

# State Policy and the Educational Outcomes of English Learner and Immigrant Students: Three Administrative Data Stories

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## Abstract

Recent years have seen a shift to individual states as the battlegrounds for ensuring the educational rights of the rapidly growing populations of immigrant and English-learning students enrolled at all stages in the educational pipeline. It is, therefore, essential that state policy makers understand how the educational trajectories of immigrant and English learner students can be dramatically influenced by decisions that are made by state legislatures. In this article, we highlight how state and district longitudinal administrative data sets could be leveraged to provide valuable insight in this policy arena. We make use of descriptive portraits of the data systems in Florida, Texas, and New York City, noting both the strengths of each and how all could stand to benefit by incorporating elements of the others. We conclude by offering recommendations for both researchers and policy makers in the use of state data systems to help inform policy affecting the future of immigrant and English-learning students.

## Keywords

English learners, immigrant students, administrative data systems

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Demographers estimate that immigrants, their children, and their grandchildren accounted for at least 55% of the nation's population growth between 1965 and 2015, adding nearly 72 million people to the total U.S. population (Pew Research Center, 2015). Embedded in these rapidly changing demographics are key issues related to immigrant student achievement, language, culture, and citizenship, as well as issues of integration by generational status in the United States. As a result, the educational rights and achievement profiles of both immigrant and English learner (EL) populations, the groups of focus for this study, have been a consistent legislative question across the United States, with varying policies across states regarding the provision of bilingual education, in-state tuition for undocumented students, and the role of race in college admissions. Of particular relevance is that these state policies involve individuals who are among some of the fastest growing and most underserved student populations in U.S. schools.

Most policy related to immigrant and EL students has been federal; recently, however, individual states have been the primary battlegrounds for determining the educational rights of immigrants and ELs, through legislative activity, voter referenda, and informal enforcement policies. Moreover, state policy tends to touch on multiple points in the education pipeline for various populations, which often has a cumulative effect on students. For instance, state policy regarding ELs has been primarily in the K-12 sector, while policy related to the education of (undocumented) immigrant students has been primarily at the higher education level. However, these two sectors are part of the same education pipeline, and the same students are often negatively affected by multiple policies (Rodriguez & Cruz, 2009). Furthermore, while enrollment in higher education has not been a specific aim of EL student policy, legal and historical analyses of the intent of policy language suggest that outcomes such as attending a postsecondary institution or gaining meaningful employment may have been indirect goals of legislation created to ensure greater educational opportunity (Moran, 1998; San Miguel, 2004). Indeed, the influence of state education policy extends well into postsecondary education and beyond, often having a direct effect on students' labor market outcomes and on the economic well-being of a particular state (Flores, Park, & Baker, 2017; Perna & Finney, 2014).

Given the lasting impact state policies can have on the educational and financial outcomes of immigrant and EL students, it is essential that policy makers fully understand these students' complex and changing educational trajectories. Fortunately, many states have longitudinal data systems that can track students throughout their educational careers and into the workforce. In this article, we highlight these data systems in three states that have sizable and rapidly expanding immigrant and EL student populations: Florida, New York, and Texas.

These data often provide more individual detail than federal data sets on the various ways students' immigrant or EL status can be identified and how they can be tracked over time. Importantly, the data systems we discuss do not come from states with explicit exclusionary policies for these populations in the years examined but from states with a long history of integrating EL and immigrant students into their school systems, although with varying outcomes.

## Purpose

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the ability of data systems in New York, Texas, and Florida to identify and track immigrant and EL student outcomes at a time when state policy has been the major force shaping these students' futures. We have three related goals. The first is to illuminate, from a state-specific perspective, how state databases can be used to track the education trajectories of students who fall into the federally defined categories of immigrant and EL. We argue that, because federal protections and regulations do not extend to postsecondary study, state policy is of critical importance to these students' educational rights. Until recently, however, few research studies have employed longitudinal data systems to illuminate how state policy affects the long-term outcomes of immigrant and EL students, particularly later in the education pipeline. In the K-12 sector, reclassification procedures that move students from EL identification to proficiency are defined by state context; however, we often know little about how these students fare after graduating high school and enrolling in college, due primarily to federal data constraints and the varied identification procedures of the nation's colleges (Kanno & Harklau, 2012; Núñez, Rios-Aguilar, Kanno, & Flores, 2016). Over the past few decades, however, advances in the education databases compiled by some states have begun to overcome this lack of federal education data, particularly at the postsecondary level. Still not all state data systems allow for a complete investigation of the story of immigrant and EL students, due to limitations of the specific data collected, which ironically are often also the result of state education policy.

A second goal of this article, therefore, is to compare and critique three student-level administrative databases and suggest ways that all three might benefit from adopting elements of the other two. We present case studies of three jurisdictions that have a large number of immigrant and EL students, and of the data systems that capture these students' educational experiences across the K-12 and higher education sectors. Two jurisdictions are states, Florida and Texas, the other is New York City, which has the nation's largest school district. These jurisdictions, which represent some of the largest and most diverse states in the nation, differ in terms of opportunity granted by state policy, options for educational attainment, and higher education landscapes.

The third goal of this article is to suggest how researchers and policy makers can use these state administrative data systems to design policy geared toward improving the educational outcomes of immigrant and EL students.

We ask the following:

1. What can these three administrative longitudinal data systems tell us about the educational trajectories of EL and immigrant students?
2. What can we learn from cross-state comparisons? What are the shortcomings of the existing data sets and how might they be improved to better identify and explain the educational pipeline for EL and immigrant students?
3. How might policy makers and researchers use such databases to address the educational progress these students—and all students—make in the coming decades?

