

## **Reaching English Learners Act**

- ***1 in 10 public school students across the United States is learning to speak English***
- ***32 states report a shortage of teachers for English Learners (ELs)***
- ***65 percent of ELs graduate high school, compared to the national graduation rate of 83 percent***

### **English Learners (ELs)**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) defines “English learner” as a student aged 3-21 who is enrolled in or preparing to enroll in elementary or secondary school, whose native language is one other than English, and whose difficulties speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English may deny the student the ability to meet State academic standards, achieve academically in classes taught in English, and/or participate fully in society (20 USC 7801).

There are nearly 5 million EL students across the country – one in ten public school students – most of whom are U.S. citizens. While Spanish is the primary language for most EL students, other languages are also prevalent, including Chinese, Vietnamese, and Arabic<sup>1</sup>.

### **EL Teacher Shortage**

Teaching ELs requires a specific skillset and unique teaching strategies, including bilingual instruction, but the Department of Education reports that 32 states have a shortage of teachers for EL students<sup>2</sup>, making them unable to meet the students’ needs. The difficulties in instructing this growing population are reflected in a shocking academic achievement gap: on the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress, 70 percent of eighth grade EL students scored “below basic” on reading proficiency, compared to 20 percent of non-ELs, while 69 percent of ELs scored “below basic” in math proficiency, compared to 24 percent of non-ELs<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that 65 percent of EL students graduate high school in four years, compared to the national four-year graduation rate of 83 percent<sup>4</sup>.

### **Reaching English Learners Act**

The ***Reaching English Learners Act*** would address this crisis by creating a grant program under Title II Part B of the Higher Education Act to fund the development of teacher preparation programs that train future teachers to instruct ELs. Specifically, institutions of higher education would be required to partner with local educational agencies to build or strengthen teaching programs that provide teacher candidates with skills related to:

- Helping ELs in prekindergarten, elementary, and secondary school programs achieve at high academic levels and attain English proficiency;
- Recognizing and addressing the social and emotional needs of ELs;
- Appropriately identifying and instructing ELs with disabilities; and
- Promoting parental, family, and community engagement in EL educational programs

The bill would require programs to offer work-based learning opportunities and provide the necessary coursework for teacher candidates to qualify for an EL teaching certification. Grant recipients would be required to report on the effectiveness of the EL teaching program to the Department of Education.

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<sup>1</sup> [Migration Policy Institute \(2015\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [U.S. Department of Education \(2016\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [U.S. Department of Education \(2015\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [National Center for Education Statistics \(2015\)](#)