POLICY BRIEF

The State of Education for Students Learning English in Maryland and Prince George's County Public Schools

Kayla M. Good **June 2019**

I. Introduction

The increasing enrollment of English Learners (EL) in Maryland public schools is drawing attention to the challenges of providing equitable access to educational opportunities and of developing the capacity to meet the needs of EL students. Meeting these challenges requires an understanding of how this population is changing and identifying options to address their learning needs.

This report examines the state of education for English Learners in Maryland. It provides a brief overview of EL programming in Maryland and the ways in which the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) changed accountability for EL students. Using data from the U.S. Department of Education, it examines the growth and distribution of EL students across school districts in Maryland. To identify disparities in educational outcomes, it uses data from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Report Card, including graduation and dropout rates, attendance, and performance on the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP). This analysis compares performance of EL students in Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) to Maryland averages. Finally, because reducing inequities in outcomes requires focusing on policies and practices, it concludes with a discussion of an innovative approach adopted by PGCPS to facilitate the learning of EL students.

This report focused on EL students in PGCPS for two reasons. First, Prince George's county has the largest proportion of EL students, suggesting that data on their educational outcomes will weight Maryland averages. Second, the rapid increase of EL students in PGCPS has likely created challenges similar to those facing other school districts in the U.S. with increasing EL enrollment. To adapt to those challenges, PGCPS has opened two international high schools for EL students based on an innovative program model from the International Network for Public Schools.

II. English Learner Programming and Services in Maryland

Similar to most states in the U.S., Maryland does not mandate the specific structure of EL programming in public schools.[1] Instead, local districts typically construct their own programming structure based on four common instructional models. These include the pull-out design, where a student is pulled from regular classes for a separate language learning class; the push-in approach, where a language specialist is sent into regular content classes to assist the EL student; the self-contained or sheltered English immersion method, in which content and language classes are blended together (this approach is typical for middle

[1] "Dual Language Education Programs: Current State Policies and Practices." 2015. USDE and Office of English Language Acquisition. https://ncela.ed.gov/files/rcd/TO20_DualLanguageRpt_508.pdf. Delaware, Georgia, Utah, North Carolina, and New Mexico are the only states that have specified state models and expectations for EL program design.

and high school programs); and dual immersion, or bilingual education where content courses are taught 50% in English and 50% in the native language. In Maryland, both Montgomery and Prince George's county public schools have dual immersion programs in the elementary grades.[2]

To determine eligibility for English language services, students from a family that speak a language other than English are assessed when they enter school. The English Language Proficiency Assessment determines a student's level of proficiency in English and is then used to place students in a program geared to their needs. After their eligibility is established, Maryland continues to use that test to measure student progress towards English proficiency. The goal is for EL students to achieve English proficiency within 6 years of entering the program.[3]

New Every Student Succeeds Act Standards

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) changed how state accountability systems incorporate accountability for EL students. ESSA places a greater emphasis on achieving English proficiency and tracking the progress of EL students than its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind Act. In Maryland, the progress of EL students towards proficiency composes 10% of the school's overall accountability score. This progress is measured and reported via the "Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency" performance indicator, which is publicly available on the MSDE website for each district in Maryland. The incorporation of this performance indicator is meant to improve accountability, given that it is displayed online and contributes to the overall accountability score of a district.[4]

The Maryland ESSA Consolidated State Plan established goals to improve educational outcomes for all students. These included the goal that EL students would attain English proficiency within 6 years, regardless of their initial proficiency level. In setting its growth targets, MSDE found that an average of 46% of all ELs in Maryland exited the program within the 6-year time frame. Using this as the baseline, MSDE established a growth target goal to cut in half the number of students who fail to exit the program within the 6-year timeframe, by 2030. The specific long-term and interim targets that MSDE has set for EL progress are based on trends in performance and take into account the finding that ELs at lower proficiency levels tend to advance more quickly than ELs at higher proficiency levels.[5]

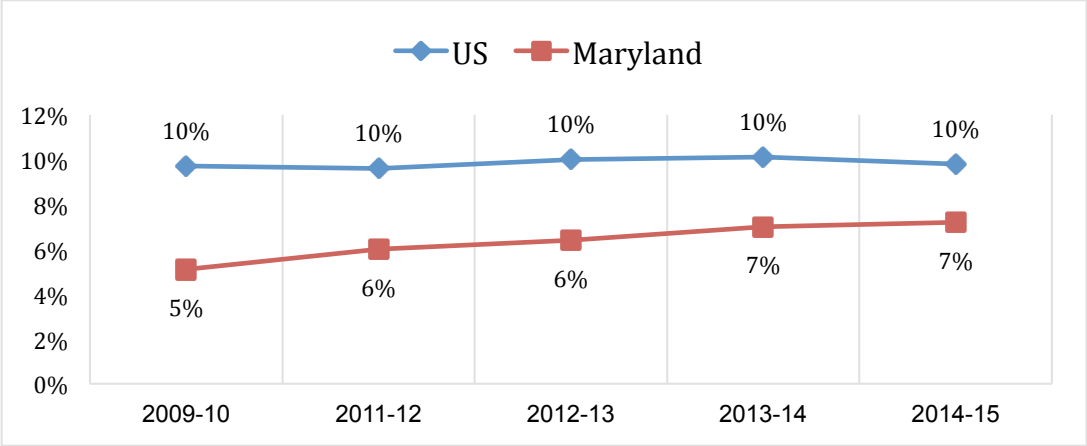
English Learner Demographics and Population Statistics