For the purposes of this article, we employ the following definitions. The federal government broadly defines an EL as a Limited English Proficient (LEP) student aged 3 through 21 years who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary or secondary school, is not born in the United States, whose native language is not English, and is from an environment where another language has had a significant impact on their level of English proficiency (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002a). Of particular relevance to this definition is that a student's English ability may not meet a state's proficient level, making this a critical part of the identification process. The Education Commission of the States (2014) notes that most state definitions of ELs have roots in the federal definition but include state-specific details. For example, New York includes various EL categories to account for foreign birth status, while other states focus on learning English and do not mention immigration status.

To identify a child as an immigrant regardless of EL status, the federal government defines these individuals as of a similar age group (3 through 21 years); not born in the 50 states, Washington, DC, or Puerto Rico; and not having attended school in any state for more than three full academic years (NCLB, 2002b). An important part of these definitions is that English language programming is the federal government's responsibility as long as immigrant and nonimmigrant students require additional instruction. Thus, as various scholars have noted, not all ELs are immigrants, but many new immigrants are ELs (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009; Rodriguez & Cruz, 2009).

We argue that, to understand the most accurate educational status of immigrants and ELs and their path to academic achievement, policy makers and educators across the nation should be acutely aware of the role data quality can play in providing comprehensive portraits of short- and long-term achievement of these rapidly growing populations. This combination of analytical tools, particularly at the state level, is essential in developing more effective and efficient education policy, especially that affecting multi-identity populations such as immigrant and ELs. In short, by identifying and addressing shortcomings in the existing data systems, researchers and policy makers may be better equipped to enact state policy that will improve educational opportunities for these students.

We begin by providing a brief history of the nation's educational response to EL and immigrant students since the turn of the century, as well as how immigrant and EL students' educational trajectories across state contexts is relevant to the development of states' education policies and levels of educational attainment. We then address our first and second research questions by describing three student-level administrative data systems and by presenting findings from a series of descriptive analyses we conducted in each setting. We conclude by answering our third research question, offering recommendations for how educators and state policy makers can use state-related administrative data most effectively to improve the educational outcomes of all students in an era of consistently changing demographics.

## **Background on States' Responses to Language and Citizenship Changes in Their Schools and Communities**

An historic examination of national and state responses to immigrant groups and their incorporation into U.S. schools indicates that efforts and resistance to addressing the

needs of new populations are long-standing. Protests against teaching languages other than English existed well before the 1960s. Important gains in providing additional educational resources for limited English-speaking children were made through Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (Petrzela, 2011). Terrence G. Wiley and Jin Sook Lee (2009), who document controversies around language diversity and education policy for immigrant children, cite protests against the growing German student population prior to World War I. By 1919, at least 34 states had passed laws prohibiting the teaching of German and other foreign languages throughout K-12 education. Where teaching other languages was allowed, it was not permitted before Grade 6, so children would not learn foreign languages at the age when they would be most likely to retain them (Wiley & Lee, 2009). Challenges to such restrictions ultimately landed before the U.S. Supreme Court. *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923) and *Farrington v. Tokushige* (1927) provided some protection against language restrictions (Piatt, 1992, as cited in Wiley & Lee, 2009), but the state and local role in determining what constituted permissible instruction was less well defined—a situation that would remain until the turn of the 21st century. Multifaceted approaches to language instruction continue today; our ability to assess the effects on short- and long-term educational outcomes is due to advances in data collection and availability, which we discuss later.

Meanwhile, two complex jurisdictional histories continue to affect EL and immigrant students. First, the evolving definition of their educational rights is intertwined with laws that prohibit discrimination by national origin and guarantee American citizens access to a free K-12 public education (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982; San Miguel, 2004). However, like undocumented students' right to a free K-12 public education, which the Court granted in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), the educational rights of ELs do not appear to extend beyond K-12; they remain mired in states' debates about the type of language instruction to be provided, if any (Cimpian, Thompson, & Makowski, 2017). Second, the differential state responses to EL and immigrant students' educational opportunities continue. For example, since 1998 state referenda in Arizona, Massachusetts, and, until 2016, California, prohibited sustained formal EL instruction (California overturned its ban on bilingual education in July 2017; Sanchez, 2016). In contrast, 20 states now allow undocumented students who meet the residency criteria to attend a postsecondary institution at in-state tuition rates (National Conference of State Legislators, 2015). However, six states still prohibit in-state tuition benefits, while university systems in other states also prohibit or have previously prohibited such benefits via institutional mandate (National Conference of State Legislators, 2015). Even in states with more accessible postsecondary options for immigrant students, a student's progress can be difficult to measure, as their status often is either temporary or not properly accounted for in the data sets that measure long-term educational trajectories.

One key finding in the literature is that immigration status per se does not predict educational attainment; the determining factors are more likely to be associated with country of origin and the age at which a student arrived in the United States (Baum & Flores, 2011). However, Cynthia Feliciano and Yader Lanuza (2016, 2017) found that predicting educational attainment goes beyond country of origin; it also depends on a migrant's social status before they migrated and on the educational opportunity

available to them by national context. In other words, comparing earning a high school diploma in nations, where only one third of the population does so to earning a high school diploma in the United States, does not reflect the vastly different educational opportunities available in different contexts.

A second key finding relates to the importance of disaggregating student outcomes not only by race, ethnicity, and income but also by metrics that capture diverse immigration experiences, such as citizenship and language, and the interplay of these variables in the home. For example, assessments of data sets over the past 10 years have shown that the field has made considerable progress in examining educational outcomes by race and ethnicity, but language and citizenship are often treated as unrelated to or separate from the racial and ethnic experiences and environments of students and their families (Núñez et al., 2016). In fact, more than 50% of students identified as ELs are U.S. citizens, and nearly one third of all students in the United States are children of immigrants. These students have varied citizenship status and English language ability, and their numbers are increasing in U.S. schools, including in states that have not traditionally enrolled students with these criteria (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009). Moreover, many data sets cannot account for the role language plays at particular points of entry into the education system, as they do not reveal when and how long a student was identified as an EL or when they were reclassified into non-EL classes. Additionally, while citizenship tends to be included in most data sets, there are significant limitations to using the utility of such a measure in empirical analyses of student outcomes, as citizenship alone does not fully capture a student's educational path, access to educational resources, understanding of the education system, and the social and economic capital required to earn a postsecondary degree—in short, the ticket to a middle-class U.S. lifestyle.

