

Evaluating American Community Survey (ACS) Data on School-Age Children Who Speak English with Difficulty

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Motivation

- In 2011, approximately 22 percent of school-age children spoke a language other than English at home (LOTE). As the U.S. population becomes more diverse, collecting accurate data on language use and language ability is increasingly important.
- The American Community Survey (ACS) reports on children who speak a language other than English at home and how well these children speak English. The U.S. Department of Education reports on the number of English Language Learners (ELL) in public elementary and secondary schools.
- These two sources reveal a different picture of school-age children with English language difficulties. Between 2006 and 2011, the percentage of school-age children who speak English with difficulty has remained steady (ACS), while the percentage of ELL students has consistently increased (Department of Education).

Background

- ELL includes students being served in appropriate programs of language assistance (e.g., ESL, High Intensity Language Training, bilingual education).
- The Department of Education's Common Core of Data (CCD) identifies ELL students based on limited English language ability; therefore, these students speak English with some difficulty.
- ACS includes a three-part question on language use and ability. LOTE speakers are asked to assess how well they (or their children) speak English – “very well,” “well,” “not well”, or “not at all.”
- No study has measured the performance of the Census question on English-speaking ability since the 1982 English Language Proficiency Study (Kominski and Shin 2008).

Research Questions

- Are estimates of K-12 public school enrollment comparable between the Department of Education's Common Core of Data (CCD) and the American Community Survey (ACS)?
- Have CCD estimates of ELL students and ACS estimates of students who spoke English less than "very well" followed a similar pattern between 2006 and 2011?
- How do state-level estimates of these students compare between the CCD and ACS in 2011?

Methods

ACS PUMS (2006; 2011)

- Limited to students in public schools, enrolled in kindergarten to 12th grade, and age 5 to 18
- Includes households and group quarters (college, military, incarcerated)
- Mail, telephone follow-up, subsample personal visit, interviewers in 18 languages
- Mail mode is intended for English and Spanish speakers
- 97.6% response rate in 2011

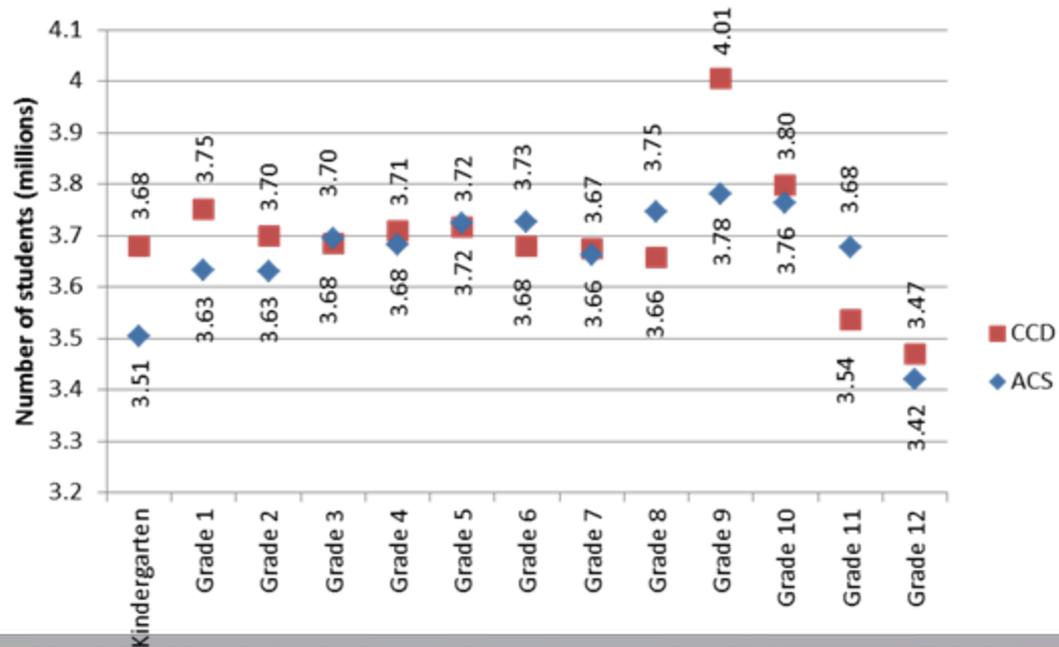
CCD (2005-06; 2010-11)

