

## English Learners' Growth toward English Proficiency in Sixth through Twelfth Grade, 2018-19

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*This is the second Research Brief on English Learners' growth toward English proficiency produced by the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE). [In our first brief \(published in October 2019\)](#), we looked at the growth of students in grades K-5. This brief uses the same background information and analytic methods to provide information about the growth of students in grades 6-12.*

### ACCESS Growth Targets

Beginning in 2017-18, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) started measuring English Learner (EL) students' growth toward English proficiency to align with the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). PDE now sets annual ACCESS growth targets for each student. An annual growth target represents "the growth on the ACCESS assessment that a student must make in each of the years remaining before being expected to attain proficiency, which usually takes no more than six years."<sup>1</sup>

To set annual growth targets, PDE uses a student's first ACCESS<sup>2</sup> assessment scale score to determine their baseline proficiency level. Then, a formula is applied that combines the student's grade level at the baseline and their baseline English proficiency level to calculate an attainment target score and target grade for achieving attainment. According

### About ACCESS

**Who takes it?** All English Learners (ELs) in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade take the ACCESS assessment. In 2018-19, 91% of 6-12 ELs were assessed.

**What does it measure?** The test rates students' English proficiency in four language domains: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing.

**How are scores calculated?** Students receive a scale score in each of the domains, which are then translated into levels (1.0-6.0) representing English Language Proficiency (ELP), with a 5.0+ considered proficient. A composite ACCESS score combines the domain scale scores and also ranges from 1.0 to 6.0.

The scale score required for students to reach proficiency varies by grade level.

**When is it administered?** Students take the ACCESS annually in January or February.

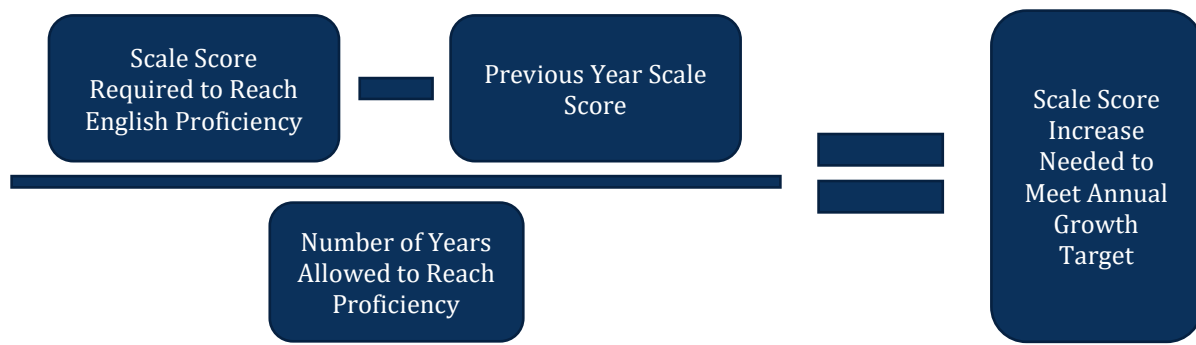
<sup>1</sup> For more on PDE's calculation of growth targets for EL's in alignments with ESSA requirements, see PA's ESSA Consolidated State Plan, page 12: <https://bit.ly/2VpYfNU>

<sup>2</sup> ACCESS stands for Assessing Communication and Comprehension in English State to State and was developed by World Class Instruction Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium at the University of Wisconsin. Visit PDE's website to read more about the ACCESS assessment: <https://bit.ly/2IW7d2v>

to the formula from PDE, it should take no more than six years to achieve attainment (and fewer than six years if the student starts at a higher baseline level). For example, if a student’s first ACCESS scale score corresponds to level 1.0 in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, she would have until 11<sup>th</sup> grade, or six years, to reach the attainment target that corresponds to 5.0, which is considered proficiency. If she was a level 4.0 in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, she would have until 11<sup>th</sup> grade (two years) to reach proficiency.