We know today that a student's language and citizenship are critical intersections of identity, a crossroads that also tends to be further shaped by state context (Núñez, 2014). The interplay between a student having multiple statuses, the state they live in, and the organizations they participate in is becoming an increasing mechanism of opportunity—or disadvantage. Below, we present portraits of our key states of interest in terms of their immigrant and EL populations.

## **Three Case Studies: Context and Structure of Longitudinal Administrative Data**

### *Florida*

The Migration Policy Institute (Sugarman & Lee, 2017) reports that of Florida's population of approximately 20 million, 20% are identified as foreign born; of whom 75% are from Latin America, 11% from Asia, and 10% from Europe. The state has approximately 610,000 unauthorized residents (Migration Policy Institute, 2016) and roughly 10% of the nation's total foreign-born population (Sugarman & Lee, 2017). Nearly, one third of Florida's school-age children have one or more foreign-born parent, compared with the national average of 25%. Nearly, 81% of these children are U.S. born, yet their language needs may reflect those of immigrant students. While census data indicate that 5% of Florida students aged 5 to 17 years are classified LEP (or ELs),

state data put that number closer to 12% (Sugarman & Lee, 2017). While the number of EL children may be significantly undercounted, a comparison of state and national data, which track EL students' nativity, indicates that 59% of ELs were born in the state, compared with the national average of 71%. Comparing these two data sources yields two notable facts: national data are likely to undercount the state share of ELs and state data may not accurately count foreign-born ELs.

*The State Data Contribution.* Florida administrative data, which come from the Florida Education Data Warehouse (FL-EDW), include students' primary spoken language, parental language, and LEP classification. Language is established through a home language survey given to all students as part of school registration. FL-EDW data also contain student demographic information, high school transcripts, and state standardized test scores. FL-EDW data enable researchers to track students from K-12 into postsecondary education, and into the workforce. FL-EDW data at the higher education level include public postsecondary enrollment, course-taking patterns, and degree attainment for all students who attend a Florida public higher education institution.

The FL-EDW is somewhat limited in its ability to track students' immigration status. For our descriptive analysis using Florida data, we examined all students who entered ninth grade in Florida public schools in 1996, 1998, 2000, and 2002 and progressed in a standard fashion through their high school years (i.e., one grade per year until graduation 4 years later, about 300,000 students; Long, Iatarola & Conger, 2009). We identified EL students as those who ever were classified as LEP for any amount of time. We classified students as "previous LEP" if they exited the LEP program at any time by any means.

### *New York State*

New York State's nearly 4.5 million foreign-born individuals account for 23% of the state's total population and more than 10% of the nation's foreign-born population (Sugarman & Lee, 2017). Approximately half of this population is from Latin America, 28% from Asia, and 17% from Europe. Approximately 850,000 are identified as unauthorized, giving New York State the third largest unauthorized population in the nation (Migration Policy Institute, 2016). Some 36% of school-aged children in New York State have one or more foreign-born parents, which is slightly more than in Florida and above the U.S. average. Fully 83% of these children of immigrants are U.S. born (Sugarman & Lee, 2017). New York State and national numbers regarding the share of EL students are comparable: ACS data identify 8% of New York's K-12 population as LEP, while the New York State Education Department puts ELs at 8% (Sugarman & Lee, 2017). At 61%, Spanish is the most prevalent non-English language spoken at home, followed by Chinese at 10%. Another important difference is that New York State is dominated by one major urban area that has the nation's largest public school district, and the state's highest concentration of immigrant and EL students (133,627; Sugarman & Lee, 2017). Thus, while state EL policy applies to all students, the New York City district will likely experience the greatest consequences and advantages. Census versus state data have comparable estimates of students identified as EL or immigrants. However, focusing on state data alone would obscure much of the

difference driven by the large New York City context, which plays an important role in the status of these populations statewide. For the remainder of this analysis, we use data from New York City, described below in the context of the state of New York.

*The New York City District Data Contribution.* As New York State does not have a comprehensive K-20 longitudinal database easily accessible to researchers, we use data from the state's largest district, New York City, which is able to provide a K-20 time frame of evaluation of student-level data. The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) is the nation's largest public K-12 system. The city also has one of the country's largest and most diverse public postsecondary systems, the City University of New York (CUNY). An extensive student-level longitudinal database was compiled from the New York City Partnership for College Access and Success, a research collaboration between the NYCDOE, CUNY, and the Research Alliance for New York City Schools. Variables on students' demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds include race/ethnicity, gender, whether born in the United States, whether English was spoken at home, and LEP status in eighth grade. Data related to immigrant status include whether a student is foreign born or U.S. born, country of origin, and language of origin. NYCDOE also provides information on whether English is the primary language spoken at home. The data on LEP status include whether a student was identified as LEP at any time during their schooling. The sample of students evaluated for this analysis include ninth graders in academic years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 ( $N = 28,675$ ), who graduated from high school on time (within 4 years), and enrolled immediately in a 4-year institution (fall 2007 and fall 2008).

## Texas

Texas has nearly 4.5 million foreign-born residents who comprise approximately 17% of the state population. The state had one of the fastest growing foreign-born populations in the nation. The population doubled from 1990 to 2000, and then grew an additional 56% by 2014 (Sugarman & Lee, 2017). Thirty-six percentage of the state's school-age children have foreign-born parents, slightly more than Florida. A key characteristic of Texas is that a large majority of its foreign-born and EL population is from Latin America (70%) and/or speak Spanish as their primary language (90%). The state's unauthorized population, also overwhelmingly from Latin America, is approximately 1.4 million (Migration Policy Institute, 2016). The Migration Policy Institute reports that 9% of Texas students identified as LEP, while state data indicate an EL enrollment of 19%, approximately 10 percentage points higher than national data. Similar to discrepancies seen in Florida, state estimates for ELs are larger than estimates drawn from available national data.