- Includes all public school students in the U.S.
- Local Education Agency (School District) Universe Survey
- Surveys filled out by State Education Agencies (SEAs)
- Number of students enrolled on October 1 of school year, but reporting is done next year
- 93.6% of districts reporting student membership also report on ELL counts

Results

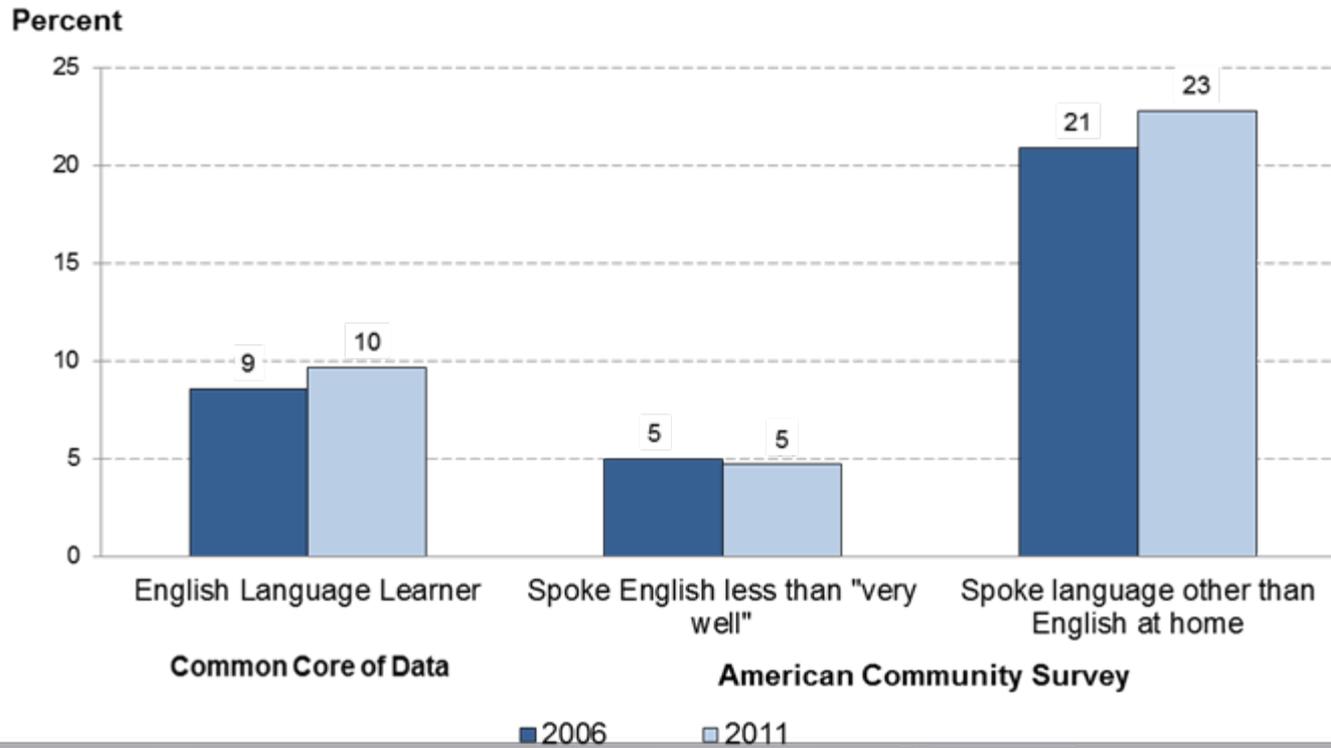
Are estimates of K-12 public school enrollment comparable between the CCD and the ACS?

Number of K-12 public school students in the CCD and ACS: 2011



Have CCD estimates of ELL students and ACS estimates of students who spoke English less than "very well" followed a similar pattern between 2006 and 2011?