PDE then calculates annual growth targets to measure whether ELs are on track to reach their attainment target (proficiency) by their target grade. This is done by subtracting a student’s previous year ACCESS scale score from the ACCESS composite scale score required to achieve proficiency (attainment target) and dividing that number by the number of years remaining for each student to reach proficiency (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Annual Growth Target Calculation



Annual growth targets are recalculated each year to adjust for students’ progress. To do this, the student’s most recent scale score is subtracted from their attainment target, and the result is divided by years until their target grade for attainment. For example, if a student missed his growth target scale score by ten points and had two years left to attain proficiency, the scale score increase needed to meet the following year’s annual growth target would increase by 5 points to reflect the points missed in the current year. Attainment targets do not change according to annual performance. Instead, they will always be the target scale score which was determined after the student’s baseline year.

In future years, SDP’s School Progress Reports (SPR) will include the percentage of ELs meeting their annual growth target, meaning their Growth Toward Target (GTT) met or exceeded 100%.<sup>3</sup>

This brief provides an overview of how many ELs in 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade met their ACCESS growth target in the 2018-19 school year.

<sup>3</sup> Students who are enrolled at a school and are scheduled to take the ACCESS but do not (this may occur for a variety of reasons, including transience) are counted as not meeting their growth target. Because they did not take the ACCESS test, these students are not included in this analysis.

## Research Questions

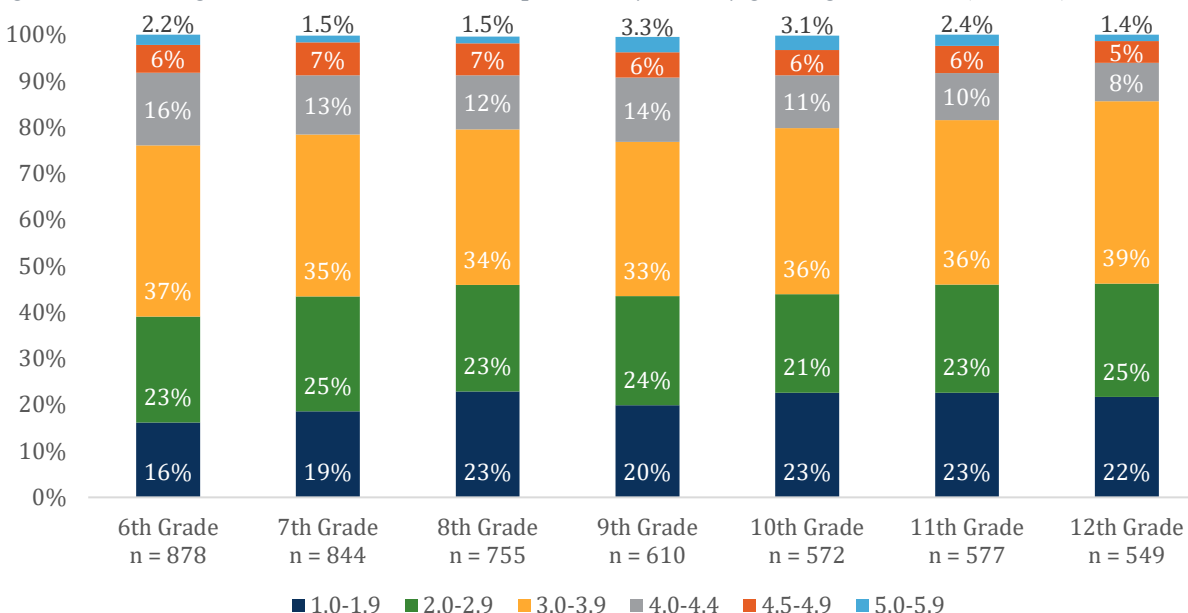
1. How many ELs met or exceeded their annual growth target in 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in 2018-19?
2. How did the percentage of ELs meeting or exceeding their growth target differ by grade level and number of years classified as an EL?
3. How did the percentage of ELs meeting or exceeding their growth target differ by subgroups such as gender, race/ethnicity, and home language?