*The State Data Contribution.* The Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board provide a student-level, restricted-use longitudinal state administrative data set, which was collected from around 1990 to the present for all Texas public K-12 schools, all public colleges and universities, and, more recently, private colleges; the data do not track students in private K-12 schools. The distinct advantages of this data set are the indicators for LEP status (including time-varying measures of reclassification);



whether (and for how long) students received supplemental language instruction; whether a student's parents secured a waiver from the state-mandated 3-year language instruction program for EL students; and in which language students took certain state achievement tests. The data set also contains indicators for students' race/ethnicity, gender, and economic status (designated by qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch [FRPL] in the K-12 school system). It also includes high school and postsecondary transcripts, and whether a student was dual enrolled (simultaneously enrolled in high school and doing college coursework). Individual student (de-identified) indicators also make it possible to link education data to workforce data collected by the Texas Workforce Commission, which allows for such indicators as whether a student worked during high school, and later field of employment and income.

Data on citizenship categories are less dependable due to issues of self-reporting with regard to immigration status and protections from the *Plyler* decision, although language spoken at home and race/ethnicity do allow examination of the diversity of the EL population, and potentially of the immigrant population and/or children of immigrants. This data set is primarily focused on students, thus no information is provided on parents' language ability, education status, or citizenship status.

A robust EL population enables researchers to examine a specific cohort for an extended period of time, starting in an early grade, and thus to account for key details of the EL identification process, such as the year a student was labeled an EL and the number of years they remained so (Flores, Batalova, & Fix, 2012). For our descriptive analysis using the Texas administrative data set, we examined students who entered first grade in 1996, graduated high school in 2007, and entered college that same fall.

## **Three College Access Case Studies: Jurisdictional Portraits**

### *Florida: Capturing the Generational Influence of Culture and Home*

A key contribution of the FL-EDW is its capacity to capture the language relationship between a student and the guardian parent by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, which we showcase in the following tables. Analyses of Florida state data not shown here but relevant to these analyses indicate that White and Black students who entered the Florida public schools in ninth grade speak English (98% and 88%, respectively), while about one third of Hispanic students speak English as a primary language and two thirds speak Spanish. In addition, the data also indicate an important match between parents' and students' Spanish language ability. Nearly, two thirds (63.05%) of Hispanic parents and students speak Spanish, compared with nearly 29% who speak primarily English. Fewer than 10% of Hispanic students (8.09%) speak English, while their parent(s) speaks only Spanish, which suggests a stronger language match than expected, given the likelihood of mixed-citizenship households in Florida. Tables 1 and 2 examine the percentage of enrollment and degree attainment in Florida by student and parent language match and FRPL status, which captures differences by Spanish language status (also a proxy for Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic) and economic status, as per recent research examining differences in outcomes by race, language, and parents' social class (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016).

**Table 1.** Percentage of Enrollment and Degree Attainment in Florida by Student and Parent Language and Ethnicity.

	White		Hispanic		
	English	Spanish	Parent and student English	Student English, parent Spanish	Parent and student Spanish
No enrollment	24.9	30.50*	19.77	25.57*	30.71*
Community college enrollment	37.94	40.72*	38.84	37.52	40.62*
University enrollment	37.16	28.77*	41.4	36.91*	28.68*
No BA or associates	66.33	72.51*	66.09	69.24*	72.55*
Associates	12.88	13.97	13.97	13.3	14.01
BA	20.79	13.52*	19.94	17.46*	13.44*
Observations	176,122	34,725	15,192	4,262	33,199

Note. BA = Any bachelor's degree. Asterisks indicate that the selected percentage is significantly different at the 0.05 significance level. The differences were calculated between (a) White English as compared with Hispanic English; (b) Spanish as compared with English; and (c) the differences were calculated between student English, parent Spanish, and parent and student Spanish as compared with parent and student English. The sample is all students who entered ninth grade in Florida public schools in 1996, 1998, 2000, and 2002 who progressed in a standard fashion through their high school—one grade per year until graduation 4 years later.

Table 1 first shows that predominantly Spanish-speaking Hispanic students, who on their own and with their parents speak primarily Spanish, are the group most likely not to enroll in any type of postsecondary education after exiting high school. However, the data also show that English-speaking Hispanic students are the group most likely to enroll in a 4-year university—40%, compared with 37% of English-speaking White students. Adding parental fluency in English creates a more complex picture, including higher university enrollment rates for Hispanic students in families where they and their parents speak English, although this difference is not statistically significant. More specifically, when Hispanic parents and their children both speak English, the children are more likely to enroll in a university than Hispanic children who speak English but have Spanish-speaking parents. In terms of degree attainment, English-speaking Hispanic students are more likely to earn an associate's degree than English-speaking White students (13.85% vs. 12.88%); however, English-speaking White students are more likely to earn a BA within 6 years of entering college, although by fewer than 2 percentage points (20.79% vs. 19.42%). Among the student–parent language match pairs, Hispanic children in families where they and their parents speak English are more likely to graduate college than other Hispanic language match pairs.