The proportion of EL students in Maryland falls below the national average but has been growing annually since the 2009-10 academic school year (Figure 1). While the average EL population nationwide has hovered around 10% in recent years, the EL population in Maryland increased from 5% of the study body in 2009-10 to 7% in 2014-15. Within Maryland, the most commonly spoken languages in

[2] Personal Interview, 09/27/2018.
[3] "Dual Language Education Programs: Current State Policies and Practices." 2015. U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. Retrieved from: http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/resources.html, and;
"Maryland Assessment, Accessibility & Accommodations Policy Manual." 2017. Section 5: The Six-Step Process for Accommodating English Learners (ELs). Issue ID 201710. https://marylandlearninglinks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Maryland-Assessment-Accessibility-and-Accommodations-Policy-Manual-2018_FINAL-1.pdf
[4] "Prince George's county Report Card: Definitions: Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency Indicator." Maryland State Department of Education. Retrieved from: http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/ReportCards/ReportCardSchool/1/E/16/XXXX ; and
"Maryland Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated State Plan." 2018. Maryland State Department of Education. 26. Retrieved from: http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/ESSA/ESSAMDSubmissionConsolidatedStatePlan091718.pdf
[5] "Maryland Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated State Plan." 2018. Maryland State Department of Education. 19-22. Retrieved from: http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/ESSA/ESSAMDSubmissionConsolidatedStatePlan091718.pdf

nonmonolingual homes are Spanish (42%), Indo-European languages (25%), and Asian & Pacific Islander languages (21%).[6]

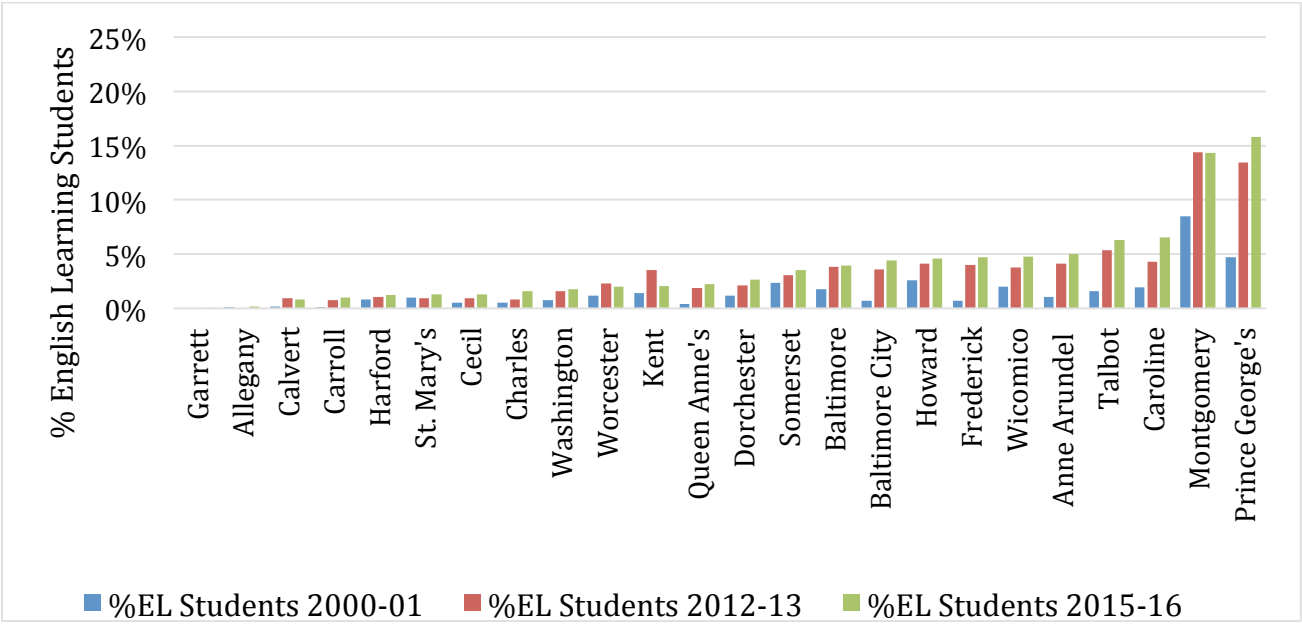
Figure 1: Proportion of English Learning Students in the United States and Maryland (%)



Source: Data Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD).

Figure 2 displays the growth in the EL population in Maryland school districts. PGCPS has the largest proportion of EL students in Maryland public schools, with EL students composing 16% of their student body in the 2015-2016 academic year. The share of EL students is noticeably higher than in 2000-2001, when the EL population accounted for just 5% of total enrollment. Montgomery County Public Schools has the second largest enrollment of EL students at 14% and has also experienced a substantial increase in EL enrollment since the 2000-01 school year.

