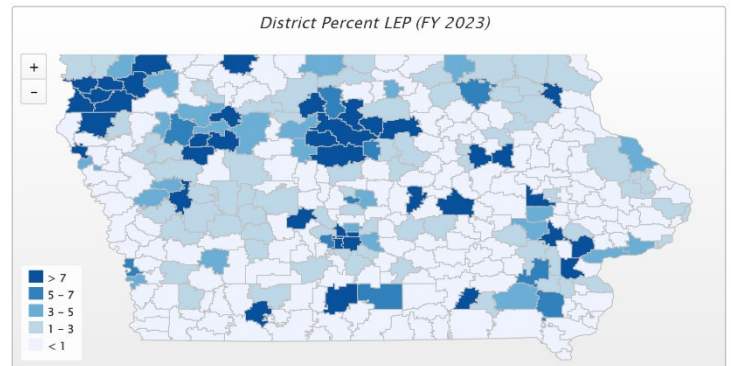


UEN 2025 Priority Issue Brief: English Language Learner Supports

English-Learner Programs and Services: UEN supports increased weighting commensurate with the costs of programs and support to provide services for Iowa's English Learners. Such investments support the employment of appropriately credentialed staff, hard to find with today's teacher shortage. Many students begin their educational journey with EL services and become proficient by testing standards, which is to be celebrated. They still need more support, however, as content of textbooks becomes more difficult and assignments become more complicated. Ultimately, English-Learner services build successful, engaged citizens, strong communities and a strong workforce.

ELL Enrollment Growth: The number of Iowa students who are English Learners (ELs) continues to increase. In 2022-2023, 6.9% of public-school students were ELs compared to 6.3% in 2021-22 as reported in the 2023 DE's Annual Condition of Education Report (June 2024). The [DE Education Statistics](#) webpage indicates EL enrollments by district for 2023-24, showing 7.4% of enrolled students receiving EL services that school year (a total of 35,187 students). Des Moines Public Schools served 7,206 EL students in 2022-23 (over 25% of enrollment). Storm Lake and Postville served the highest concentration of ELs, both over 44% of students enrolled. Sixteen of the 60 districts with more than 5% EL students are UEN districts, with those 16 UEN districts educating 31,352 ELs.

The ISFIS Mapping Tool shows the distribution is diverse. The darkest blue districts exceeded concentrations above 7% in FY 2023, including districts from urban and rural communities.



Funding History: [ELL Task Force Report](#), Nov.

2013, tells the history of the formula support for ELL services: "Prior to the 2013 legislative session, students served in an ELL program counted for an additional 0.22 weighting, including state contribution in the formula, for programming for up to four years. During the 2013 legislative session, state contribution was extended to a fifth year beginning with the 2014-15 budget."

Legislation, [HF 605](#), enacted in 2021, set two weightings to generate funding for students served in limited-English proficient programs based on need, providing tiered weighting based on student's skills: 1) An intermediate level with a weighting of .21 and 2) An intensive level of .25 (both based on student ELPA test scores). The Task Force recommendation included need-based tiered weighting at a higher level to match the costs of providing supports and instruction.

Current Shortfall: On Dec. 13, 2023, The School Budget Review Committee approved \$13.7 million of modified supplemental amount (spending authority) to reimburse school districts for providing 2023-24 instructional services to ELL students being served beyond the five years of weightings for

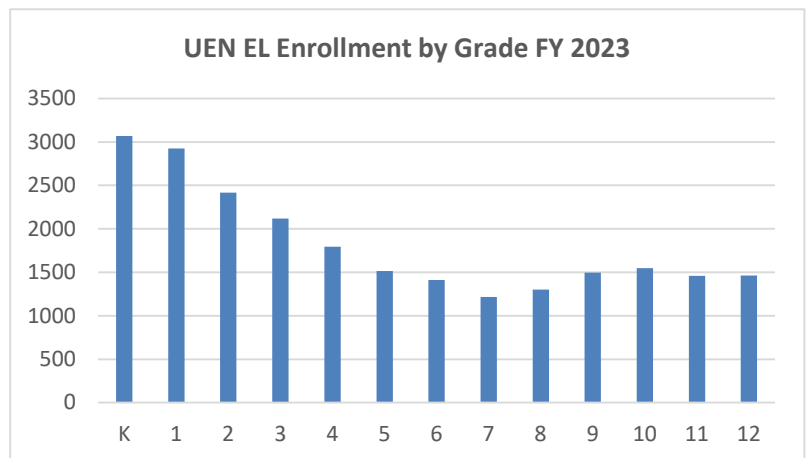
191 school districts and \$22.9 million of modified supplemental amount (spending authority) for reimbursement of services provided in excess of the two weightings generated by the formula to the 151 school district making requests. The FY 2024 requests by school districts to the SBRC have not yet been posted on the DE’s website.

Educational Requirements: The Task Force Report also described the responsibility of schools to provide services: Iowa has educational requirements for EL students as defined in Iowa Code, Chapter 280.4, Uniform School Requirement: When a student is limited English proficient, both public and nonpublic schools shall provide special instruction, which shall include, but need not be limited to, either instruction in English as a second language or transitional bilingual instruction. Such instruction will continue until the student is fully proficient in English or demonstrates a functional ability to speak, read, write, and understand the English language.

Funding Recommendations: The Task Force recommended, and the UEN supports, -EL-weighted funding closer to the national average by increasing it to .39 through a phase-in formula over a three-year period. The .39 national average weighting was shown in the Nevada study, Study of a New Method of Funding for Public Schools in Nevada, American Institutes for Research, 2012. The Task Force also recommended extending eligibility for EL state weighting from five years to seven years, reflecting the research-based timeline sufficient to move EL students to proficiency: “The extension of years is critical to provide enough time for all students to reach academic language proficiency through ELL educational programming to ensure they don’t fall into a subsequent designation of special education requiring an Individualized Education Program (IEP).”

How long does it take for ELs to reach proficiency? The National Literacy Panel, as reported in [A review conducted for the Center for Public Education](#) by researchers at Edvantia, concluded that “considerable future research is needed to develop valid and reliable measures” of academic language proficiency (August & Shanahan, 2006). However, studies conducted to date indicate that it takes 4 to 7 years for ELs to become proficient in academic English.” They cite several empirical studies that confirm the statement.

Success: this chart shows that EL students served early in elementary years reach proficiency and exit the program, as the numbers by grade level decrease dramatically through 6th grade. Older students arriving in Iowa may take longer, as the content for high school coursework is more advanced.



Preschool Policy Impact: Iowa’s preschool students are not assigned an EL status or program support until they attend kindergarten. An EL weighting applied to PK would provide additional resources, especially for translation and services to communicate with parents who play a vital role in supporting student success. In combination with this change, there should be an extension of state contribution to support the costs of educating Iowa’s English learners for at least another year.