As previously noted, the social-class status of a family on entering the United States plays a role in what educational resources and guidance a student receives over time (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016, 2017). Table 2 presents the percentage of degree attainment in Florida by student–parent language match and by FRPL status for all students,

**Table 2.** Percentage of Enrollment and Degree Attainment in Florida by Language Match and FRPL Status.

	All			FRPL			Not FRPL		
	Parent and student English	Student English, parent Spanish	Parent and student Spanish	Parent and student English	Student English, parent Spanish	Parent and student Spanish	Parent and student English	Student English, parent Spanish	Parent and student Spanish
No enrollment	25.61	25.99	30.57*	37.43	33.63	33.85*	21.25	19.15*	23.14*
Community college enrollment	38.78	37.98	40.82*	43.41	40.34*	42.01*	37.08	35.86	38.11*
University enrollment	35.61	36.04	28.61*	19.16	26.03*	24.14*	41.67	44.98*	38.75*
No BA or associates	68.83	69.68	72.61*	82.71	76.89*	75.54*	63.71	63.23	65.97*
Associates	12.09	13.08*	13.90*	9.02	11.75*	13.75*	13.23	14.26	14.26*
BA	19.08	17.25*	13.48*	8.28	11.36*	10.71*	23.06	22.51	19.77*
Observations	244,895	4,795	34,996	65,998	2,263	24,285	178,897	2,532	10,711

Note. FRPL = free or reduced-price lunch; FL-EDW = Florida Education Data Warehouse; BA = Any bachelor's degree. Asterisks indicate that the selected percentage is significantly different at the 0.05 significance level. The differences were calculated between student English, parent Spanish, and parent and student Spanish as compared with parent and student English. The sample is all students who entered ninth grade in Florida public schools in 1996, 1998, 2000, and 2002 who progressed in a standard fashion through their high school—one grade per year until graduation 4 years later. Source. Authors' calculations based on FL-EDW data.

focusing on Spanish language use, which is a proxy for Hispanic ethnicity in this description. Among the full sample, not accounting for FRPL status, the data indicate that the English-speaking student–parent match group is most likely to enroll in a 4-year university and graduate with a BA degree within 6 years. We see very different results among the FRPL sample. English-speaking students with Spanish-speaking parents are the group most likely to enroll in a university, followed by the group of Spanish-speaking students and parents (26.03% and 24.14%, respectively). Among the non-FRPL sample, English-speaking students with Spanish-speaking parents are more likely to enroll in a university than any other student–parent language match examined, including English-speaking students and parents. For BA attainment rates, we also see a more complex picture of the influence of speaking Spanish when examining student–parent language matches in the FRPL sample. In this sample, the English-speaking students whose parents speak Spanish are only marginally more likely to attain a BA than the group where both students and parents speak Spanish (11.36% vs. 10.71%); the group least likely to earn a degree is that in which both students and parents speak English. In the non-FRPL sample, the group marginally more likely to earn a BA is that in which both parents and students speak English (23.06% vs. 22.51% and 19.77%). This outcome differs from the enrollment outcome, where English-speaking students with Spanish-speaking parents had the advantage.

The data suggest two important stories. First, Spanish use between parents and students is not always a negative influence on university enrollment and graduation rates. We see this in the data across all groups, but particularly within the FRPL

sample, with regard to parents speaking Spanish in the home while the student speaks English. The second story relates to the loss of the Spanish language advantage from college enrollment to degree completion. While we do not estimate the factors that lead to college completion, we hypothesize that being a first-generation U.S. college student may make it more difficult to get to the finish line, due to factors that parents' advantages in educational attainment may not remedy, especially if those advantages were achieved prior to migrating to the United States. Without data on parental degrees, including where they earned them, we are only able to hypothesize about the advantages lost following college enrollment among Hispanics in Florida.

### *New York City: College Completion in a City With Unprecedented Size and Immigrant Diversity*

New York City remains a beacon of hope for immigrants from around the world, which adds a degree of complexity to its already diverse racial and ethnic landscape. Indeed, a snapshot of 4-year college enrollees from our cohort of ninth graders indicates a group with almost no major minority: White students represent 23%, Hispanics 23%, Blacks 24%, and Asians 29%. Important to this analysis of 4-year students is that this sample represents an already selective group of students because they first entered a 4-year institution rather than a 2-year institution as a point of college entry. This means that there was likely attrition along the educational pipeline most likely for underrepresented students. The number of Hispanic students in first grade were likely a different (higher) percentage than the number of Hispanics who made it to 9th and 12th grade given evidence of high school dropout along the pipeline (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010; Swanson, 2004). The majority of students in the cohort were born in the United States (73%), but less than half (46%) indicate that their home language is English. In this full sample, only 6% were labeled LEP in the eighth grade.

Table 3 presents a story of 4-year college enrollees and graduates, while accounting for various high school characteristics by race and ethnicity: U.S. born, U.S. born and speaks a foreign language, and foreign born (which assumes the student speaks the language of their native country). The data indicate an approximate 25 percentage point difference in the 6-year BA completion rate between White (76%), Hispanic (51%), and Black (53%) students; Asian students had a completion rate of 71%. Completion rates for all racial and ethnic groups among U.S.-born students who speak a foreign language are higher than for their English-dominant U.S.-born peers, except White students.

In this cohort, U.S.-born students are least likely to be identified as in need of FRPL. Data also examine LEP status in eighth grade, the year before high school entry, to determine the most recent point at which a student was classified an EL (LEP in this data set). Unsurprisingly, foreign-born students in each racial and ethnic group were most likely to have been identified as LEP in eighth grade. However, at 30%, Hispanics were most likely to be identified in this category, compared with Asian students at 24%, Black students at 9%, and White students at 11%. While GPA is a highly contextualized high school variable in that it is based on courses offered, weighting grades according to courses offered and other school context considerations, we see that variation among racial and ethnic groups in the subgroups likely to have the

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics for All First-Time Ninth Graders in New York City as of AY 2003 and 2004 Who Graduated High School on Time and Enrolled Immediately in 4-Year College (by Race/Ethnicity and Foreign-Born Status).