## Methods and Sample

A student's first ACCESS test provides a baseline score, and then they need one additional year of ACCESS data to measure growth. Our growth analyses include ELs with both a 2017-18 and 2018-19 ACCESS score in SDP who were continuously enrolled between October 1<sup>st</sup> and the end of the ACCESS testing window in February (n = 4,785). Data for 2019-20 is not yet available, so ELs who took ACCESS for the first time in 2018-19 are excluded from this analysis.

To provide context for this analysis, ORE first examined the distribution of EL proficiency levels for 6-12 students. EL performance on the ACCESS test is distributed similarly in each grade level (Figure 2), even though the total number of ELs is lower in higher grade levels. In grades 6-12, between 76% (in grade 6) and 86% (in grade 12) of ELs scored at a Level 3.9 or lower.

Figure 2. Percentages of ELs at each ACCESS proficiency level by grade, grades 6-12 (2018-19)



**Source:** Qlik, ACCESS for ELs App, Overview Sheet, retrieved 10/23/19

**Note:** For readability, we removed the percentage labels representing the small number of students who were at the 6.0 proficiency level. These were 0.0% in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 0.3% in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 0.3% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 0.4% in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 0.1% in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 0.0% in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and 0.0% in 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

## Findings

**Overall, a low number of students in grades 6-12 met their growth target in 2018-2019. The subset of ELs in grades 6-12 who were in or beyond their attainment year met their growth target less often.**

Fifteen percent of ELs in grades 6-12 met their annual ACCESS growth target in 2018-19 (Figure 3). An even smaller percentage, approximately 4% of ELs in or beyond their attainment year (n = 2,409) met their growth target (Figure 4). This means that ELs who are in or beyond the year in which they are expected to demonstrate English proficiency met their target less often than the overall population of ELs in grades 6-12. Students who are beyond their attainment year are still required to make growth. For these students, growth targets are equivalent to attainment targets.

Figure 2. Percentage of ELs in grades 6-12 who met their growth target (n = 4,785)

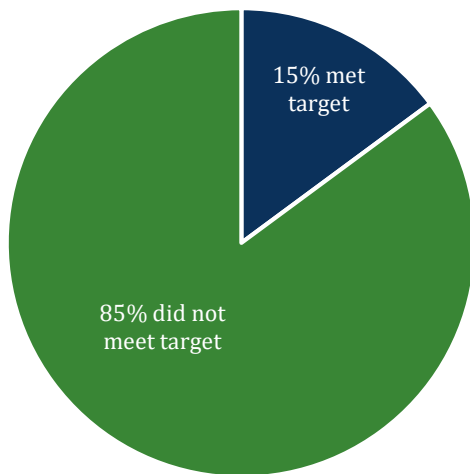
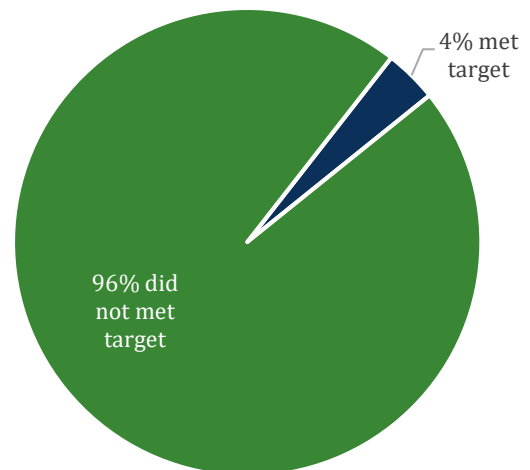


Figure 3. Percentage of ELs in grades 6-12 in or beyond their attainment year who met their growth target (n = 2,409)