Figure 2: Proportion of English Learning Students in Maryland Public School Districts (%)



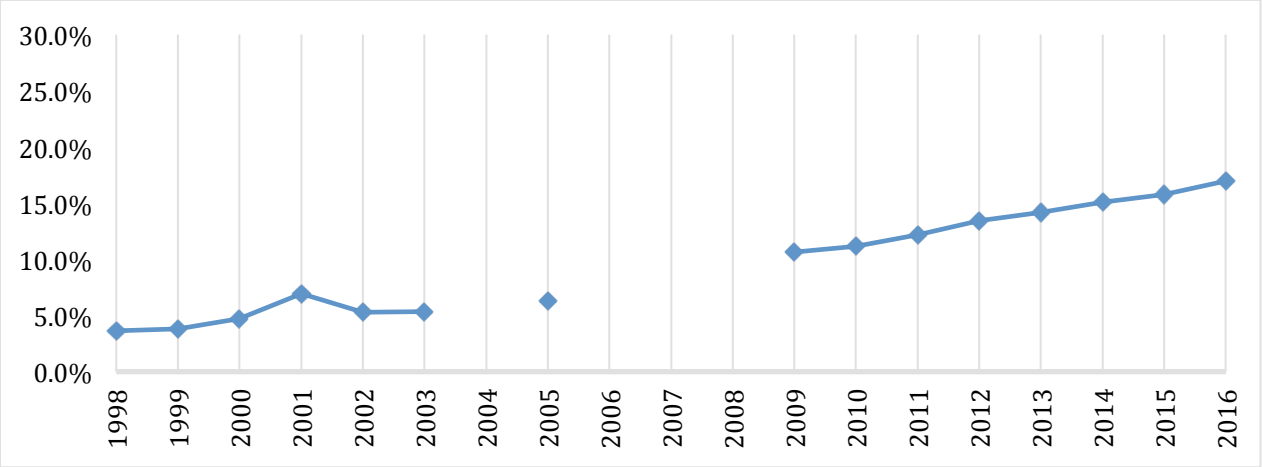
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), 2018

[6] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), 2019. http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/

III. Student Characteristics in Prince George's County Public Schools

The Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) are quite diverse. In 2018, 58% of the total student body identified as African American and 33% identified as Hispanic. There are smaller numbers of Caucasian (4.2%), American Indian (0.3%), and Pacific Islander students (0.3%), while 1.3% of students identify as two or more ethnicities. Overall, enrollment at PGCPS has grown slowly but steadily, at a rate of approximately 1.4% each year since 2014. Total enrollment in 2016 was 130,814 students in the district, with 22,208 EL students.[7] As presented in Figure 3, the percentage of EL students in the PGCPS study body has increased since 1998, when there were 4,736 EL students (3.6%), to 22,208 EL students (17%) in 2016, which constitutes more than a threefold increase over that time frame.[8]

Figure 3: Percentage of English Learning Students in Prince George's County Public Schools per Academic School Year



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), 2019. http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/

IV. High School Progress of English Learners

To understand how the increasing number of EL students are doing in PGCPS high schools, this report used data from the Maryland State Department of Education Report Cards from 2010 to 2016 in order to display trends in graduation, dropout rates, and attendance for EL high school students as compared to their peers. This report also used English and math proficiency rates on the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) for 2018 as measures of school performance. On average, EL students were found to underperform compared to their English-speaking peers, both in PGCPS and across the state. However, beginning in 2014-2015, these disparities between EL and their peers began to widen.

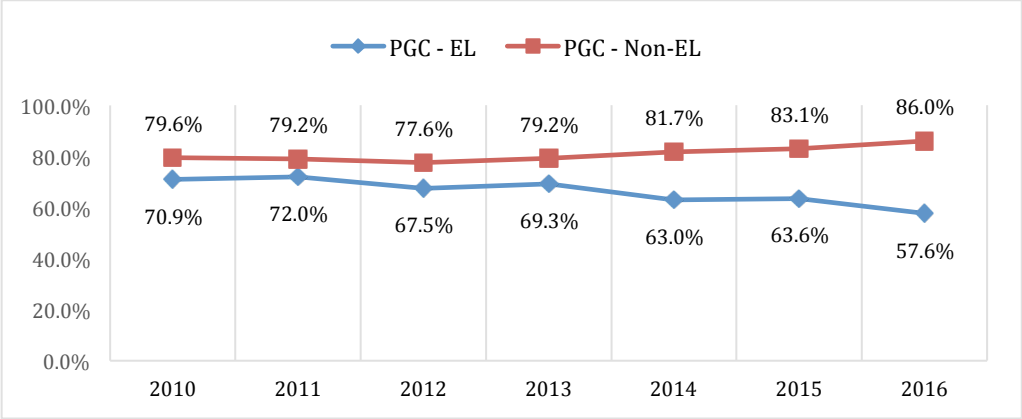
The 5-year adjusted cohort graduation rate in Prince George's County was 57.6% for EL students in the Class of 2016 compared to 70.9% in 2010 (Figure 4). In contrast, the graduation rate of non-EL students reached a six-year high of 86% for the Class of 2016 compared to 79.6% in 2010. The graduation rates for

