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# GAO: Many Charter Schools Are Not Reporting Data on ELLs

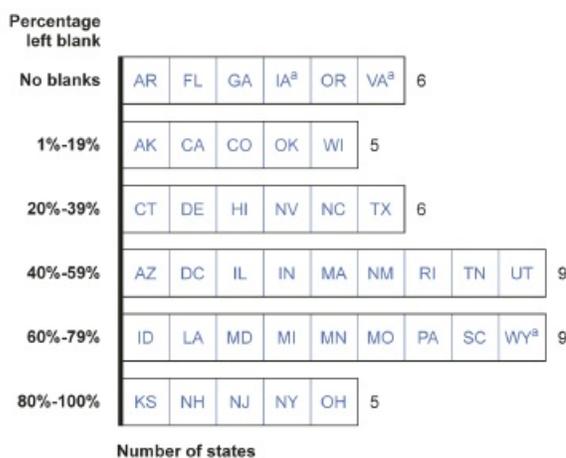
By **Katie Ash** on August 15, 2013 7:18 PM | [3 Comments](#)

A recent report from the Government Accountability Office has found that over a third of charter schools in 2010-11 did not report the number of English-language learners in their data collections for the federal government.

About 37 percent of the data collected from charter schools left the field where the number of ELL students was to be recorded blank, the GAO found. And while a blank field could mean that the charter did not have any ELL students, because of the high number of blank fields, the GAO suspects that it is a result of nonreporting instead.

The GAO includes a chart that details the percentage of charter schools, broken down by state, that left the ELL field blank. (Click to enlarge.)

**Figure 2: Percentage of Charter Schools With Blank ELL Enrollment Counts in School Year 2010-11, by State**



Source: GAO analysis of Education's school-level ELL enrollment data for SY2010-11.

<sup>a</sup>States with less than 5 charter schools operating in school year 2010-11.

One reason that many charters left the field blank could be definitional, the GAO concludes. The field used to determine the number of ELLs in charter schools asked schools for the number of students enrolled in "English language instruction educational programs." The word "program" was not adequately defined, the report says, which could have led to some of the schools not reporting a number for that field.

However, the field for the number of ELLs in charter schools was not the only field left blank, the GAO says. In fact, some of the charter schools missing ELL counts were also missing data on math and/or reading performance, as well as graduation data, suggesting a broader reporting problem among charter schools.

The GAO report recommends that the U.S. Department of Education conduct a systemic evaluation of data-reporting practices in charter schools to determine the extent to which nonreporting by charter schools happens and to explore the underlying reasons for the nonreporting.

In response, the Education Department said it was putting together a comprehensive directory of all charter schools in the United States, which would help determine the extent of the problem. But the GAO believes that "these efforts are not designed to provide a clear picture of the extent of nor reasons for charter school nonreporting," the report says.

U.S. Reps. George Miller, D-Calif., and Raul Grijalva, D-Ariz., released [a letter addressed to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan](#) urging him to put forward some concrete steps to improve the quality of data from charter schools.

"It is imperative that [the Education Department] have reliable and accurate data for all public schools, LEAs, and states in fulfilling our mission to equitably serve all children and families," the letter states.

Nina Rees, the president and CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, and Greg Richmond, the CEO of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, [released a joint statement](#) about the report. The statement notes that the GAO did not find that charters were serving ELLs inadequately and calls on charter schools to work with their state education departments to provide appropriate data.

"We hope that all schools—public charter or traditional public—will take reporting requirements seriously and follow the letter of the law," the statement says.

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