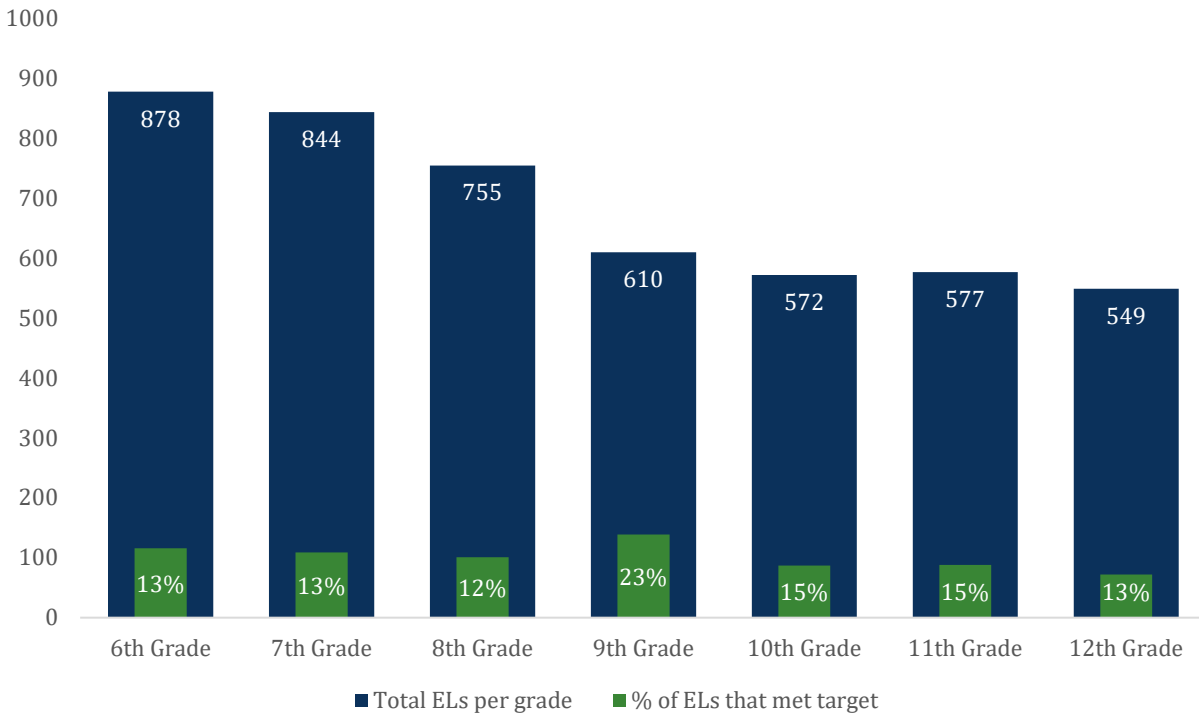


**Source:** Qlik, ACCESS for ELs App, Growth to Target (GTT) Summary Sheet, retrieved 10/23/19

## ELs met their growth targets at low rates across all grade levels (6-12).

Twenty-three percent of ELs in 9<sup>th</sup> grade met their annual growth targets from 2017-18 to 2018-19 (Figure 5). In other grades, the percentage of ELs meeting their growth was smaller, ranging from 13-15%.

Figure 4. The percentage of students meeting their growth target, by grade (2018-19)