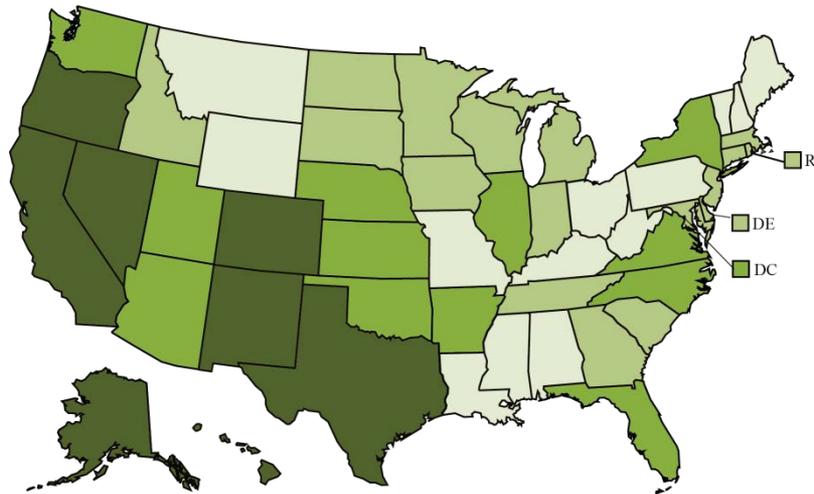
Percentage of public school students identified as English Language Learners (ELL) or speaking English less than "very well": 2006 and 2011



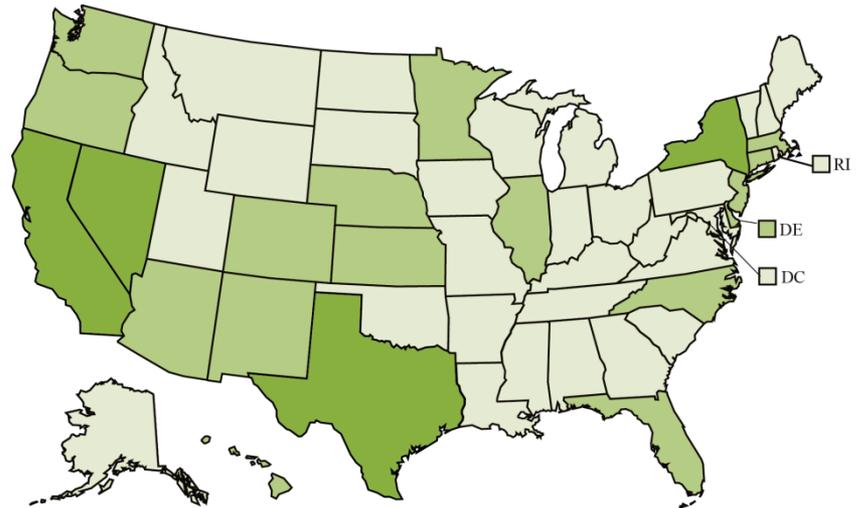
How do state-level estimates of these students compare between the CCD and ACS in 2011?

