virginia’s state supplemental funding for EL students (13.5%) is just one-third of the national average (39%). And Virginia fares particularly poorly compared to other states when it comes to academic achievement. It’s clear based on state data that a majority of EL students are not receiving the support they need to overcome unique barriers to education.



Virginia’s English learner (EL) student population faces significant barriers to education and the state is falling short in providing adequate resources to assist students in overcoming these barriers.

**24%**

Pass rate of Virginia EL students on 2021 state reading tests; lowest of all Virginia student subgroups

**3rd Worst**

Virginia’s rank for 8th grade NEAP reading scores for EL students out of states with measurable data

**73%**

Four-year graduation rate of EL students, compared to 94% for non-EL students; 6th worst out of all states for EL graduation

# Policymakers Have Tools to Uphold Constitutional Commitment to a High-Quality Education for All Students

How we choose to spend shared resources in a state budget is often seen as a reflection of what and who the state values. More funding is not the singular solution to meet EL students' needs, yet is an essential part of the equation.

Comprehensive research shows that school funding makes a significant difference over time by improving achievement, graduation rates, and education enrollment.

Virginia's current EL funding falls far below the lower bounds of what most cost adequacy studies in other states suggest for needed additional supplements.

Adequate and flexible funding will help schools train general education teachers to better work with EL students, purchase EL-specific learning resources, sufficiently staff EL teachers, and more. The state could advance a number of other policies to identify and nourish the strengths and abilities of EL students.

**1** Provide **adequate support** for EL students. Based on adequacy studies from other states, Virginia should provide an additional \$132 to \$169 million annually for EL students

**2** Fully fund the revised **Standards of Quality**, as recommended by Virginia Board of Education, which includes a number of investments, from additional EL instructors to support staff

**3** Invest in and scale services provided by **community-based organizations** that serve EL students and immigrant families

**4** Provide state funding to support **community schools** to offer holistic models for providing essential services to students & families

**5** **Automatically enroll** qualified students in advanced courses with an opt-out option, to give more EL students the opportunity to engage in challenging coursework

**6** **Diversify Virginia's teaching workforce** and **increase training** for all educators working with EL students (e.g. increase state investment in "Grow Your Own" teaching programs)

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