	4-Year college enrollees											
	Hispanic			Black			White			Asian		
	U.S. born	Foreign born	U.S. born and speaks foreign language	U.S. born	Foreign born	U.S. born and speaks foreign language	U.S. born	Foreign born	U.S. born and speaks foreign language	U.S. born	Foreign born	U.S. born and speaks foreign language
<i>n</i>	1,337	4,083	4,083	392	1,144	3,753	859	2,005	1,050	3,910	3,267	71,01
6-Year BA completion	51.46	54.42	54.23	60.97	59.35	76.13	69.73	72.97	71.62	76.04	71.01	
Individual characteristics												
Sex (female)	61.26	63.90	64.61	61.48	63.64	55.16	54.95	52.97	55.43	51.59	54.85	
Free lunch status (eighth grade)	43.01	68.19	65.88	51.12	60.46	11.16	31.20	30.52	28.67	47.98	48.67	
LEP status (eighth grade)	0.67	4.24	30.06	0.05	3.57	9.18	0.70	11.42	0.00	1.00	23.97	
Academic characteristics												
Cumulative GPA (12th grade)	3.12	3.10	3.16	3.03	3.13	3.32	3.24	3.28	3.26	3.30	3.30	
Max Regents math score	80.18	79.75	79.97	77.89	79.40	84.52	84.41	85.67	85.84	88.31	87.13	
Took upper-level Regents math exam	63.05	62.50	64.89	56.91	66.00	82.17	84.98	88.78	88.10	93.35	89.04	
Graduated with an advanced high school diploma	37.62	35.42	37.38	29.02	36.99	34.44	66.08	65.42	71.62	67.81	79.34	
Postsecondary context												
Percentage full-time faculty	47.71	46.05	46.37	47.33	48.68	53.52	47.12	47.06	50.05	53.10	50.12	
Student-faculty ratio	17.52	17.65	17.45	17.42	17.50	16.10	16.29	16.10	16.01	14.70	15.65	
Enrollment (1,000s)	9.06	8.93	9.22	7.77	8.32	9.83	10.23	10.53	10.37	11.45	10.96	
Per pupil expenditures (logged)	9.29	9.29	9.30	9.25	9.30	9.28	9.36	9.34	9.36	9.42	9.35	
CUNY institution	42.86	53.44	58.85	30.43	41.33	45.72	29.23	49.71	57.16	45.90	51.39	
SUNY institution	16.75	16.68	14.43	19.50	18.88	18.27	21.32	10.27	17.24	21.05	17.17	
Private institution	36.05	28.02	25.23	36.98	34.95	29.81	40.47	30.82	34.38	38.39	29.63	
Barron's: Very selective	13.01	12.88	14.36	9.93	10.46	9.62	28.70	20.85	27.43	34.53	25.99	
Barron's: Selective	23.49	19.50	19.47	16.72	18.37	19.67	26.38	34.66	25.52	33.07	28.47	
Barron's: Somewhat selective	42.18	44.77	42.22	46.87	44.84	33.25	40.75	36.36	34.76	27.80	37.07	
Barron's: Nonselective	16.83	19.20	20.26	20.45	20.41	21.42	9.14	8.96	10.38	2.69	6.86	
Barron's: Special/missing rating	4.49	3.65	3.70	6.04	4.85	4.46	2.53	1.35	1.90	1.92	1.62	

Note. BA = Any Bachelor's degree; LEP = Limited English Proficient; GPA = grade point average; CUNY = City University of New York; SUNY = State University of New York. Source. Authors' calculations, Research Alliance for New York City, New York City Partnership for College Success.

highest cumulative GPA. Among Hispanic and Black students, the foreign born had the highest GPA, whereas U.S.-born, English-dominant White students had the highest GPA among all Whites. Among all Asians, those foreign born and U.S. born who speak a foreign language had the highest GPAs.

With regard to advance-level coursework, foreign-born students within the Hispanic, Black, and White groups are the most likely to have taken the district's highest level math curriculum sequence. Among Asian students, those U.S. born who speak a foreign language are the most likely to have taken the high-level math sequence exam. This achievement pattern changes when looking at which group earned the district's advanced diploma. Foreign-born Whites were more likely than similar Hispanics and Blacks to have graduated with an advanced diploma. U.S.-born Asian students who speak a foreign language achieved this metric at a much higher rate than other Asian students; they also had the highest rate for all racial/ethnic and citizenship groups in New York City. Finally, in terms of location of postsecondary attendance, the data indicate that foreign-born students in all racial and ethnic groups are more likely to attend a 4-year CUNY institution than their nonforeign-born counterparts, whereas U.S.-born, English-dominant students (with the exception of Asians) are more likely to attend a State University of New York 4-year institution, a particularly stark pattern among White students. This same pattern holds for all racial groups among students who are likely to attend a private institution, which suggests that foreign-born status is a key indicator for attending a CUNY institution.

Three key stories are particular to New York City. First, foreign-born Hispanic, Black, and White students are the subgroups most likely to have been identified as an EL in eighth grade, to have higher cumulative GPAs (White students are the exception on this metric), to have taken the district's high-level math sequence exam, and to attend CUNY. The Asian students broadly showing the highest academic preparation are those who are U.S. born and speak a foreign language. The second story has to do with the complex comparison between language and foreign-born status. While foreign-born Black and Hispanic students tend to have higher cumulative GPAs and have taken the highest-level math exam than their similar U.S.-born peers, U.S.-born Hispanics, and U.S.-born Black students who speak a foreign language graduate with an advanced diploma at higher rates than their counterparts. The U.S. born who speak a foreign language, with exception to White students, have the highest college-completion rate within their race/ethnicity, which suggests that, when it comes to navigating the pathway to and through college, those who are U.S. born have an advantage over some of their foreign-born peers with somewhat similar performance records.

### *Texas: High-Quality Data for Language Participation*

Texas has a long history of incorporating ELs into its schools, yet it has faced several lawsuits challenging the adequacy of instruction and school quality for its EL population (Smith, 2014). Recent lawsuits initiated by state civil rights groups that are calling for more evidence on the equity outcomes for Texas students participating in these instructional programs have made their way to the federal courts. Ironically, although underutilized, few states have the quality of data Texas has to test these questions;

these data include time in an EL program, time to reclassification, and long-term outcomes in educational attainment and the labor market. The data presented in Table 4 provide a glimpse of students by time in an EL program, specifically on the long-term outcomes for a cohort examined from first grade to college enrollment. The time in program categories, which are based on key data group distributions, include Never ELL, Ever ELL, 1 to 3 Years EL, 3 Years Only (a state-recommended category of time in a program for transition), 4 to 6 Years EL, and 7+ Years EL.

