

Multilingual students have improved in academic achievement since 2003

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Multilingual students, who speak a language or more than one language other than English at home, have improved in reading and math achievement substantially since 2003, finds a new study published in *Educational Researcher* by Michael J. Kieffer, associate professor of literacy education at New York University's Steinhardt School of

Culture, Education and Human Development.

This new research debunks a common myth that multilingual students and English Learners have made little progress in [academic achievement](#) in recent years, and that U.S. schools continue to fail these students.

"Educators and policymakers have been misled by traditional ways of looking at achievement data for English learners," said Kieffer. "When we look at the broader population of multilingual students, we uncover remarkable progress."

Kieffer and the study's co-author, Karen D. Thompson of Oregon State University, analyzed National Assessment of Educational Progress data from 2003 to 2015. The data demonstrated that although all students' scores improved, multilingual students' scores improved two to three times more than monolingual students scores in both subjects in grades four and eight. There is little evidence that these trends can be explained by cohort changes in racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, or regional composition.

The research also demonstrates that multilingual students are about one-third to one-half of a grade level closer to their monolingual peers in 2015 than they were in 2003. The data cannot identify the specific sources for the change in [achievement](#), but suggests that a bundle of policy changes which occurred between 2003 and 2015 may have moved schools in the right direction in serving multilingual students.

"Despite the dominant perception that these students have made little academic progress in recent years, our findings indicate there is real evidence of progress for this population," said Thompson, the study's co-author and an assistant professor in OSU's College of Education. "Students are showing what they know."

Provided by New York University

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