

English Language Learner (ELL) funding

SCHOOL FUNDING INTERIM COMMISSION
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The Commission has expressed interest in establishing a funding component for English Language Learners (ELLs). This paper provides information to aid the Commission’s consideration.

A number of different terms are used for students in this category: ELLs, English Learners (ELs), students with limited English proficiency, Multilingual Learner/English Learner (ML/EL).

According to a January 2025 analysis by the Learning Policy Institute (LPI)¹, “49 states provide separate, additional funding for students who are English learners on top of base funding for schools,” with Montana being the only remaining state without a specific ELL funding adjustment. The analysis further specifies some methods that other states use to incorporate ELL funding into their formulas:

- 33 states provide an **additional weight** for ELL students, 21 of which are a flat weight, while the other 12 provide a variable weight based on factors like English proficiency, proportion of student population, or grade level.
- 10 states provide a specific **dollar amount** per ELL student.
- 3 states provide funding for **additional staff positions** based on the proportion of district enrollment who are ELL students.

This Commission may consider employing one, or a combination of multiple, of these funding methods.

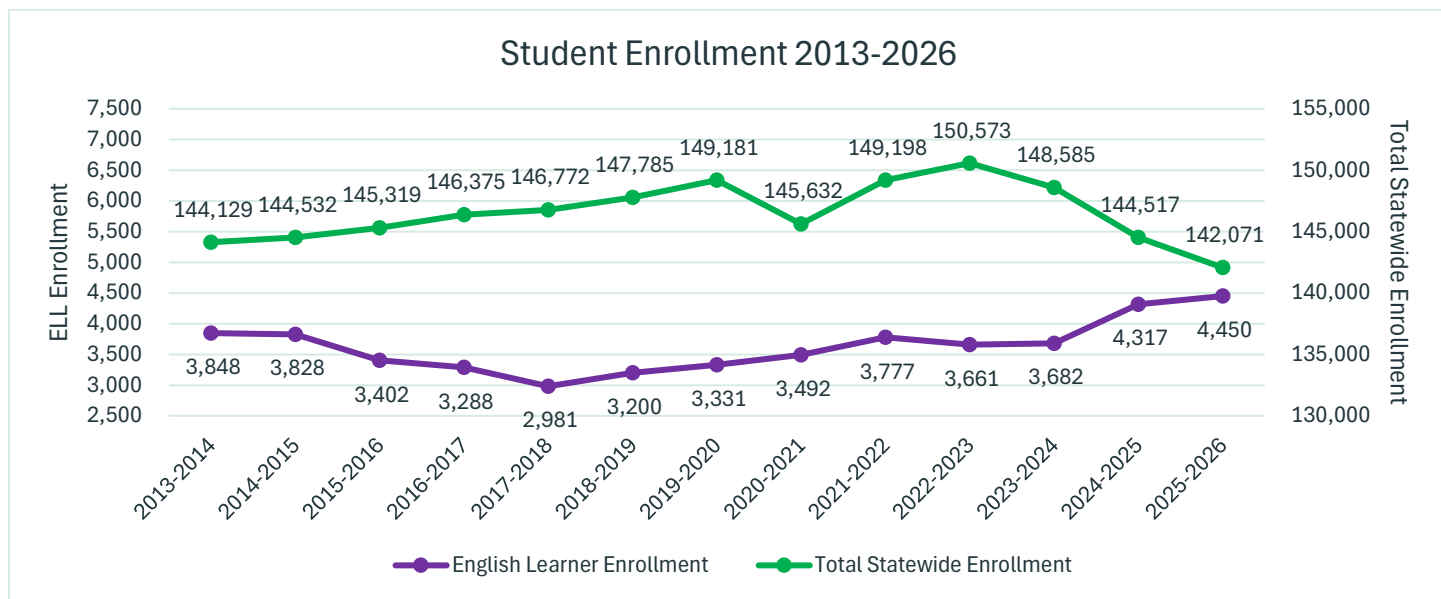
You may recall the staff paper from September that provided a “crosswalk” of the definition of “basic system of free quality elementary and secondary public schools” under 20-9-309² and the funding formula that “students with limited English proficiency” are included in the definition and that the needs of these students are one of several “educationally relevant factors” that the Legislature is required to consider in designing the funding formula.³ Depending on whether and how the Commission determines to address this issue, 20-9-309 may require amendment.

¹ Griffith, M., & Burns, D. (2025). Funding student needs: A review of state funding policies for English learners and students from low-income backgrounds. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/471.440>

² https://mca.legmt.gov/bills/mca/title_0200/chapter_0090/part_0030/section_0090/0200-0090-0030-0090.html

³ <https://archive.legmt.gov/content/Committees/Interim/2025-2026/SFIC/September-15-16-2025/20-9-309-crosswalk.pdf>

Figure 1. This graph shows the student enrollment numbers of English Language Learners (ELL) in purple, compared to the total statewide student enrollment in green. Please note there are two vertical axes, one for each data set, so that enrollment numbers could be compared more closely.