Table 4 presents important descriptive outcomes for All Students by EL identification (Never, Ever), All Students, and Hispanic Students Only, the primary group to be identified as ELs in Texas. Of importance are the results by individual characteristics (economic status); high school context (percentage minority, per pupil expenditures, and size); and key milestones, such as access to readiness courses, graduating from high school, and college enrollment (the one variable we condition on high school graduation). In the All Students category, we see that Ever EL students are dramatically more likely to be identified as economically disadvantaged than Never EL students (86% vs. 36%), with Hispanic ELs even more likely to be poor (90%). The students in all of our comparison groups are more likely to be female, with the exception of those with 7 or more years in an EL instructional program, which signals a higher than average male population of long-term ELs. In terms of high school context, Never ELs on average attend high schools where 49% of students identify as Black and Hispanic, which we identify as underrepresented minority (URM) students. In comparison, ELs on average attend a high school where 79% of students are Black and Hispanic. Hispanic Never EL students attend high schools that average 71% URM enrollment, about 11 percentage points lower than the Hispanic Ever EL category. Hispanic students in an EL program for 1 to 3 years have a slightly lower rate (80%) than other URM students, and Hispanic students in the 7+ years category have the highest URM rate (83%).

As to our key milestones of interest—taking AP/IB coursework, high school graduation, and college enrollment—we find that, on average, only 37% in the All students sample who were Never ELL participated in AP/IB coursework, compared with 34% of all ELs. Among Hispanic students alone, however, 33% of Never EL students participated in this coursework, compared with 32% of ELs. However, the rate of AP/IB course-taking is significantly higher for the 1 to 3 Year and 3 Year Only groups, with 42% and 44%, respectively, participating in these courses; this is nearly 10 percentage points higher than the Ever EL group for the All Students and Hispanic Student Only categories, and approximately 5 to 7 percentage points higher than the Never EL all-student group. As this sample represents a cohort of students who reached 12th grade on time, we expect high school graduation rates to be considerably higher than if we had reviewed all students who started in ninth grade together, with no restrictions for proceeding through high school on time.

Nevertheless, we still see some differences in the otherwise higher than average graduation rates. While 94% of All/Never EL students graduated from high school compared with 88% of All/Ever EL students, the Hispanic 1 to 3 Year and 3 Year Only groups graduated at a rate of 93%; this falls to 75% for 7+ Year Hispanic students who reached 12th grade on time. With regard to college enrollment for students who graduated high school, the gap between the All/Never EL groups has an enrollment rate of 61%, compared with

**Table 4.** Long-Term Outcomes for First-Grade Students Who Enrolled in 1996, Graduated High School in 2007, and Enrolled in College in Fall of 2007 in Texas.

	All students												Hispanic students only											
	Never ELL (n = 111,797)		Ever ELL (n = 24,121)		Never ELL (n = 25,280)		Ever ELL (n = 21,636)		1-3 Years ELL (n = 7,995)		3 Years exact ELL (n = 4,535)		4-6 Years ELL (n = 9,766)		7+ Years ELL (n = 3,875)									
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD						
Male	0.48	0.50	0.48	0.50	0.47	0.50	0.47	0.50	0.46	0.50	0.47	0.50	0.45	0.50	0.53	0.50								
Economic disadvantage	0.36	0.48	0.86	0.35	0.65	0.48	0.90	0.30	0.87	0.33	0.89	0.31	0.91	0.28	0.94	0.23								
HS % UR minority (Black and Hispanic)	0.49	0.28	0.79	0.24	0.71	0.25	0.82	0.22	0.80	0.23	0.82	0.22	0.82	0.22	0.83	0.22								
HS PPE (log)	8.44	0.12	8.46	0.10	8.46	0.12	8.46	0.10	8.46	0.10	8.46	0.10	8.46	0.09	8.47	0.11								
HS enrollment	1.73	1.02	1.98	0.93	1.77	0.99	1.92	0.93	1.92	0.97	1.97	0.94	1.96	0.91	18.26	8.80								
Urbanicity	0.20	0.40	0.34	0.47	0.29	0.46	0.34	0.47	0.26	0.44	0.27	0.44	0.41	0.49	0.34	0.47								
County unemployment	0.04	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.05	0.01	4.88	1.39								
Worked in HS	0.38	0.49	0.41	0.49	0.46	0.50	0.43	0.49	0.42	0.49	0.42	0.49	0.43	0.50	0.42	0.49								
APIB coursework	0.37	0.48	0.34	0.48	0.33	0.47	0.32	0.47	0.42	0.49	0.44	0.50	0.32	0.47	0.10	0.30								
Graduate from HS	0.94	0.25	0.88	0.32	0.91	0.29	0.88	0.33	0.93	0.26	0.93	0.26	0.88	0.32	0.75	0.44								
College enrollment (condition on HS graduation)	0.61		0.53		0.56	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.57	0.49	0.57	0.50	0.49	0.50	0.32	0.47								
Observations	103,658		21,074		22,694		18,711		7,429		4,214		8,636		2,892									

Note. ELL = English language learners; HS = high school; UR = underrepresented; AP = Advanced Placement; IB = International Baccalaureate; PPE = per pupil expenditure.  
 Source. Authors' calculations, Texas Higher Education Board, and Texas Education Agency.



the All/Ever EL group's 53%. However, the 1 to 3 Year and 3 Year Only Hispanic groups advantage persists by a one-point difference over the Hispanic Never EL group (57% vs. 56%). This 1 percentage point difference is not large enough to likely be significant making the groups nearly indistinguishable on this metric. Overall, the descriptive data suggest that, in the course-taking and high school graduation outcomes, Hispanic students with some EL participation have an advantage over Hispanic students with no EL participation or who spend longer periods in an instructional program (4 or more years). However, if this advantage does exist, it does not extend to college enrollment. This is not surprising, given the additional skills, information, and financing required to apply and enroll in college.