[7] Prince George's County 2018 Report Card. Maryland State Department of Education, 2019. http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Demographics/Enrollment/3/17/10/16/XXXX

[8] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), 2019. http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/

both EL and non-EL student groups in Prince George's county in 2016 are slightly below state averages of 56.1% and 85.9%, respectively. [9]

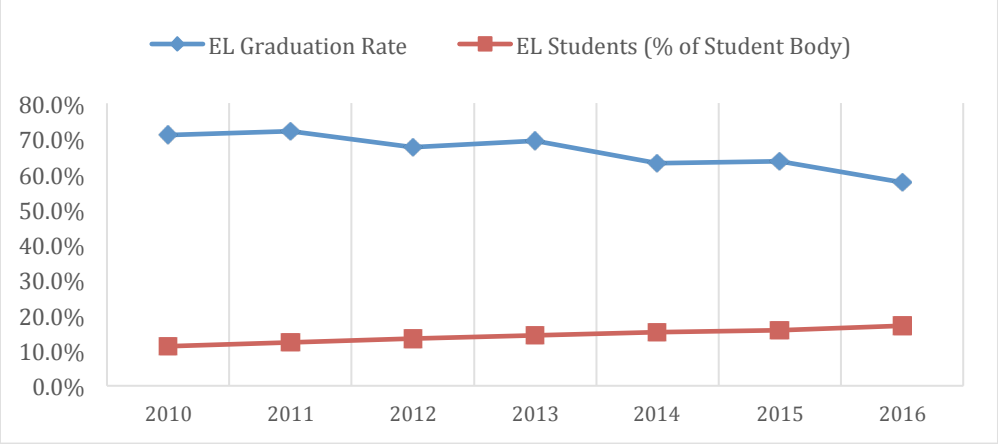
Figure 4: Five-Year Cohort Graduation Rate in Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS)



Source: Maryland State Department of Education Report Card Data 2017

Figure 5.1 shows that higher graduation rates among EL students are associated with lower proportions of EL students, while low graduation rates in that group are associated with higher proportions of EL students. As shown by the scatterplot in Figure 5.2, the correlation between graduation rates and EL students as a percent of the student body is -0.92, which is a substantial negative correlation. That is to say that as the enrollment of EL students increased, the graduation rate among EL students declined. Although causation cannot be established from a simple correlation analysis, the finding suggests that PGCPS may be struggling to develop the capacity to provide the opportunities necessary to educate the increasing number of EL students. Changes in the demographic characteristics of EL students, such as country of origin, previous education history, or age at time of arrival could also be contributing to the challenges of accommodating this growing EL student population.

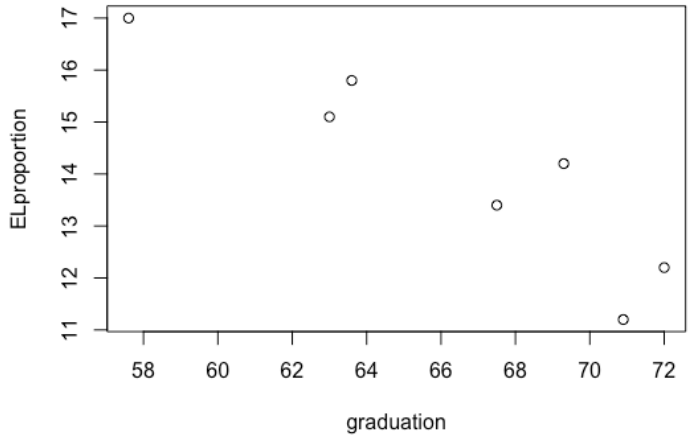
Figure 5.1: EL Graduation Rates Compared to ELs as a Percent of the Student Body in PGCPS