CCD

ACS

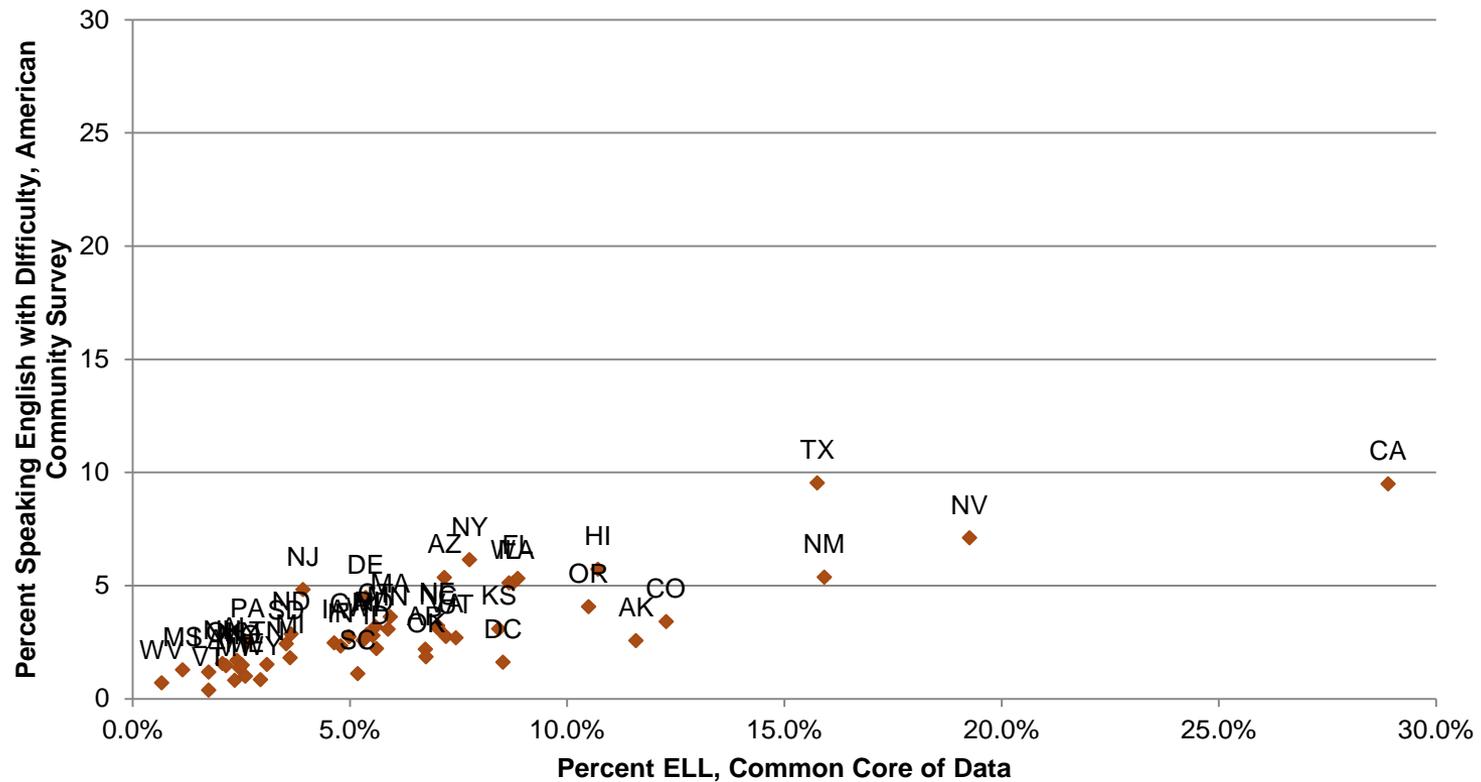


- 0 to 2.99 percent ELL (13)
- 3 to 5.99 percent ELL (17)
- 6 to 9.99 percent ELL (13)
- More than 10 percent ELL (8)



- 0 to 2.99 percent spoke English with difficulty (31)
- 3 to 5.99 percent spoke English with difficulty (16)
- 6 to 9.99 percent spoke English with difficulty (4)