## **Cross-Case Study Analysis**

Although descriptive, these portraits provide a broad three-state perspective on what is currently known about the educational pipeline for some of the nation's most underserved and complex populations. The analyses sought in particular to describe the advantages and challenges states and district administrative data can provide in assessing educational progress and opportunity for ELs and immigrant students. The data across the three jurisdictions provide portraits of each state's population and how to prioritize the identification of populations as evidenced by their data. This does not mean that new data cannot be collected. However, in times of limited resources, we recommend that a state know its clear advantages for assessing its population while also working to remedy gaps in other identification procedures that could add to the educational progress story. For example, Florida has great capacity to understand the relationship of language use between a student and parent, and evidence indicates that speaking Spanish in the home is not necessarily a deterrent, as may be often perceived, to university attendance, provided students are able to enter their educational trajectory with a strong knowledge of English. This may be a larger reflection of which Latino groups are most prevalent in Florida and the state's relationship with the migration of these groups, and of the resources these migrants are likely to pass down to their children, as noted in previous literature.

In New York City, we see a great opportunity to understand the role of foreign-born status and language by racial group, which signals that foreign-born status is not the culprit in the low educational achievement of most of the racial groups. However, even the foreign-born groups remain heavily concentrated and/or segregated by race, which points to the ever-important role of race and ethnicity, even among immigrant groups.

Finally, in Texas, we see a new angle on language use, primarily in terms of proficiency categories and time spent in an EL program. In this state portrait, when the data permit, they provide important evidence for disaggregating a student's experience within an EL instructional program by the amount of time they participate and across racial groups. We see early evidence within Hispanic groups, for example, that time spent in an EL program is associated with more positive outcomes than not spending any time in a program (among similar peers). This suggests that language is not the highly perceived negative in long-term outcomes. While our results are not causal, the point of these exercises is to begin to disaggregate our understanding of these groups within their state context, using the advantages each state data set provides to understand academic progress more thoroughly (Cimpian et al., 2017). As the Every Student

Succeeds Act created a stronger agenda for the role state context plays in defining educational opportunities, as well as pathways to college and career readiness, the proper and well-informed use of data systems and their advantages in identifying these pathways by state context may indeed allow more efficient and effective use of resources to do so.

## **Conclusion: Next Directions for Researchers and Policy Makers**

Our analyses of K-20 databases across three of the most diverse states in the nation have provided important findings in understanding what these detailed data are able to provide, and not provide, regarding students' educational trajectories by state context. Motivated by previous literature suggesting the important role played by the state policy context in which a student moves through their educational trajectory, and by a series of legislative, voter, and institutional decisions relating to EL and immigrant students often not considered in state policy analyses (Flores, 2010), we offer the following recommendations.

First, data quality in an era of demographic expansion and diversification should continue to be a priority at both the state and federal level. Understanding the performance of a state's most underserved populations is connected to its capacity for economic development and sustainability. At the federal level, provisions are needed to ensure that a state's populations will be properly represented in order to make reliable conclusions that account for state context. Data systems have been attentive to the population at the state level, but the demographic changes occurring in many states may not yet be reflected. This is particularly important because of changes in the labor market, which schools may need to address in order to meet the needs of student groups that previously were not part of their population.

Second, each data set we examined provides important examples of how language and citizenship have been oversimplified or overlooked in the context of family or states' reception of new populations, and of the lack of attention to the contexts in which parents received schooling. While these analyses are not causal, we have learned that speaking Spanish in the home might be an advantage, or at least not a disadvantage (Florida), and that some language programming may be more beneficial to students than no language programming (Texas). We also see that foreign-born status does not necessarily mean lower educational capacity and can in fact indicate stronger GPAs and higher enrollment rates for some immigrant groups (New York). These lessons would be harder to uncover without the context-specific nature of a state database, especially for EL and immigrant students. However, additional improvements are needed. A key lesson here is that states most able to understand their populations are likely to formulate the strongest, most accurate, and efficient solutions for improving educational opportunity, especially for immigrant and EL students (Hakuta, 2017). Ultimately, we continue to argue that state policy makers will be most successful if they understand both the strength, challenges, and interdependence of both state and federal data and when one jurisdiction will be more helpful than another in defining and solving the most important of policy challenges facing the K-20 educational pipeline.

## Authors' Note

The data include administrative records from the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Texas Workforce Commission. The conclusions of this research do not necessarily reflect the opinions or official position of the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Texas Workforce Commission, or the state of Texas.

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### Author Biographies

**Stella M. Flores** is an Associate Professor of Higher Education at New York University. A scholar of inequality in the pathway to and through higher education, her work employs quantitative methods to explore demographic changes in schools and the nation and how public policies affect the educational pathways of low-income and underserved minority students from Kindergarten to college graduation. She serves on various journal editorial boards and her publications can be found in *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *Educational Researcher*, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *American Journal of Education*, *The Review of Higher Education*, and *Research in Higher Education* among other outlets.

**Toby J. Park** is associate director of the Center for Postsecondary Success and assistant professor of education policy at Florida State University. His primary research utilizes quasi-experimental methods and large statewide datasets to investigate student outcomes in postsecondary education and explore potential policy initiatives that could improve student success. His recent publications have appeared in *Research in Higher Education* and *The Journal of Higher Education*.

**Samantha L. Viano** is a Doctoral Candidate in Leadership and Policy Studies at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University. Her research focuses on evaluating policies and assessing school contexts that predominantly affect traditionally marginalized student populations and their teachers. Her work specifically focuses on school climate and safety, teacher mobility, student experiences in high school, and school leadership.

**Vanessa M. Coca** is doctoral candidate in the sociology of education program at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at New York University. Her primary research centers on the study of high school students' transitions into college and issues of inequality in college access and success from both sociological and policy lenses.