Source: Maryland State Department of Education Report Card Data 2017

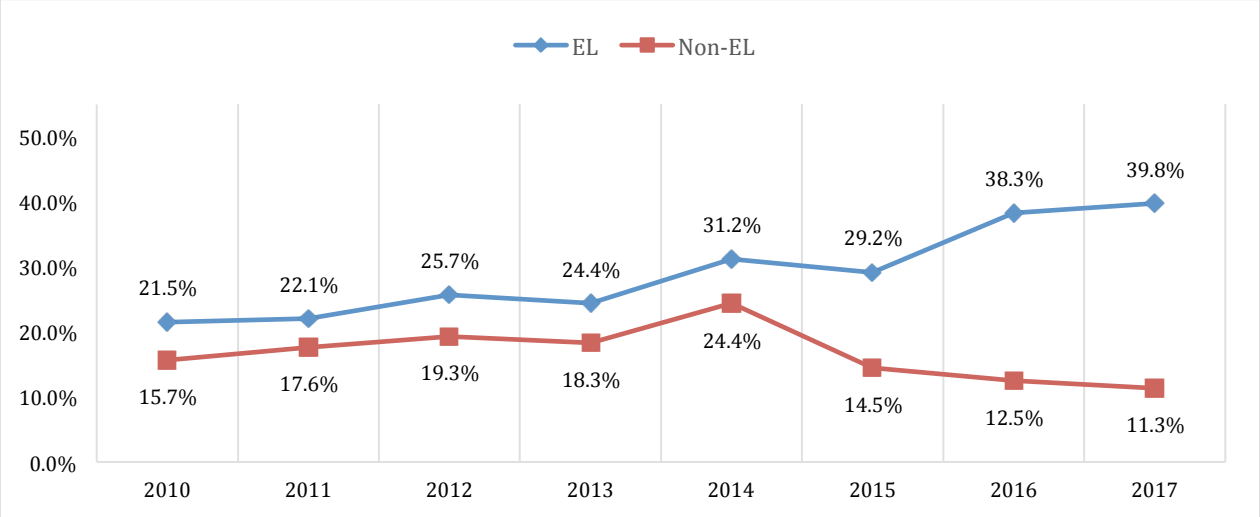
[9] Prince George's County 2017 Report Card. Maryland State Department of Education, 2018. http://msp2017.msde.state.md.us/CohortGradRate.aspx?PV=163:12:16:AAAA:1:N:0:14:1:1:0:1:1:1:3&SORT=2

Figure 5.2: Scatterplot of Graduation Rates and EL Students as a Percent of Student Body



As illustrated in Figure 6, EL students have dropped out of high school at a higher rate than the non-EL cohort. Beginning with the class of 2015, this disparity widened further. In 2014, 31.2% of EL students dropped out of school compared to 24.4% of non-EL students, for a gap of 6.8 percentage points. By 2017 this gap widened to 14.7 percentage points, when 39.3% of EL students dropped out as compared to 11.3% of the non-EL cohort. Trends in graduation and dropout rates in PGCPS are similar to trends in Maryland. For example, the average Maryland dropout rate for the EL cohort in 2017 was 41.7% compared to 39.8% in PGCPS.[10]

Figure 6: Dropout Rates of EL & Non-EL Students in PGCPS (4-Year Cohort)



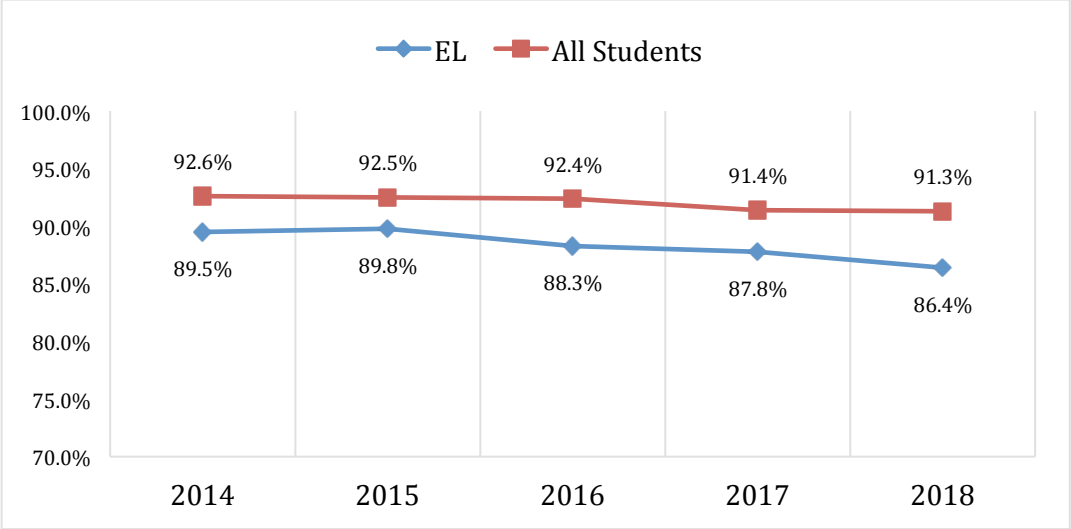
Source: Maryland State Department of Education Report Card Data 2017

Consistent attendance in high school affects class performance, particularly for students working towards achieving English proficiency. To provide additional context for understanding changes in outcomes, data on attendance was also analyzed. As displayed in Figure 7, the average attendance rate of the high school

[10] Prince George's County 2017 Report Card. Maryland State Department of Education, 2018. http://msp2017.msde.state.md.us/CohortDropoutRate.aspx?PV=171:12:99:AAAA:1:N:0:3:1:1:0:1:1:1:3

EL population in PGCPS was lower than the average for all high school students in the district. These disparities ranged between 2.7 percentage points in 2015 to 4.9 percentage points in 2018, demonstrating that this gap has widened over time with an overall downward trend in PGCPS. Trends in the attendance of EL students in Prince George's County Public Schools are similar to that of EL students in Maryland. In 2018, the attendance rate for EL students was 86.4% in both PGCPS and Maryland.

