

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS & SOUTHEAST ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Who are English Language Learners (ELL) students?

- Under No Child Left Behind, states are given flexibility in defining who is considered an ELL student. For example, a state can narrowly define the group as students who receive direct ELL services, or more broadly, include students receiving direct services and students being monitored based on their achievement on academic assessments.¹
- Total number of ELL students in public schools (2007-2008): 5.3 million ELL students, representing about 10.7% of the total pre-K-12 population. Note: this total number is different from the individual state reports as illustrated in Table 1.²
- Largest concentration of Asian American ELL populations by state:
 - California (169,000)
 - New York (39,000)
 - Texas (21,000)
 - Minnesota (15,000)
 - Washington (14,000)
 - New Jersey (11,000)
 - Massachusetts (11,000)
 - Illinois (10,000).³

Spotlight on Southeast Asian American ELL students - Nationwide⁴

- While Spanish is the predominant language spoken by English language learners, nationwide, two of the top five languages spoken by English learners in school years 2009-2012 included Southeast Asian languages.

TABLE 1
Top 5 Languages Spoken by English Language Learner Students: Nationwide⁵

School Year	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Top Five ELL Languages	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish
	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Chinese
	Chinese	Arabic	Vietnamese
	Arabic	Chinese	Arabic
	Hmong	Hmong	Hmong
Total # of ELL	4,687,350	4,371,553	4,638,534

Data source: Consolidated State Performance Report, 2009-2012

Southeast Asian American ELL students - State Distribution

- Southeast Asian American ELL students are distributed across every region of the country including the West, Mid-West, South, and East. For example, nationwide, 34 states reported having at least one Southeast Asian American language within its top five languages spoken by ELL students in school year 2011-12.⁶ Seven states reported two Southeast Asian American languages within their top five languages spoken by ELL students, and Minnesota reported three Southeast Asian American languages.
- Besides Vietnamese and Hmong, the other top five Southeast Asian American languages spoken by ELL students included Karen languages, Burmese, and Khmer. For example, in Idaho and Indiana, Karen and Burmese ranked second among the top five languages spoken by ELL students. The two states with Khmer ranking within the top five languages spoken by ELL students were Maine and Rhode Island.⁸

TABLE 2
States with 2+ Southeast Asian American languages (2011-2012)⁷

STATE	Top Five ELL Languages				
Minnesota	Spanish	Hmong	Somali	Karen Languages	Vietnamese
Arkansas	Spanish	Marshallese	Vietnamese	Hmong	Arabic
California	Spanish	Chinese	Vietnamese	Tagalog	Hmong
Iowa	Spanish	Vietnamese	Bosnian	Reserved for local use	Karen Languages
Nebraska	Spanish	Karen Languages	Vietnamese	Arabic	Nilo-Saharan
North Carolina	Spanish	Arabic	Vietnamese	Chinese	Hmong
Oklahoma	Spanish	Arabic	Vietnamese	Hmong	Chinese

Data source: Consolidated State Performance Report, 2011-2012

¹ U.S. Department of Education. "Archived: Fact Sheet: NCLB Provisions Ensure Flexibility and Accountability for Limited English Proficient Students" (February 19, 2004) accessed online on August 12, 2013 at <http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/schools/factsheet-english.html>.

² Batalova, Jeanne and Margie McHugh. 2010. States and Districts with the Highest Number and Share of English Language Learners. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, page 1.

³ Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund. *Left in the Margins: Asian American Students and the No Child Left Behind Act* (New York, NY: 2008), page 2.

⁴ SEARAC defines Southeast Asian Americans as those who trace their ethnicity back to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. For the purpose of our ELL analysis, we also include refugees from Bhutan and Burma (with the Karen and Chin ethnic groups being the largest among refugees from Burma) as these two groups represent the largest and newest influx of refugees from Southeast Asia to the United States in recent years, and are highly represented in new ELL populations.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education. ED Data Express: Data about elementary & secondary schools in U.S. "Title III Program - English Learners - Facts and Figures (school years 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012)," accessed online on August 12, 2013 at <http://www.eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-elements.cfm/tool/data/>. Data source: Consolidated State Performance Report.

⁶ Ibid, Title III Program - English Learners - Facts and Figures (school year 2011-2012).

⁷ U.S. Department of Education. ED Data Express: Data about elementary & secondary schools in U.S. "Title III Program - English Learners - Facts and Figures (school years 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012)," accessed online on August 12, 2013 at <http://www.eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-elements.cfm/tool/data/>. Data source: Consolidated State Performance Report.



What are the needs of Southeast Asian American ELL students?