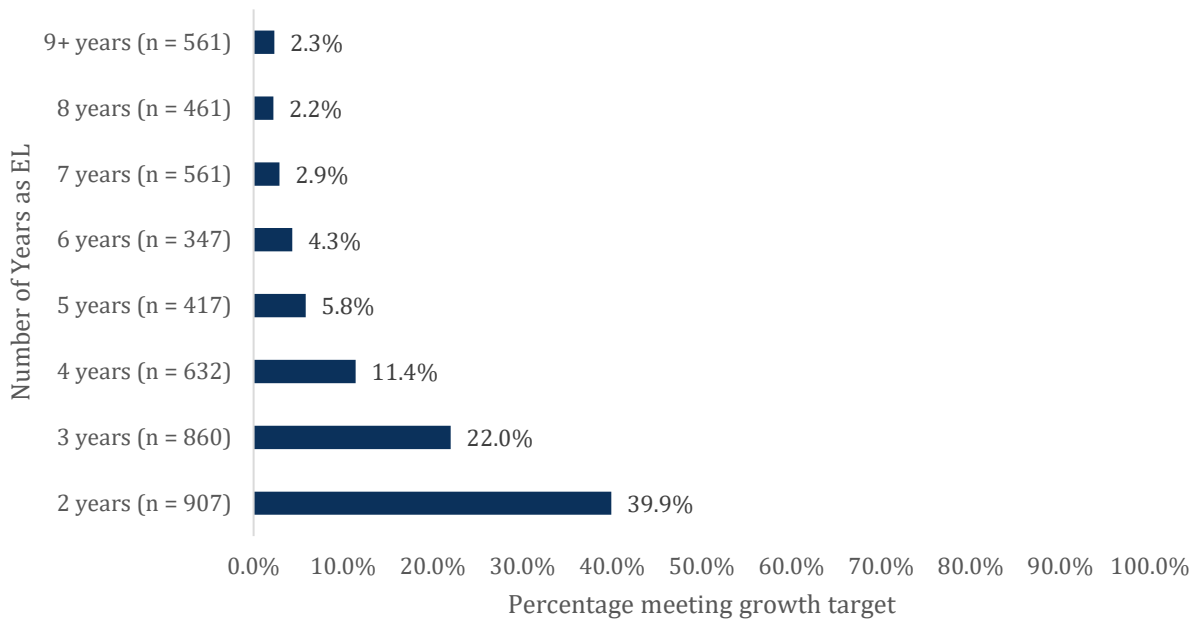
**Source:** Qlik, ACCESS for ELs App, Growth to Target (GTT) Summary Sheet, retrieved 10/23/19

**How to read this table:** The blue bars show the total number of students classified as ELs in each grade. The green bars show the percent of ELs who met their growth target in each grade. For example, 15% of the 572 10<sup>th</sup> grade students classified as an EL met their growth target.

**The percentage of students in grades 6-12 meeting their growth target is negatively associated with the number of years they have been classified as an EL.**

Less than half of students who had been classified<sup>4</sup> as ELs for two years met their growth target in 2018-19 (40%), and the proportion of students who met their growth targets steeply declined as the number of years of classification increased (Figure 6).<sup>5</sup> Only 22% of ELs classified for three years and 11.4% of ELs classified for four years met their growth targets. Very small percentages of students (2.4-5.8%) who had been classified as ELs for five or more years met their annual growth target in 2018-19. This negative association holds across grade levels (Table 1). N counts in Table 1 vary widely by grade and years in program, so caution is warranted when interpreting individual cells.

Figure 6. Percentage of 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade ELs meeting annual (2017-18 to 2018-19) ACCESS growth targets by number of years classified as an EL.<sup>6</sup>



**Source:** Qlik, ACCESS for ELs App, Growth to Target (GTT) Summary Sheet, retrieved 10/23/19

<sup>4</sup> Years classified as an EL are the number of years that a student has been classified as an EL in SDP. This number excludes years in which they were not enrolled in SDP.

<sup>5</sup> Students who have been classified as an EL for six years make up the smallest group represented in Figure 7. This is because the chart does not include EL students in Grade 5. Out of 869 students in year 6 of classification who otherwise meet inclusion criteria for this analysis, 497 (59%) are in 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

<sup>6</sup> Excludes students who have been classified as an EL for one year (n=39). These students had a growth target because they took their baseline assessment in the state of Pennsylvania, but 2018-19 was the first time they were classified as an EL in SDP.

Table 1. Percentage of ELs meeting annual (2017-18 to 2018-19) ACCESS growth targets by grade level and number of years in EL program

Grade Level	6 <sup>th</sup>		7 <sup>th</sup>		8 <sup>th</sup>		9 <sup>th</sup>		10 <sup>th</sup>		11 <sup>th</sup>		12 <sup>th</sup>	
	#	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Years in Program														
2 years	145	44%	137	36%	136	39%	127	59%	161	30%	108	37%	93	34%
3 years	133	23%	124	24%	107	21%	115	39%	64	20%	165	15%	122	14%
4 years	107	9%	86	1%	91	13%	75	11%	64	6%	86	13%	123	9%
5 years	72	3%	80	8%	60	3%	49	4%	54	9%	50	6%	52	8%
6 years	98	2%	55	4%	51	4%	41	5%	32	6%	42	5%	28	11%
7 years	295	2%	92	4%	51	6%	32	3%	35	0%	27	7%	29	3%
8 years	24	0.0%	249	1%	63	5%	44	2%	22	5%	35	6%	24	4%
9+ years	0	0	0	0	195	2%	125	3%	100	5%	56	0.0%	69	1%