STATES' STATUTORY LANGUAGE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Following are several examples of the language other states use to define ELLs and provide additional funding.

Alabama

Code Section 16-13-364⁴ (b)(3) A student who is identified as an **English Language Learner (ELL)** shall generate a weighted allocation of up to 15 percent. A student shall generate an additional weighted allocation for concentrated **ELL** within a range of up to five percent if the students' LEA has a percentage of **ELL** students enrolled which is at or above the level specified in the Education Trust Fund appropriations act.

Code Section 16-13-361⁵ (8) **ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER (ELL)**. A student identified in accordance with federal or state law as entitled to receive English as a second language or bilingual services on the basis of the student's English language proficiency.

⁴ <https://alison.legislature.state.al.us/code-of-alabama?section=16-13-364>

⁵ <https://alison.legislature.state.al.us/code-of-alabama?section=16-13-361>

Georgia O.C.G.A. § 20-2-156⁶ *The State Board of Education shall create a program for **limited-English-proficient** students whose native language is not English, subject to appropriation by the General Assembly. The purpose of this program is to assist such students to develop proficiency in the **English language**, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, sufficient to perform effectively at the currently assigned grade level. The state board shall prescribe such rules and regulations regarding eligibility criteria and standards as may be needed to carry out the provisions of this Code section. This program may also be referred to as the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) program.*

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-161⁷ (b)(18) provides a hybrid system of funding **ELL** students – 2.6313 weight per student plus 1-to-7 teacher-student ratio

Illinois 105 ILCS 5/14C-2⁸ (d) "**English learners**" means (1) all children in grades pre-K through 12 who were not born in the United States, whose native tongue is a language other than English, and who are incapable of performing ordinary classwork in English; and (2) all children in grades pre-K through 12 who were born in the United States of parents possessing no or limited English-speaking ability and who are incapable of performing ordinary classwork in English.

105 ILCS 5/18-8.15⁹ (b)(2)(W) Additional investments in **English learner** students. In addition to and not in lieu of all other funding under this paragraph (2), each Organizational Unit shall receive funding based on the average teacher salary for grades K through 12 to cover the costs of:

- (i) one FTE intervention teacher (tutor) position for every 125 **English learner** students;
- (ii) one FTE pupil support staff position for every 125 **English learner** students;
- (iii) one FTE extended day teacher position for every 120 **English learner** students;
- (iv) one FTE summer school teacher position for every 120 **English learner** students; and
- (v) one FTE core teacher position for every 100 **English learner** students.

⁶ <https://advance.lexis.com/documentpage/?pdmfid=1000516&crd=634586d3-8a37-42ad-a63e-59aecb55cfb1&config=00JAA1MDBIYzczZi1IYjFILTQxMTgtYWE3OS02YTgyOGM2NWJlMDYKAFBvZENhdGFsb2feed0oM9qoQOMCSJFX5qkd&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fstatutes-legislation%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A6348-FW31-DYB7-W0P1-00008-00&pdcontentcomponentid=234186&pdteaserkey=sr4&pditab=allpods&ecomp=6s65kkk&earg=sr4&priid=d2479443-6fb2-4441-a63d-aa5ee1bf3eaf>

⁷ O.C.G.A. § 20-2-161

⁸ <https://www.ilga.gov/Documents/legislation/ilcs/documents/010500050K14C-2.htm>

⁹ <https://www.ilga.gov/Documents/legislation/ilcs/documents/010500050K18-8.15.htm>

Massachusetts Gen. Laws Ann. Ch. 70, Section 3¹⁰ (a) *For each student identified as being low-income or an English learner, the increments in the following table shall be added to each foundation allotment.*

EL PK-5	\$2,537.49
EL 6-8	\$2,721.46
EL High School	\$3,265.74

Michigan Compiled Laws

Section 388.1631A¹¹ (24) (a) *“At-risk pupil” means a pupil in grades pre-K to 12 for whom the district has documentation that the pupil meets any of the following criteria:*

- (i) The pupil is economically disadvantaged.*
- (ii) The pupil is an **English language learner**.*
- (iii) The pupil is chronically absent as defined by and reported to the center.*
- (iv) The pupil is a victim of child abuse or neglect.*
- (v) The pupil is a pregnant teenager or teenage parent.*
- (vi) The pupil has a family history of school failure, incarceration, or substance abuse.*
- (vii) The pupil is an immigrant who has immigrated within the immediately preceding 3 years.*

...

