

Funding Student Needs Through State Policies

FACT SHEET

What are the specific funding needs for students from low-income backgrounds and English learners?

Students in the United States come from a diverse range of backgrounds with varying assets and challenges, and states have an important role in ensuring equitable access to the resources, skilled educators, and learning opportunities that foster academic success for each and every student. Some student groups, such as students from low-income backgrounds and English learners, have unique learning needs that require additional resources to help them achieve state standards for learning. States vary greatly in how they fund these student groups, and the extent to which they are able to meet students' specific needs.

Research has demonstrated that the conditions of poverty impact children's learning in many ways and that English learners have learning and resourcing needs that are distinct from those of other students. Testing data show that while these students generally exhibit lower achievement than their peers, increased funding [leads to more positive student learning outcomes](#) for both groups, including higher educational attainment, higher graduation rates, greater earnings post-graduation, and lower incidences of poverty.

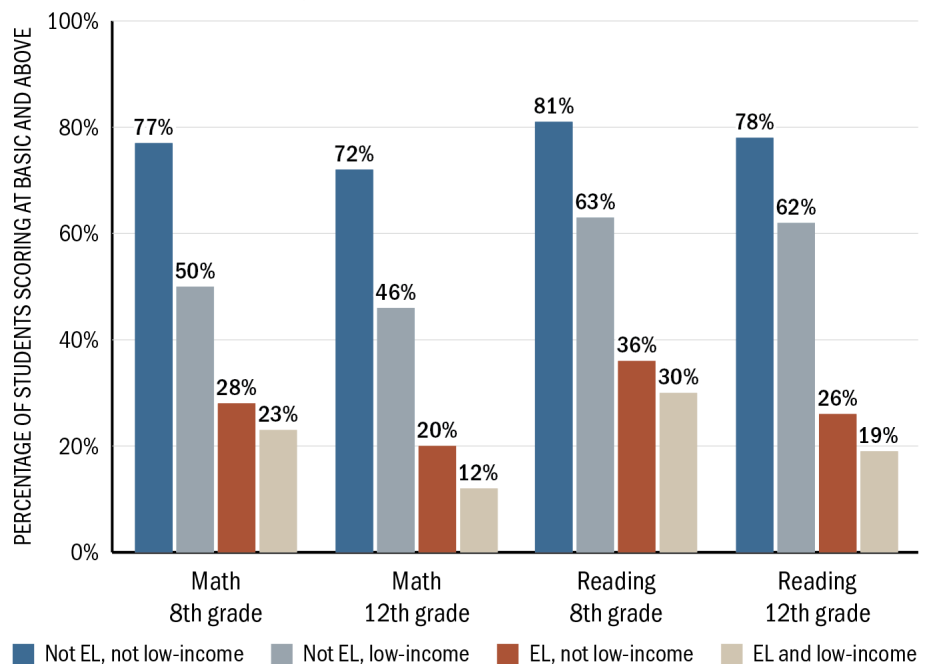
For students from low-income backgrounds, additional funding can help schools provide both social services (e.g., community partnerships to address basic needs, such as nutrition and health care) and academic support (e.g., reducing class sizes, providing targeted tutoring, and creating expanded learning time

programs that augment instruction before and after school and in the summer). Increased funding for English learners can help with resources to implement high-quality English language development, which may include bilingual education, as well as other key resources (e.g., paraprofessionals, professional development and training for teachers, specialized curricula and assessments, and support for home-to-school communications).

How do states fund these student groups?

The Learning Policy Institute reviewed every state's 2023–24 K–12 funding formula to understand whether and how states provide additional educational funding for students from low-income backgrounds and English learners, how states determine the extent of this additional funding, and whether states offer dual funding for students who qualify as both from low-income backgrounds and English learners. The analyses found that:

National Assessment of Educational Progress: Students Scoring at Basic and Above, 2022



Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *National Assessment of Educational Progress 2022 math and reading assessments*. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

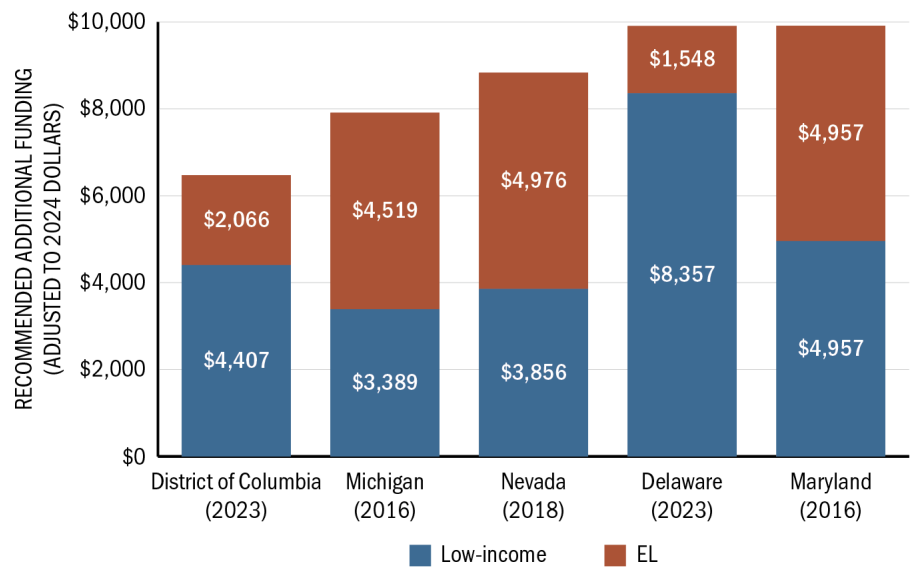
- **49 states provide separate, additional funding for students who are English learners.** Of these, 33 states fund English learners through additional weights in their funding formula, ranging from a high of 2.49 (VT) to a low of 0.025 (UT), with a median weight of 0.25.
- **44 states provide unique funding for “at-risk” students (including students from low-income backgrounds).** Of these, almost half (21 states) also provide districts additional funding based on the concentration of at-risk students enrolled, recognizing that as concentrated poverty increases, the costs of achieving any given level of educational outcomes increase significantly.
- **37 states provide dual funding for students who are both from low-income backgrounds and English learners.** Among the 11 states for whom it was possible to estimate per pupil funding for each group, total additional funding ranged from \$904 to \$16,161.

What does it cost to adequately educate these two student groups?

State costing studies that determine the funding required to meet student needs have typically recommended that states provide additional funding for both student groups. The most recent such studies found that:

- Recommended weights for low-income students ranged from 0.30 to 0.81, and for English learners, from 0.15 to 0.40.
- The total recommended dollar amount for students who are both at-risk and English learners ranged from \$6,473 to \$9,914.

Recommended Additional Funding for English Learner and Low-Income/At-Risk Students



Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of state education financing studies. (2024).

What state action is recommended?

States are encouraged to conduct updated costing studies to accurately assess the extent of student needs and whether their funding formulas meet those needs. Given the different types of resources needed for students from low-income backgrounds and English learners, states should consider the feasibility of providing dual funding to support these student groups.

Learn more

For more in-depth information, access the [Funding Student Needs: A Review of State Funding Policies for English Learners and Students From Low-Income Backgrounds](#) report.

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