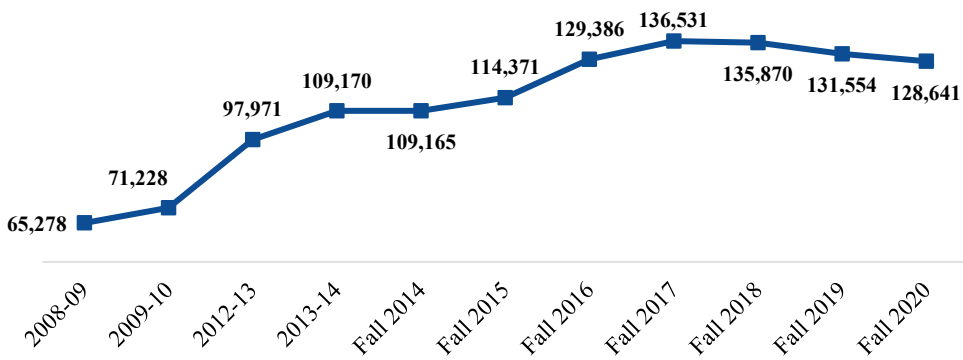# English Learners Who Speak Arabic as a Home Language

Most Common Languages Spoken by English Learners (Excluding Spanish and English): Fall 2020

Other than English and Spanish, Arabic was the most commonly spoken language by English learners (ELs) in grades K–12 during school year (SY) 2020–21, followed by Chinese and Vietnamese.
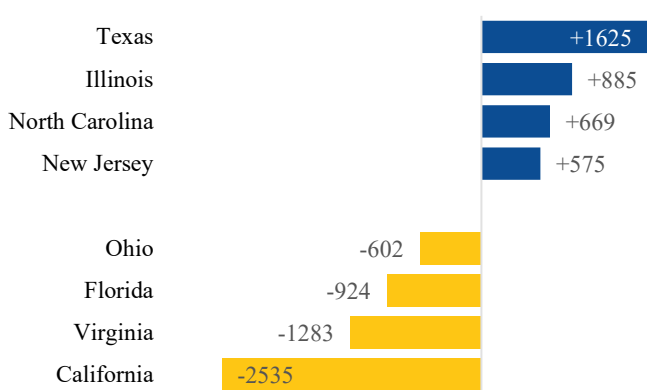

Bar graph — Number of ELs:
- Arabic: 128,641
- Chinese: 93,339
- Vietnamese: 73,075
- Portuguese: 43,426
- Russian: 37,159
- Haitian: 30,063
- Hmong: 28,719
- Urdu: 25,192
- Korean: 22,816
- French: 22,383

Number of Reported Arabic-Speaking English Learners: 2008 through 2020[1]

Line graph data:
- 2008-09: 65,278
- 2009-10: 71,228
- 2012-13: 97,971
- 2013-14: 109,170
- Fall 2014: 109,165
- Fall 2015: 114,371
- Fall 2016: 129,386
- Fall 2017: 136,531
- Fall 2018: 135,870
- Fall 2019: 131,554
- Fall 2020: 128,641

Between SY 2008–09 and fall 2017, the number of Arabic-speaking EL students increased by 92%, or more than 65,000 students. Subsequently, the number of Arabic-speaking students declined by 6%, or nearly 8,000 students.

States Where Arabic Was a Top Five Language With the Largest Increase and Decrease in the Number of Arabic-Speaking English Learners: School Years 2016–17 to 2020–21

- Texas: +1625
- Illinois: +885
- North Carolina: +669
- New Jersey: +575
- Ohio: -602
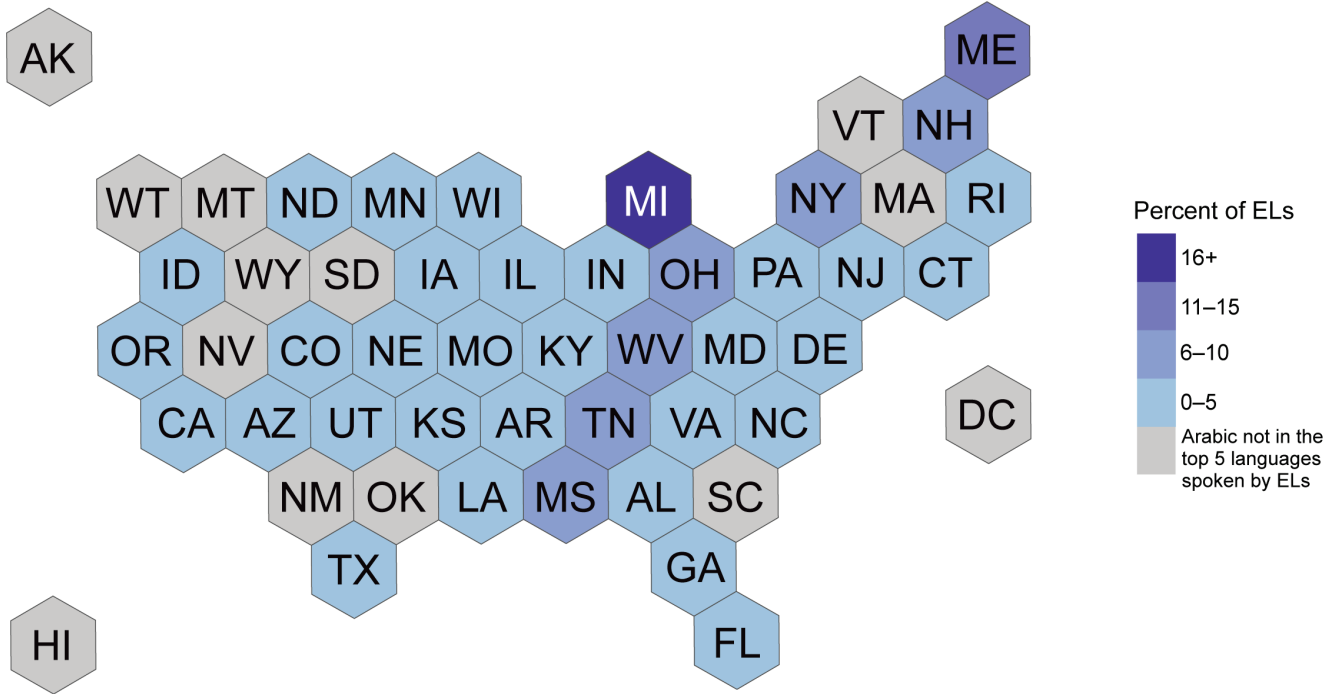- Florida: -924
- Virginia: -1283
- California: -2535