- Limited English proficiency can impact the academic preparedness of students, and requires that students receive additional resources to become proficient.⁹ Research has documented that ELL students' school performance is far below that of other students, sometimes 20 to 30 percentage points, and usually shows little improvement over many years.¹⁰ Additionally, low English proficiency adversely affects a student's performance in college courses that require rigorous English proficiency, and often result in students dropping out of college. For example, an analysis done by Patricia Ryaby Backer of San Jose State University found that Asian American students who did not graduate also tended to fail their English courses.¹¹
- Case studies reveal that the quality of education in ELL classes attended by Southeast Asian Americans are not sufficiently preparing students for college and careers. For example, in 2011, the Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans (VAYLA) surveyed over 100 Asian and Latino students across six public and charter high schools in New Orleans, Louisiana. Their research found that 69.5% of students surveyed said they were placed in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class that they did not feel was appropriate for their level of language development.¹² In a prior 2010 study by VAYLA, one student stated that even after 10 years in New Orleans public schools, he still does not have the level of English proficiency that he needs to participate in his English-only classes.¹³
- Lack of high quality English language instruction is worsened by shortages of ESL teachers. The Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund found that ESL teachers and bilingual teacher shortages are pervasive resulting in some teachers being responsible for up to 80 students of varying grade levels and language abilities.¹⁴ Additionally, the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice found that in California, one out of every ten ELL students is Asian American or Pacific Islander, but only 5% of bilingual teachers and 7% of bilingual teaching aids speak an Asian or Pacific Islander language.¹⁵
- Limited English proficient parents face barriers in accessing school information. Across the country, community members cite that lack of parental involvement for ELL students is exacerbated by the lack of translated information and the lack of or shortages of bilingual staff who can serve as interpreters for parents.¹⁶ Access to interpretation services is critical for many Southeast Asian American parents (especially those from Hmong and Cambodian backgrounds) who have high rates of not being literate in their own native language.¹⁷

What can local and federal policy makers do to serve the needs of Southeast Asian American ELL students?

- Federal and state policies should enable schools to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services to Southeast Asian American students and their families. This includes developing and retaining bilingual SEAA educators, counselors and administrators; promoting language programs for SEAA languages; promoting high-quality bilingual programs; and developing programs to increase involvement among parents and families who are limited English proficient.
- School districts should provide robust interpretation and translation services. All critical school forms and parent information should be translated into major Southeast Asian languages where there are large concentrations of Southeast Asian American students. The Migration Policy Institute has collected best practices from school districts who have served diverse ELL student populations including Denver Public Schools and Saint Paul Public Schools which provide translation and interpretation in Vietnamese, Hmong, Karen, and other Asian languages.¹⁸ Additionally, school districts should consider partnering with Southeast Asian American community-based organizations to provide translation and interpretation services.
- Federal and state governments should invest in and support community-based organizations that provide culturally appropriate academic and enrichment services to Southeast Asian American ELL students. Programs that focus on English language development are especially important to support the English language acquisition of ELL students.
- The needs of Southeast Asian American ELL students should be included in the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative. The CCSS are voluntary, state-led initiatives to establish a clear set of educational standards for K–12 English language arts and math. SEARAC believes that these common standards will be integral to improving the quality of education in all classrooms, including ELL classrooms, if the needs of our community are integrated into this initiative.
- Schools and school districts should improve available data on ELL students. Schools and school districts should collect, disaggregate, and report ELL student outcomes by English language learner status (e.g., long-term ELL students), by how long they have resided in the U.S. (e.g., "recent arrivals" who have been in the country for less than twelve months and "late arrivals" who enter the U.S. school system at 9th grade or above), by the types of ELL programs that students are in enrolled in, and by major home language. This data will better inform student interventions for all ELL sub-groups including Southeast Asian American ELL students.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Wayne E. Wright & Sovicheth Boun. "Southeast Asian American Education 35 Years After Initial Resettlement: Research Report and Policy Recommendations" *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement* Volume 6 (2011), page vi. Accessed online on 11/29/2011 at <http://jsaaea.coehd.utsa.edu/index.php/jsaaea/article/view/114/89>.

¹¹ Abedi, Jamal and Dietel, Ron. *National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST)/UCLA. Policy Brief (Winter 2004: 7)*, page 1.

¹² Backer, Patricia Ryaby. 2012 AANAPISI Western Regional Summit. De Anza College. 21250 Stevens Creek Boulevard, Cupertino, CA 95014. March 16, 2012. Plenary.

¹³ Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans. *ESL: Lost in the System (New Orleans, Louisiana: 2013)*, page 4.

¹⁴ Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans. *Six Public High Schools, Six Years After The Storm (New Orleans, Louisiana: 2011)*, page 22.

¹⁵ Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, page 9.

¹⁶ Asian American Center for Advancing Justice. *A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in California (2013)*, page 19.

¹⁷ Interviews with community leaders, August 2012 to July 2013.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Migration Policy Institute and Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services. *Joint Language Access Webinar, "Language Access and Schools: Federal Requirements and School Experiences"* (October 6, 2011). Accessed online on August 12, 2013 at http://www.migrationpolicy.org/ppt/webinar_20111006_LA_schools.pdf.