**How to read this table:** This table shows the number and percentage of students meeting their annual growth goal by the number of years they have been classified as an EL in SDP (rows) and their grade level (columns). For example, 9% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students who have been classified as an EL for four years met their annual growth goal. Note that some students who have been retained will have more years of EL classification than others in their grade level.

The portion of ELs meeting their growth target was similar among male and female students, varied among racial/ethnic groups, and varied among home language groups.

A similar percentage of male students (14%) and female students (16%) met their growth target. (Table 2). Students grouped by race/ethnicity met their targets at rates within a range of 12% (Hispanic/Latino students) to 24% (White students) (Table 3). Among the groups of home languages with more than 100 students in grades 6-12, students met their targets at rates within a range of 6% to 30%. ELs with a home language of Russian most often met their annual growth target, with 30% doing so as compared 6% of ELs with a home language of Khmer (Table 4).

Table 2. Percentage of 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade ELs meeting ACCESS growth targets by gender

Gender	Met target	Did not meet target
Female (n = 2,175)	16%	84%
Male (n = 2,160)	14%	86%

Source: Qlik, ACCESS for ELs App, GTT Subgroup Comparisons Sheet, retrieved 10/23/19

Table 3. Percentage of 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade ELs meeting ACCESS growth targets by race/ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Met target	Did not meet target
Asian (n = 1,027)	16%	84%
Black/African American (n = 540)	16%	84%
Hispanic/Latino (n = 2,521)	12%	88%
Multi-Racial/Other (n = 239)	16%	84%
White (n = 455)	24%	76%

Source: Qlik, ACCESS for ELs App, GTT Subgroup Comparisons Sheet, retrieved 10/21/19

Note: Due to small numbers of students, American Indian/Alaskan Native (n = 1) and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students (n = 2) were excluded from this analysis.

Table 4. Percentage of 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade ELs meeting ACCESS growth targets by home language

Home Language (spoken by 100+ students in 6-12)	Met target	Did not meet target
Arabic (n = 361)	15%	85%
Chinese, Mandarin (n = 267)	20%	80%
French (n = 104)	14%	86%
Khmer (n = 110)	6%	94%
Portuguese (n = 190)	28%	72%
Russian (n = 146)	30%	70%
Spanish (n = 2,445)	11%	89%
Vietnamese (n = 132)	16%	84%

Source: Qlik, ACCESS for ELs App, GTT Subgroup Comparisons Sheet, retrieved 10/23/19

Note: Includes languages spoken by 100+ students (n = 3,755), representing 78% of ELs in grades 6-12. By comparison, these language groups represent 82% of ELs in grade 1-5.



## Conclusions

- Fifteen percent of ELs in grades 6-12 attained their growth targets in 2018-19. Of those ELs who were in or beyond their attainment year, or year expected to achieve ACCESS proficiency, less than 4% met their growth target.
- ELs in all grade levels met their annual growth targets at low rates, and ELs in 9<sup>th</sup> grade attained their annual growth targets more often than ELs in other grades.
- Being classified as an EL for longer periods of time was associated with a lower percentage of students meeting their growth target.
- Compared to other ELs with a home language shared by at least 100 students in grades 6-12, ELs who specified Khmer as their home language were the group who least often met their growth targets.

## Next Steps

ORE has also conducted a similar analysis of annual EL growth between 2017-18 and 2018-19 for students in grades 1-5 (available here: <http://bit.ly/2078G85>). Further planned analyses include a three-year trend analysis of similar data points; continued analysis of growth by demographic subgroups; identification of characteristics of students who are not making growth; and identification of schools whose ELs have demonstrated substantial growth to better understand the practices that may be related to that growth.