

TN Basic Education Program Review

Advocacy Guide



Funding for English Learners

Why Funding Matters for English Learners

Federal, state, and local funding sources each contribute to K–12 education budgets in Tennessee, but the breakdown is different in each district **depending on a variety of factors**. Tennessee, like many states in the region, has seen a marked increase in the number of English learners in nearly every school district. Today, **7.8% of Tennessee’s students are English learners** and are **included in our accountability framework as of 2016**. The research is clear that English learners perform better academically and achieve greater language proficiency when they have high-quality English language instruction.

Funding matters for students who are English learners because they require specific supports and services to ensure they are receiving the same quality education as their peers. Like all supplemental services, these supports require additional funding above the average per-student amount. Tennessee has an opportunity now to modernize our approach to educating our diversifying student population and ensure that schools have the resources necessary to their success.

Why a Student-Weighted Formula Matters for English learners

Student-weighted formulas improve equity, increase transparency, and expand flexibility. Currently, **34 states** allocate funding to English learners using a weighted formula. English learners need different

supports depending on their language proficiency. Student-weighted formulas allow states to more effectively provide resources based on individual student need. Accounting for English learners through the formula provides districts the ability to support English learners more effectively and offers funding predictability to school districts.

Model English Learner Funding Policies

Equitable weights should be applied to the base amount for English learners, with greater levels of funding provided for students with lower levels of English language proficiency. This approach recognizes that low-English-proficient students often require more intensive services in small instructional groups, and their families need support to become effective partners in their children’s educational experience. Such funding also ensures that general education teachers have appropriate training to meet the needs of the ELs at all levels that they serve in their classroom. The State should also employ a mechanism to account for the diseconomies of scale associated with serving a small number of English learners overall.

Model Policies for Funding English Learners Should Include:

- Weights that are applied to the base amount for every English learner (e.g., Provide 100% to 150% more (2 to 2.5 times as much) funding for English learners, with tiers based on student characteristics).

- Assign students to tiers based on their level of English language proficiency, with more funding for students at lower proficiency levels, or other characteristics such as:
 - Grade-level or tier of entry
 - Newcomers with limited or interrupted formal education
 - The prevalence of their native language in the district
 - The number of English learner students in a district, setting a minimum English learner allotment for districts with fewer students in order to provide a minimum level of service

Model Funding Practices in Other States

Maine: See *Me. Rev. Stat. Ann. tit. 20-A, § 15675(1)* Maine provides increased funding for English learners by applying a multiplier to the base per-pupil amount. The precise multiplier used varies depending on the number of students in the district not proficient in English.

Massachusetts: See *2021–2022 Final Budget Chapter 24 Mass. Gen. Laws Ann. Ch. 70, § 3* Massachusetts provides increased funding for English learners based on grade bands. EL students in grades P–5 receive \$2,399, 6–8 receive \$2,521, and high school students receive \$2,164.

New Mexico: See *N.M. Stat. Ann. § 22-8-22* New Mexico provides increased funding for English learners by applying a multiplier of 1.5 to the base per-pupil amount for these students and through a program-specific allocation.

North Dakota: See *N.D. Cent. Code Ann. § 15.1-27-03.1* North Dakota provides increased funding for English learners by applying a multiplier to the base per-pupil amount for these students, depending on the student's level of English proficiency. For the least English-proficient students, a multiplier of 1.4 is applied to the base amount; for students in the second-least proficient category, a multiplier of 1.28 is applied; and for students in the third-least proficient category, a multiplier of 1.07 is applied, though students in this category may not receive supplemental funding for more than three years.

Ohio: See *Ohio Rev. Code Ann. § 3317.016* Ohio provides increased funding for English learners in the form of a dollar allocation for each EL that varies depending on the student's educational history. English learners are divided into three categories for the purposes of this supplemental allocation. Students who have been enrolled in United States schools for no more than 180 days and have not previously been excused from testing in English Language Arts (ELA) generate a .2104 multiplier in supplemental funding. Students who have been enrolled in United States schools for over 180 days and score at least proficient on Ohio's ELA standardized test generate a .1577 multiplier in supplemental funding. Students who score at least proficient for two consecutive years on Ohio's ELA standardized test generate a .1053 multiplier in supplemental funding.

[Here are the English learner funding policies in all 50 states.](#)

Key Questions To Ask Policymakers

- Is Tennessee considering a tiered funding model to address the varying needs of English learners?
- What data will Tennessee use to assess the levels of weights applied to English learners in a new formula, and how will they identify what the appropriate costs are for educating different types of English learners?
- Will Tennessee provide supplementary funding to ELs for as long as they are identified for EL services?
- Will Tennessee award multiple weights for students who might qualify as English learners but who may also be students with a disability or students who are economically disadvantaged?
- Will Tennessee consider additional funding for districts with high concentrations of English learners?
- How will the formula account for potentially incorrect English learner student counts due to high-mobility populations like students in migrant families?

Additional Resources

- [Funding English Learner Education: Making the Most of Policy and Budget Levers](#), Migration Policy Institute, 2021
- [Funding an Equitable Education for English Learners](#), Migration Policy Institute, 2016
- [50-State Comparison K-12 and Special Education Funding: English Learner Funding](#), Education Commission of the States, 2021
- [How States Allocate Funding for English Learners](#), Education Commission of the States, 2020