Figure 7: Attendance Rate of High School EL Students in Prince George's County Public Schools



Source: Maryland State Department of Education Report Card Data 2019

V. Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program Exam Results

In this section, scores on the 2018 Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) were used to compare the high school performance of EL students to all students in PGCPS. The "all student" category was used for comparisons because MSDE does not disaggregate the scores of non-EL students. The results from the standardized MCAP exams are reported using five proficiency levels (PLs). PL 4 and 5 are both considered proficient or above and are combined for this analysis. PLs 1 through 3 are defined as not proficient.

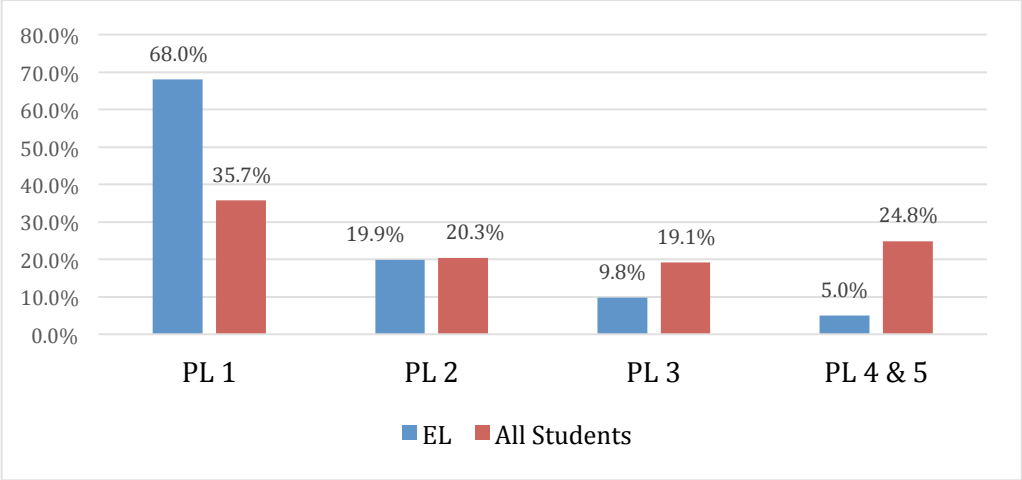
MCAP English Language Arts 10 Exam

MSDE uses the MCAP English Language Arts 10 exam to measure how well students learn grade-level material. All grade 10 students are required to take the exam, including EL students. The results from the 2018 MCAP English 10 exam are presented in Figure 8. In that year, 24.5% of all students in PGCPS scored proficient or above on the English 10 exam, while 5% of EL students scored proficient or above. Conversely, 68% of EL students tested into the PL 1 category, the lowest performance category, compared to 35.7% of all students. In Maryland public schools overall, 64% of EL students fell into the lowest proficiency level, and 3.7% scored proficient or above on the exam.[11] These results are influenced

[11] Maryland State 2018 Report Card. Maryland State Department of Education, 2019. http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Assessments/ElaPerformance/1EL/10/6/3/3/3/3/3/3/3/99/XXXX

by many factors but may partially reflect language proficiency rather than content knowledge since the English 10 exam is administered in English.[12]

Figure 8: Percentage of EL and All Students Achieving Each Proficiency Level of the 2018 MCAP English Language Arts 10 Exam in PGCPS



Source: Maryland State Department of Education Report Card Data 2019

Although English Learners are required to take the MCAP English 10 exam and the scores are measured against fixed proficiency level benchmarks, a different exam—the MCAP for English Language Proficiency (MCAP ELP)—is used to track an EL student's progress towards English proficiency. This test compares EL scores to growth expectations and targets set by the State. The goal is to have EL students achieve English language proficiency within six years of entering an EL program.[13]

The raw score data from the MCAP ELP are not available to the public; rather, MSDE uses the results to create a performance indicator, called "Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency", which measures changes in performance on the MCAP ELP. MSDE calculates a score from 1 to 10 for each district, using the exam scores and student's overall growth and progress towards proficiency on the exam. MSDE established annual growth targets and minimum growth expectations that are used in the calculations for the indicator.[14] A score of 4.5 out of 10 is considered to be meeting the proficiency growth targets.[15] The indicator is used as a mechanism for accountability by standardizing students' progress, allowing comparison across schools and districts. The score contributes 10% to the district's overall accountability rating. The district score for PGCPS high schools' EL students was 4.8 out of 10, which is lower than Montgomery County (5.9), but higher than scores in other districts with high EL enrollment, such as Caroline and Talbot Counties (4.0 and 4.1, respectively). The English proficiency score

