



BROOKINGS GREATER WASHINGTON RESEARCH PROGRAM

WASHINGTON AREA TRENDS

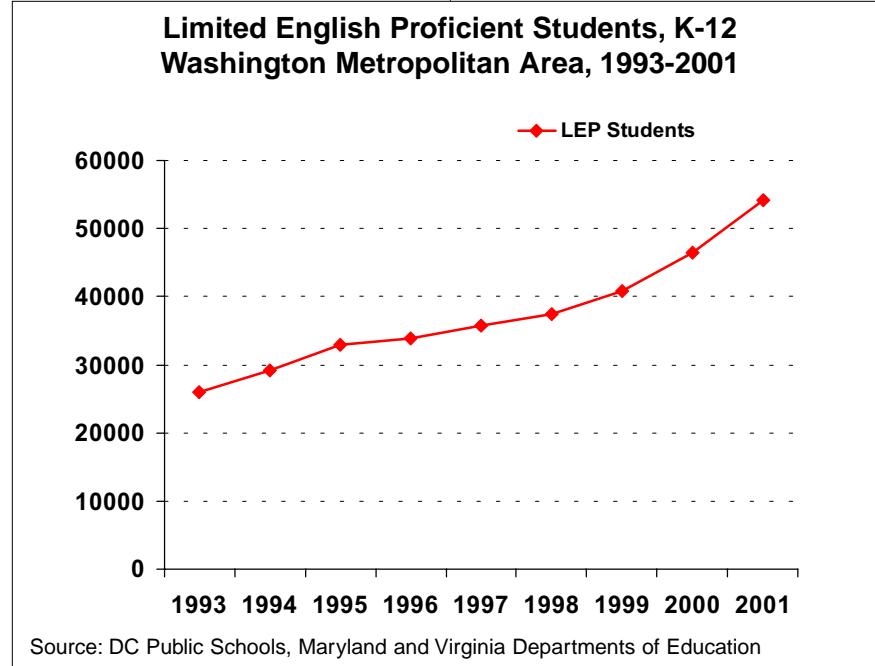
International Diversity Continues Rapid Increase in the Washington Area

The Washington area continues to attract families from around the world. Based on the enrollment of students with limited English proficiency (LEP)¹, this attraction appears to be stronger in recent years. For the year 2001, the total number of LEP students increased by 7,619 or 16.2 percent to 53,990, continuing a sharp upward trend during the 1990s. Students with limited English proficiency now constitute almost 8 percent of all

public school students in the Washington area. Since 1993, there has been a net increase of 28,027 LEP students.

The reports of LEP students underestimate the actual influx and numbers of immigrant students for two reasons. First, the number of new LEP students enrolled each year is offset by students who achieve English proficiency, graduate, or leave school. Second, many

“ Fairfax County alone has more limited English proficient students than all the Maryland suburbs combined.”



¹ Limited English proficient is the federal legal term for students who were not born in the U.S. or whose native language is not English and who cannot participate effectively in the regular curriculum because they have difficulty speaking, understanding, reading, and writing English.



Table 1
Limited English Proficient Students
Major Washington Area School Systems, 2001

Fall Enrollment	2001	LEP	Percent
DC	78,933	5,084	6.4%
Alexandria	11,104	2,078	18.7%
Arlington	19,109	5,101	26.7%
Fairfax	160,584	19,248	12.0%
Loudoun	34,571	1,192	3.4%
Pr. William	58,017	4,140	7.1%
Total Northern VA	283,385	31,759	11.2%
Charles	23,468	134	0.6%
Frederick	36,885	248	0.7%
Montgomery	134,180	10,231	7.6%
Pr. George's	133,723	6,534	4.9%
Total Suburban MD	328,256	17,147	5.2%
Washington Area	690,574	53,990	7.8%

Source: DC Public Schools, Maryland and Virginia Departments of Education

Table 2
Average Annual Change in Enrollment of
LEP Students in the Washington Area Public
School Systems, 1993-2001

	Net Change	Average Annual Percent Change
DC	1,070	3.0%
Alexandria	1,033	9.0%
Arlington	2,207	7.3%
Fairfax	10,732	10.7%
Loudoun	1,107	39.1%
Pr. William	3,614	29.4%
Total Northern VA	18,693	11.7%
Charles	(31)	(2.6)%
Frederick	105	7.1%
Montgomery	4,557	7.6%
Pr. George's	3,694	11.0%
Total Suburban MD	8,325	8.7%
Washington Area	28,088	9.6%

Source: DC Public Schools, Maryland and Virginia Departments of Education

immigrant students come from English speaking countries or have achieved English proficiency before entering school in the United States.

The majority of families with limited English proficient children are settling in the suburbs with higher numbers in Virginia. The 11.2 percent of LEP students in the Virginia suburbs is more than double the 5.2 percent in the Maryland suburbs (see Table 1). Fairfax County alone has more LEP students than all the Maryland suburbs combined. In Arlington County, one in four students had limited English proficiency in 2001, and Alexandria had nearly one in five.

Overall, the Washington area's average annual growth in LEP students was 9.6 percent from 1993 to 2001 (see table 2). Charles and Frederick Counties have less than one percent LEP students and have shown little increase since 1993. In contrast to the two outer suburbs in Maryland, the outer suburban counties of Prince William and Loudoun in Virginia have shown large and growing increases in recent years.

The number of LEP students in the District has remained fairly stable over time, with an annual average change of 3 percent. However, unlike the Maryland jurisdictions showing modest growth in LEP students, (or a slight decline in the case of Charles County), a sizable number of District students have limited English proficiency. The 5,084 LEP students in District schools is the 5th largest number across all jurisdictions.

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