Between SYs 2016–17 and 2021–21, Texas experienced the largest increase in the number of Arabic-speaking ELs – 1,625 students, followed by Illinois, North Carolina, and New Jersey. These states experienced an increase in their Arabic-speaking EL population while the national numbers declined. The state with the largest decrease was California, which had 2,535 fewer Arabic-speaking students in SY 2020–21 than in SY 2016–17.

Source for Bar Graph: U.S. Department of Education. Year. *EDFacts*. FS141 – DG678.
Source for other visuals: National Center for Education Statistics. 2020. "English learner (EL) students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools, by home language, grade, and selected student characteristics: Selected school years, 2008–09 through fall 2020." U.S. Department of Education.
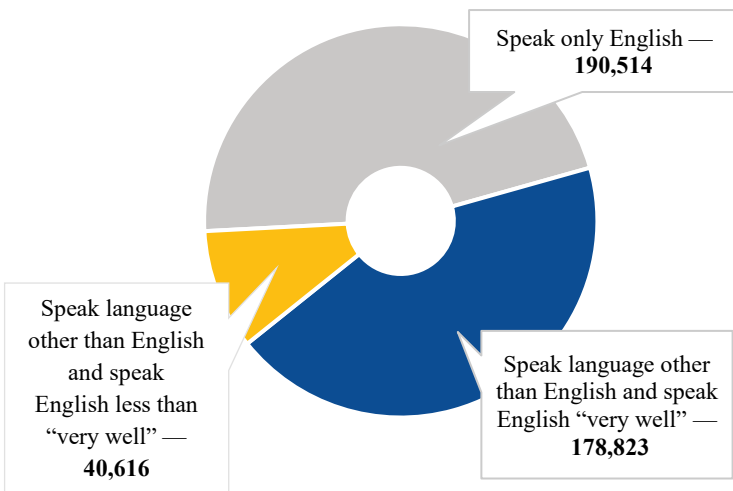
[1] Data for 2013–14 and earlier years include all ELs enrolled at any time during the school year. Data from all 2014 onward represent all ELs enrolled at that time point.

Percentage of English Learners Who Speak Arabic as a Home Language[2,3]:
School Year 2020–21

Nationally, 2.6% of all ELs spoke Arabic as a home language in SY 2020–21. However, this percentage varied by state. Michigan had the highest concentration of Arabic-speaking ELs at **28.9%,** followed by Maine at **13.1%.**

Home Languages and English Language Fluency of United States Residents Age 5–17 with Arab/Arabic Ancestry: American Community Survey 2021 Five-Year Estimate[4,5]

Speak only English — **190,514**

Speak language other than English and speak English less than "very well" — **40,616**

Speak language other than English and speak English "very well" — **178,823**

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau estimate that there are approximately 409,953 individuals age 5–17 who have Arab ancestry. This population is linguistically diverse, with 190,514 individuals who speak only English at home and a total of 219,439 who speak a language other than English at home. Of those who speak another language, most report that they speak English "very well," while around 40,616 speak English less than "very well." Not all individuals with Arab ancestry spoke Arabic, although that was the most common language reported other than English: 3.7% spoke Spanish and 6.3% spoke other Indo-European languages.

Source for map: U.S. Department of Education. Year. *EDFacts*. FS141 – DG678.

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[2] Author calculation: Change = Difference in the total number of state-reported speakers of Arabic in SY 2020–21 and 2016–17.
[3] This map depicts data only for states where Arabic was counted within the top five languages. In SY 2020–21, thirty-eight states counted Arabic within the top five languages spoken most commonly by ELs. The states that did not count Arabic within the top five languages are shown in grey.
[4] American Community Survey. 2021. "Age by language spoken at home by ability to speak English for the population 5 years and over." Table B16004. U.S. Census Bureau. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5YSPT2021.B16004?t=504
[5] These are self-reported language abilities. Respondents could say they spoke English "very well," "well," "not well," and "not at all."

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