[12] Valenzuela, Angela. "Accounting for Limited English Proficient Youth in Texas." *Learning from the Federal Market Based Reforms: Lessons for ESSA.* Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2016. Print.
[13] "Maryland Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated State Plan," 2018. Maryland State Department of Education. http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/ESSA/ESSAMDSubmissionConsolidatedStatePlan091718.pdf
[14] Maryland Report Card: Definitions. Maryland State Department of Education, 2019. http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/ReportCards/ReportCardSchool/1/16/XXXX
[15] Prince George's County 2017-2018 Report Card. Maryland State Department of Education, 2019. http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/ReportCards/ReportCardSchool/1/16/XXXX

for elementary schools in Prince George's was 6.5 out of 10, suggesting that more EL students are meeting expectations in elementary school than in high school.[16]

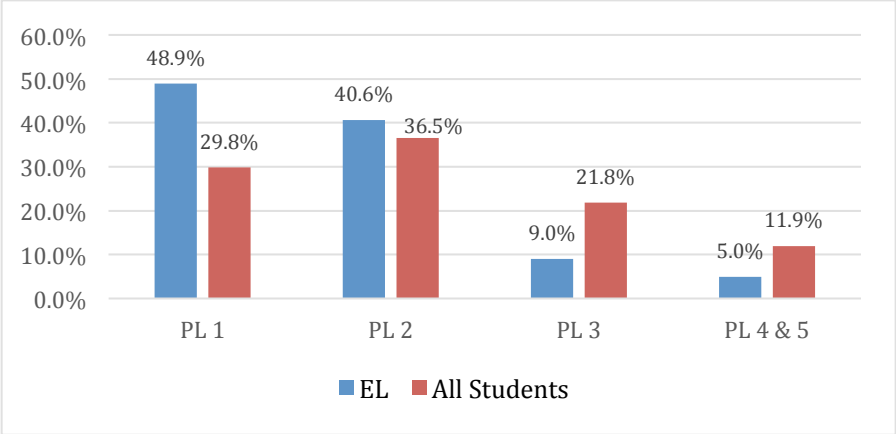
MCAP Algebra 1 Exam

The MCAP Math: Algebra 1 exam, taken in high school, is designed to test problem-solving abilities. EL students that have been enrolled in Maryland public school districts for less than three years and have had prior instruction in mathematics in Spanish, whether in their home country or another U.S. school, are eligible to take the math exam in Spanish. This can be done via either an online transadaptation or an alternative paper version. Eligible EL students are encouraged to take practice exams in both English and Spanish to determine which version they are the most comfortable. [17]

Less than 5% of ELs in PGCPS achieved proficiency or above on the Algebra 1 exam (PL 4&5), which is consistent with the Maryland average. In Maryland overall, 39.8% of EL students tested into PL 1, while 48.9% of ELs in PGCPS tested into that category, showing that EL performance on this exam in PGCPS was lower than that of Maryland as a whole in 2018.[18]

A larger proportion of EL students in PGCPS tested into PL 2 and 3 combined on the Algebra 1 exam (49.6%) than on the English 10 exam (29.7%). Though not proficient, these scores demonstrate a higher level of performance on the Algebra exam than on the English 10 exam, where a majority of EL students tested into the lowest proficiency category. It is possible that the Algebra exam provides EL students with an opportunity to demonstrate their content knowledge without their level of English proficiency playing a role or inhibiting EL students' performance.

Figure 9: 2018 Academic Year MCAP Math: Algebra 1 Exam in Prince George's County



Source: Maryland State Department of Education Report Card Data 2019

[16] Prince George's County 2017-2018 Report Card. Maryland State Department of Education, 2019. http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/ReportCards/ReportCardSchool/1/16/XXXX

[17] "Maryland Assessment, Accessibility & Accommodations Policy Manual." 2017. Section 5: The Six-Step Process for Accommodating English Learners (ELs). Issue ID 201710. https://marylandlearninglinks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Maryland-Assessment-Accessibility-and-Accommodations-Policy-Manual-2018_FINAL-1.pdf, and;
"Maryland State Assessments." 2018. Maryland State Department of Education. http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/English-Learners/MSA.aspx

[18] Maryland State Report Card: MCAP, Mathematics. Maryland State Department of Education, 2019. http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Assessments/MathPerformance/3A1/H/6/3/3/3/1/3/3/3/99/XXXX

VI. English Learner Programs in Prince George's County: A Discussion of International High Schools

To address the needs of its growing EL student body, PGCPS partnered with the International Network for Public Schools (INPS) to open three international high school programs. This model provides EL students with their own, separate academic space where they learn alongside other EL students. The model uses a competency-based learning program, which highlights the mastery of concrete skills and the importance of individualized support from teachers to achieve mastery.[19] There are two international high schools in Prince George's County—the International High School at Langley Park (IHSLP) and the International High School at Largo. There is also the International Academy, which operates within the High Point High School building.[20]

The International Schools in Maryland build their curriculum around the INPS education principles, or "HELLO" principles.[21] These include:

a) Heterogeneity and collaboration, which builds on the strength of each individual and the idea that diversity is an asset and not a hindrance;
b) Experiential learning;
c) Localized autonomy and responsibility, which encourages students to participate to their fullest potential;
d) Language and content integration, which reinforces the idea that language skills are most naturally learned in context and experientially; and lastly,
e) One learning model for all, where faculty and students all use the same learning model in order to maximize their ability to help one another. [22]

