Who Receives English Learner Testing Supports on the ACT® Test?

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This data byte investigates whether student characteristics predict which English learners (ELs) take the ACT® test with EL testing supports. It is a follow-up analysis to two research studies investigating relationships between English-language proficiency (ELP) and performance on the ACT (Moore & Schnieders, 2026; Moore et al., 2026). The two U.S. states that agreed to participate in this study have been administering the ACT to virtually all Grade 11 students since before the 2017–2018 school year and are part of WIDA (https://wida.wisc.edu/), a consortium of states led by the University of Wisconsin–Madison. WIDA develops resources for supporting ELs and their teachers, including ACCESS, a set of summative English proficiency assessments administered annually to K–12 students in more than 40 states. The ACCESS assessments include the four domains of Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking and four composite scores: Oral Language (50% Listening + 50% Speaking), Literacy (50% Reading + 50% Writing), Comprehension (70% Reading + 30% Listening), and Overall (35% Reading + 35% Writing + 15% Listening + 15% Speaking). Each domain score and composite score is reported both as a level on a 1.0–6.0 scale and as a score on a 100–600 scale.

ACT began offering EL testing supports in the fall of 2017, including (a) extended time (one and one-half time, single day), (b) translated test instructions that ACT provides, and (c) an approved word-to-word bilingual dictionary without definitions. The supports are intended to remove construct-irrelevant variance and allow ELs to more accurately demonstrate their knowledge and skills. All ELs are eligible to receive the supports, but not all ELs requested them, potentially because the ELs or their teachers and school officials were not aware of these supports or the benefits of using them. In two recent ACT studies (Moore & Schnieders, 2026; Moore et al., 2026), approximately 28% of the ELs in State 1 and 20% of the ELs in State 2 took the ACT with supports. Note that there is a process for requesting supports: (a) students or school officials initiate the request, (b) school officials submit documentation to ACT that proves their students are eligible to receive the supports, and (c) ACT approves the use of the supports. (ACT updated this process in September 2025, described in more detail in the last paragraph of this report.) These analyses are based on ELs who were approved to take the ACT with supports, although ACT does not collect information about whether students actually used the supports during testing.

In our analysis, we used logistic regression models to estimate which student characteristics predicted whether a student received EL testing supports when taking the ACT. For both states, predictors included students' ACCESS Overall score (standardized to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of 1), free or reduced-price lunch eligibility, gender (with male as the reference group), and race/ethnicity. Race/ethnicity was classified as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, two or more races, or white. Because of small sample sizes in State 1, we limited the analysis

of race/ethnicity to Hispanic/Latino compared with all the other racial/ethnic groups combined. For State 2, the odds of receiving supports were modeled for each racial/ethnic group with white as the reference group. State 2 also provided Grade 11 student transcript data, so we were also able to include the following as predictors in the regression analysis: Grade 11 grade point average (GPA), number of course credits earned, and whether the student took any advanced coursework in Grade 11 (college-level, dual-credit, or advanced/honors versus general, basic/remedial, or unspecified). Refer to the full reports for more details.

In both states, ELs who tested with and without supports had similar ACCESS English proficiency assessment scores on average (on a 100–600 point scale), but the ELs who tested with supports were somewhat more likely to have scores at the lowest ACCESS proficiency level (Level 1) compared to the ELs who tested without supports.

Table 1 contains the number of ELs who took the ACT with and without testing supports, average ACCESS Overall scores, and percentages of students in each demographic category for State 1. In this state, ELs who took the ACT with supports were somewhat more likely to be female than ELs who took the ACT without supports (52% vs. 38%), more likely to be white than ELs who took the ACT without supports (14% vs. 7%), and less likely to be eligible for free or reduced-price lunch than ELs who took the ACT without supports (46% vs. 53%).

Table 1. Predictor and Outcome Variables for Regression Analysis, State 1

Student characteristic		Statistic	ELs with supports	ELs without supports
EL		Count	182	460
ACCESS Overall score		Mean	371.5	378.3
Free/reduced-price lunch eligible		Percent (%)	46	53
Gender	Female	Percent (%)	52	38
	Male		48	62
Race/ethnicity	Black/African American	Percent (%)	1	1
	Hispanic/Latino		78	79
	Asian		6	5
	Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander		1	0.4
	American Indian/Alaska Native		0	6
	Two or more races		0	1
	White		14	7

Table 2 contains the number of Grade 11 ELs who took the ACT with and without testing supports, average ACCESS Overall scores, percentages of students in each demographic category, high school grades, credit hours earned, and advanced coursework taken for State 2. Demographic characteristics between ELs who took the ACT with and without supports were similar (within 5%) in State 2. ELs who took the ACT with supports had a slightly higher average Grade 11 GPA, were more likely to earn a higher number of credit hours, and were more likely

to have taken one or more advanced/honors course in Grade 11 compared to ELs who took the ACT without supports.