Findings by state: 2011



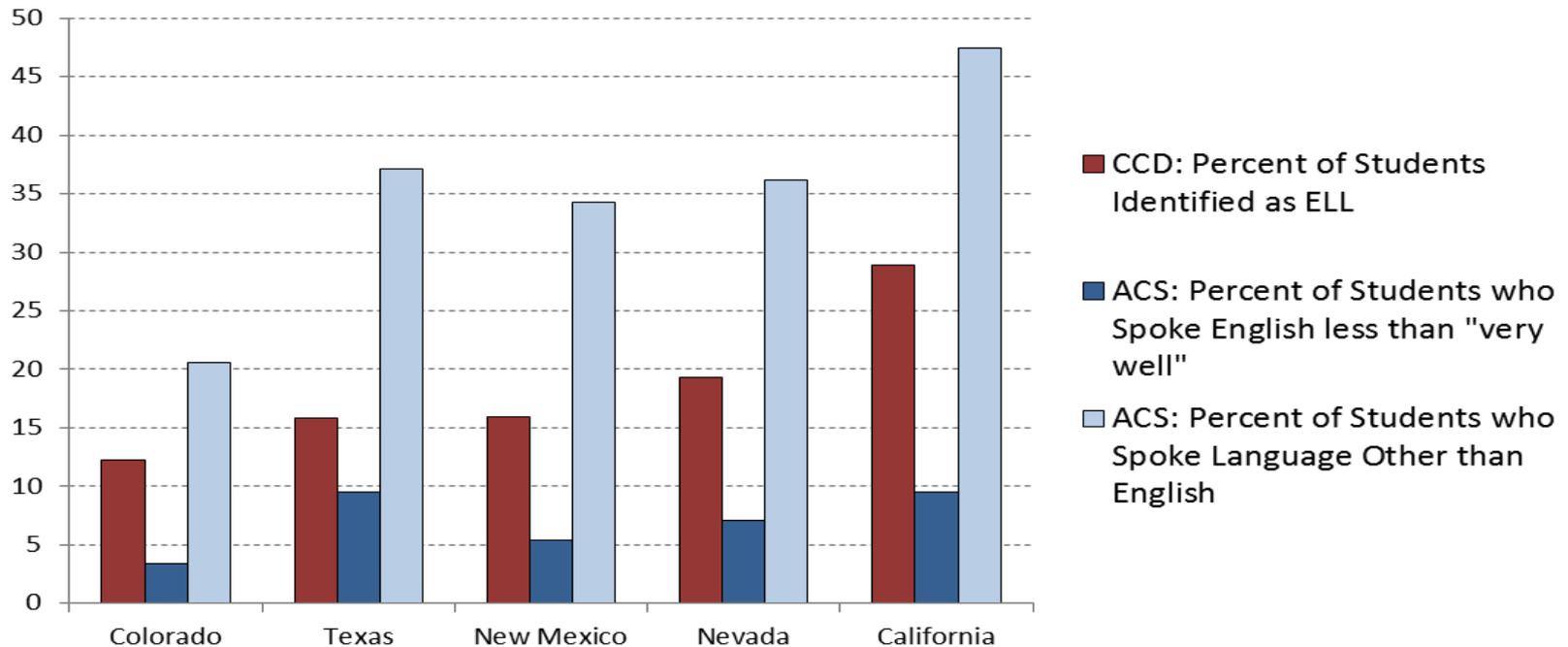
States with highest percentage of ELL students: 2011

Characteristics of states with highest percentage of students in ELL programs

	Number of K-12 Students		Number of ELL Students compared with Students who spoke English less than "very well"	
	CCD 2010-11	ACS 2011	CCD 2010-11	ACS 2011
Colorado	812,723	810,551	99,804	27,667
Texas	4,686,106	4,606,941	738,663	439,507
New Mexico	330,142	341,523	52,557	18,345
Nevada	432,705	434,387	83,352	30,861
California	6,216,977	6,095,088	1,796,706	578,936

States with highest percentage of ELL students, cont'd

Percentage of public school students identified as English Language Learners (ELL) or speaking English less than "very well," selected states: 2011



Key Findings

- ACS estimates of public school enrollment are generally comparable to the CCD.
- The percentage of ELL students reported on the CCD increased between 2005-06 and 2010-11.
- The percentage of LOTE students on the ACS increased between 2006 and 2011. However, the percentage of students who spoke English less than “very well” remained steady.
- CCD percentages of ELL students were higher than the ACS percentage of students who speak English less than “very well.”

Conclusions

- ACS data on students who speak a language other than English at home are rich and allow for examination by several characteristics. However, the ACS question on language ability may need further consideration if it is intended to capture ELL students.
- Administrative data are a good source for estimates of ELL students but are limited in scope. CCD data do not include any language use information or demographic characteristics. In addition, ELL students are not measured consistently across states.

Limitations & Future Research

- Unable to directly link school districts CCD/ACS PUMS.
- Need to consider ACS mode of administration in respondent assessment of language ability.
- In the future, we plan to examine concordance between child's language skills and parents' language skills.
- As the Department of Education expands the Office of Civil Right's data collection, we may be able to investigate the gap between children identified as needing ELL services and those receiving ELL services.

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