*(c) “**English language learner**” means limited English proficient pupils who speak a language other than English as their primary language and have difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English as reported to the center.*

Section 388.1641¹² (1) *For a district to be eligible to receive funding under this section, the district must administer to **English language learners** the English language proficiency assessment known as the “WIDA ACCESS for **English language learners**” or the “WIDA Alternate ACCESS”. From the state school aid fund money appropriated in section 11, there is allocated an amount not to exceed \$62,732,600.00 for 2025-2026 for payments to eligible districts for services for **English language learners** who have been administered the WIDA ACCESS for English language learners. Services for **English language learners** under this section may include software used to assist learning.*

(2) The department shall distribute funding allocated under subsection (1) to eligible districts based on the number of full-time equivalent English language learners as follows:

- (a) \$2,329.00 per full-time equivalent [FTE] **English language learner [ELL]** who has been assessed under the WIDA ACCESS for English language learners or the WIDA Alternate ACCESS [WIDA] with a WIDA ACCESS or WIDA Alternate ACCESS [WIDA] composite score between 1.0 and 1.9, or less, as*

¹⁰ <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter70/Section3>

¹¹ <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/Laws/MCL?objectName=mcl-388-1631a>

¹² <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/Laws/MCL?objectName=mcl-388-1641>

applicable to each assessment. It is the intent of the legislature to increase this amount until it reaches 75% of the target foundation allowance.

*(b) \$1,608.00 per [FTE **ELL** who has been assessed under WIDA with a WIDA] composite score between 2.0 and 2.9, or less, as applicable to each assessment. It is the intent of the legislature to increase this amount until it reaches 50% of the target foundation allowance.*

*(c) \$263.00 per [FTE **ELL** who has been assessed under WIDA with a WIDA] composite score between 3.0 and 3.9, or less, as applicable to each assessment. It is the intent of the legislature to increase this amount until it reaches 35% of the target foundation allowance.*

Nevada NRS 387.1214¹³ (1)(e) *To each school district, charter school or university school for profoundly gifted pupils, an amount of money determined to be sufficient by the Legislature, when combined with any other resources available for this purpose, to provide additional weighted funding for each pupil estimated to be enrolled in the school district, charter school or university school for profoundly gifted pupils who is:*

- (1) An **English learner**;*
- (2) An at-risk pupil; or*
- (3) A gifted and talented pupil.*

NRS 388.890¹⁴ (7)(a) *“**English learner**” has the meaning ascribed to it in 20 U.S.C. § 7801(20)*¹⁵.

Utah Code Ann. Section 53F-2-314¹⁶ (1)(b) *“**Limited English proficiency**” means that an **English learner** student received a score of 1-4 on an English language proficiency assessment.*

(2)(a) Additional weighted pupil units for students who are at-risk are computed based on the number of students within each LEA on October 1 of the previous school year as follows, added to a base of five WPUs for each LEA:

...

*(ii)(B) for each student with **limited English proficiency**, up to .1 total weighted pupil units.*

¹³ <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/NRS/NRS-387.html#NRS387Sec1214>

¹⁴ <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Legal/LawLibrary/NRS/NRS-388.html#NRS388Sec890>

¹⁵ <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/7801>

¹⁶ https://le.utah.gov/xcode/Title53F/Chapter2/53F-2-S314.html?v=C53F-2-S314_2025070120250507

Wyoming Stat. Ann. Section 21-13-309¹⁷ (m)(v)(A) *At-risk students, for purposes of model computations, shall include students within a school who are eligible for participation in the free and reduced price lunch program under the national school lunch program established by 42 U.S.C. 1751 et seq., who are identified as **limited English proficiency** in accordance with rules and regulations of the department of education or who are mobile students as defined by department rule and regulation and enrolled in grades six (6) through twelve (12) for the applicable school year. A student shall be counted only once for purposes of computing school at-risk student populations even though that student may simultaneously be eligible to participate in the free and reduced price lunch program, in programs serving students with **limited English proficiency** or is defined as a mobile student;*

COMMISSION DIRECTION

The table of potential findings and recommendations includes one on funding ELLs. If the Commission wants to include a bill draft as part of a recommendation, staff can develop one based on the above examples. The Commission will need to determine the funding level per ELL. APA recommended a .25 weight on a Foundation amount of \$8,586, roughly \$2,125 per ELL and in the vicinity of \$10 million statewide annually, depending on the measure of poverty used. As pointed out in the At-Risk funding paper and as shown above, some states, including Wyoming, use a broader definition of “at-risk” that includes ELLs.

¹⁷ [Wyo. Stat. § 21-13-309](#)