Table 2. Predictor and Outcome Variables for Regression Analysis, State 2

Student characteristic		Statistic	ELs with supports	ELs without supports
EL		Count	3,225	12,563
ACCESS Overall score		Mean	365.9	367.8
Free/reduced-price lunch eligible		Percent (%)	67	68
Gender	Female	Percent (%)	47	42
	Male		53	58
Race/ethnicity	Black/African American	Percent (%)	2	2
	Hispanic/Latino		90	87
	Asian		6	8
	Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander		0.4	1
	American Indian/Alaska Native		0	0.1
	Two or more races		0.1	0.4
	White		2	2
Education	Grade 11 overall GPA	Mean	2.49	2.43
	Number of credits earned	Mean	5.70	5.43
	Advanced coursework	Percent (%)	40	35

Table 3 contains the results of a logistic regression analysis predicting whether ELs received testing supports in State 1. For this state, the ACCESS Overall score was a significant negative predictor of ELs' receiving these supports, meaning that students with lower ELP were more likely to receive supports than students with higher ELP. The odds ratio for the ACCESS Overall score was 0.798, meaning that, after the other variables were held constant, an increase in ACCESS Overall score of 1 standard deviation corresponded to a 20% decrease in the odds of receiving supports. Free or reduced-price lunch was also a significant negative predictor, meaning that, after the other variables were held constant, ELs who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches were less likely to receive supports than students who were not eligible. The odds ratio was 0.698, meaning that the odds of receiving supports were 30% lower for ELs who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Female ELs were more likely to receive supports than male ELs. The odds ratio for female is 1.797, meaning that the odds of receiving supports were 80% higher for female ELs compared to male ELs. There was not a significant difference in the odds of receiving supports for Hispanic/Latino ELs compared to other racial/ethnic groups.

Table 3. Results of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Who Receives Supports, State 1

Variable	β	*SE*	Odds ratio
Intercept	−1.002***	0.216	0.367
ACCESS Overall score (std.)	−0.226*	0.088	0.798
Free/reduced-price lunch eligible	−0.360*	0.181	0.698
Female	0.586*	0.179	1.797
Hispanic/Latino	−0.026^{ns}	0.218	0.974

Note. *** indicates statistical significance at $p < 0.001$; * indicates statistical significance at $p < 0.05$; ^{ns} indicates not significant.

Table 4 contains the results of a logistic regression analysis predicting whether ELs received testing supports in State 2. For this state, the ACCESS Overall score was also a significant negative predictor of receiving supports, meaning that students with lower ELP were more likely to receive supports. The odds ratio for ACCESS Overall score was 0.931, meaning that, after the other variables were held constant, an increase in ACCESS Overall score of 1 standard deviation corresponded to a 7% decrease in the odds of receiving supports. ELs who were female or Hispanic/Latino were more likely to receive supports than ELs who were male or white. The odds ratio for female was 1.124, meaning that the odds of receiving supports were 12% higher for female ELs compared to male ELs. The odds ratio for Hispanic/Latino was 1.467, meaning that the odds of receiving supports were 47% higher for Hispanic/Latino ELs compared to white ELs. Grade 11 GPA, advanced coursework, and number of credits earned were all positively associated with receiving testing supports.

Table 4. Results of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Who Receives Supports, State 2

Variable		β	*SE*	Odds ratio
Intercept		−2.047***	0.122	0.129
ACCESS Overall score (std.)		−0.072**	0.022	0.931
Free/reduced-price lunch eligible		−0.029^{ns}	0.046	0.971
Female		0.117**	0.044	1.124
Race/ethnicity	Black/African American	−0.138^{ns}	0.187	0.871
	Hispanic/Latino	0.383***	0.076	1.467
	Asian	—	—	—
	Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander	—	—	—
	American Indian/Alaska Native	−0.491^{ns}	1.070	0.612
	Two or more races	−0.613^{ns}	0.482	0.542
Education	Grade 11 overall GPA	0.086*	0.035	1.090
	Number of credits earned	0.054***	0.013	1.055
	Advanced coursework	0.158***	0.046	1.172

Note. *** indicates statistical significance at $p < 0.001$; ** indicates statistical significance at $p < 0.01$; * indicates statistical significance at $p < 0.05$; ^{ns} indicates not significant. Asian and Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander variables were not estimated because of singularities.

To summarize, we found this similarity in the two states: ELs who were female and had lower ELP were more likely to receive EL testing supports when taking the ACT. And we found these differences: In State 1, ELs who were ineligible for free or reduced-price lunch were more likely to receive supports; whereas, in State 2, ELs who were higher achieving academically and ELs who were Hispanic/Latino (vs. white) were more likely to receive supports. This study cannot explain why ELs with these characteristics were more or less likely to receive the supports or why there are differences between the two states, but it does provide information that educators may use to assess how schools and districts are supporting their ELs to ensure that the students who may benefit from testing supports are more likely to receive them. We urge educators to ensure that these testing supports are available for their EL students by becoming familiar with ACT's policy and process for requesting supports and communicating this information widely at their schools and with students and caregivers. All ELs are eligible for these supports, but our research shows that not all ELs receive them.

Beginning in September 2025, ACT changed its EL policy such that both the ACT-provided translated test directions and approved word-to-word bilingual dictionaries are now considered "designated supports," meaning that schools will be locally authorized to provide them to students without needing to obtain ACT approval. Requests for extended time will still require ACT approval. The links in this paragraph provide more information about the process for requesting supports and other resources. Although the changes to this policy are intended to simplify the request process and make the test more accessible to ELs, it remains important that students, caregivers, and educators are aware of these testing supports and how to obtain them.

References

Moore, J. L., & Schnieders, J. Z. (2026). *Exploring relationships between English proficiency and ACT test performance of English Learners: State 1*. ACT. https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/r2538-english-proficiency-act-test-performance-els-state-1-2026-04.pdf

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