PGCPS adopted the International High School model to provide a structured curriculum for high school EL students and to expand the capacity of the district to adequately teach a growing EL population. This approach allows the district to provide subject matter teachers with the knowledge and language support that is needed to address gaps in outcomes between the EL and non-EL student populations.[23]

The International High School at Langley Park

The International High School at Langley Park (IHSLP) opened its doors in the fall of 2015. Students in the school are from 24 countries and speak 14 different languages. Approximately 85% of the student body is Hispanic. Spanish is the most commonly spoken non-English language, followed by Arabic.[24]

Prince George's County received a $3 million-dollar grant from the Carnegie Foundation to design the program and provide start-up funds for the first year of operation at Langley Park. After the first year, the district has allocated funds for the school. IHSLP receives a fixed amount of money each year, which gives them flexibility to implement the program. For example, all teachers and staff are employed for the full 12 months of the year. Eleven months are spent in classes with students, and one month is dedicated to teacher development.

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[19] "Competency-Based Education." 2019. National Conference of State Legislatures. http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/competency.aspx
[20] "Schools and Academies." 2018. Internationals Network: Transforming Education for Multilingual Learners. http://internationalsnps.org/schools/# , and; Personal Interview, 2/11/2019.
[21] Personal Interview, 2/11/2019.
[22] "Internationals Approach" 2018. Internationals Network: Transforming Education for Multilingual Learners. http://internationalsnps.org/about-us/internationals-approach/
[23] Personal Interview, 2/11/2019
[24] Personal Interview, 2/11/2019

IHSLP enrolls approximately 330 students in grades 9 through 12. Their goal is to keep class sizes under 25 students so that learning can be individualized. To ensure this is achieved, IHSLP accepts applications for students to join their program and admits 100 new students each year based on a lotterysystem. The aim is for 85% of the incoming class to be 8th grade students currently enrolled in schools in the United States, and the remaining 15% of the slots are reserved for students who have not previously attended schools in the U.S.

IHSLP graduated its first cohort in the spring of 2019. Local officials reported that 87% of this cohort applied to college and received a collective $4.5 million in merit-based awards. They attribute these high figures to a targeted college fair operated by IHSLP that provides EL students access to information about college and careers. IHSLP also works with CASA de Maryland and the University of Maryland on mentorship and partnership programs. For example, the Mi Espacio program at CASA is an after-school program where students receive academic tutoring, career counseling, and other services. As one official pointed out, since regular high school counselors may not be fully equipped to assist EL students' progress to the next level of education, or a student may simply fall through the cracks as high school counselors have massive caseloads, these services are helping to achieve equity in access to information about options for students' futures.[25]

VII. Conclusions and Implications

English learners are enrolled in most of the school districts in Maryland but are more heavily concentrated in a few. To understand how well EL students are doing in Maryland, this report looked at learning outcomes in PGCPS, which is the district with the largest proportion of English learners in their student body. As the population of EL students has grown in PGCPS, disparities in educational outcomes between EL and non-EL students have increased. These disparities are similar to those of EL students across Maryland. Pinpointing the cause of these disparities—whether they are due to a lack of ESOL teachers, the curriculum structure, or a change in EL student demographics (i.e., age at arrival, country of origin, lack of prior schooling, etc.)—is beyond the scope of this brief. However, this report found a negative correlation between EL population growth and graduation rates for students learning English, suggesting that the growth in EL enrollment may have out-paced the district's capacity to accommodate those changes. Thus, continual efforts should be made to build the capacity of public schools to accommodate the increasing EL population and to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. District officials should carefully track which schools are experiencing the most growth and prioritize the changing needs in those schools.

The International High School model adopted by PGCPS is a step towards building capacity to serve and ultimately ensure equity for EL students. They are a place where students can gain proficiency in the English language and have access to content of the same rigor as their English-speaking peers. These schools provide a safe environment for EL students to learn, as well as provide smaller class sizes and caseloads for counselors that allow for more personalized preparation and post-secondary school guidance. As time goes on, continual evaluative research should be conducted on this model to measure the long-term impacts on their students. If the model is indeed successful in the long run, replicating it in other school districts with high levels of EL student enrollment should be considered.

[25] Personal Interview, 2/11/2019.

About the Maryland Equity Project

The Maryland Equity Project seeks to improve education through research that supports an informed public policy debate on the quality and distribution of educational opportunities. It conducts, synthesizes, and distributes research on key educational issues in Maryland and facilitates collaboration between researchers and policymakers. The Maryland Equity Project is a program in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership in the College of Education at The University of Maryland.

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Maryland Equity Project
College of Education
University of Maryland
2110 Benjamin Building
College Park, MD 20740

Phone: 301-405-3572
Email: mdequity@umd.edu
Website: www.mdequity.org
Twitter @mdequity

About the Author

Kayla M. Good is a graduate research assistant for the Maryland Equity Project. She is a Master of Public Policy candidate at the University of Maryland. Previously, she earned Bachelor of Arts degrees in Economics as well as Spanish from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania.