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Press Release

<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/many-school-districts-struggle-meet-needs-english-learners-mpi-report-examines-diverse>

## **As Many School Districts Struggle to Meet Needs of English Learners, MPI Report Examines Diverse Approaches Taken in U.S. to Provide Appropriate Resources**

WASHINGTON – With nearly 10 percent of U.S. elementary and secondary students less than fully fluent in English, many school districts are struggling to develop the capacity to meet the needs of children from immigrant and refugee backgrounds. A new report from the Migration Policy Institute’s National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy examines the diverse approaches taken at federal, state and local levels to provide appropriate funding for the education of nearly 5 million English Learner (EL) students—most of whom are U.S. born.

The report, *Funding an Equitable Education for English Learners in the United States*, examines the approaches being taken to design supplementary funding that meets EL needs and seeks to remedy the persistent achievement and outcome gaps between these students and their native English-speaking peers. The supplementary funding mechanisms fall in three categories: weighted formulas, categorical funding and state reimbursement to local districts.

While local communities have long been the primary sources of education funding, state resources are intended to even out disparities between wealthier and poorer districts and federal funds also help fill gaps. “Low-income and EL student needs are generally more concentrated in the very neighborhoods that have the least ability to raise additional funds for programs to address them,” the report notes.

Still, a number of states have failed to ensure equitable funding across districts. And while many states have used cost studies to provide empirical data on how much funding districts need to achieve desired educational outcomes, few of these analyses focus on the specific resource needs of ELs. The report finds “little evidence” that states have engaged in systematic consideration of the numerous factors, including EL resource needs, which shape state and local contexts.

As the new federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act, gives states increasing freedom to design school improvement plans and to set the criteria for identifying students as ELs, district administrators may increasingly press state policymakers for the resources necessary to meet standards.

The report finds that a great deal more research is necessary to help policymakers develop empirically based and fair funding systems to support the education of EL students. The report offers three areas for further investigation: Expanding research on the actual costs of EL education and the variables that affect costs; examining costs in systems with low numbers of ELs; and comparative analysis of the mechanisms used by states to steer districts towards effective practices and improvement of educator skills.

“Better understanding of the variables that contribute to the complexity of designing adequate and fair funding formulas will help policymakers ensure the efficient and effective use of public funds and provide the supports needed to help all students meet the high educational standards set for them,” writes author Julie Sugarman, an MPI education policy analyst.

The report also argues for increased funding flexibility to respond to unexpected influxes or population shifts as well as for building the capacities of states and districts to use empirical data in the development of funding formulas.

The report is the second in a series produced with the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration (Sachverständigenrat deutscher Stiftungen für Integration und Migration, or SVR), underwritten with a research grant from the German foundation Stiftung Mercator. The [first report](#) examined the supplementary funding mechanisms that support schools and school districts in meeting the specific needs of migrant-background students in primary and secondary schools in four countries: Canada, France, Germany and the United States.

The report issued today can be downloaded at: [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/funding-equitable-education-english-learners-united-states](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/funding-equitable-education-english-learners-united-states).

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The [Migration Policy Institute](#) (MPI) is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit think tank in Washington, DC dedicated to analysis of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national and international levels. MPI's [National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy](#) is a crossroads for elected officials, researchers, state and local agency managers, grassroots leaders, local service providers and others who seek to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities today's high rates of immigration create in local communities.