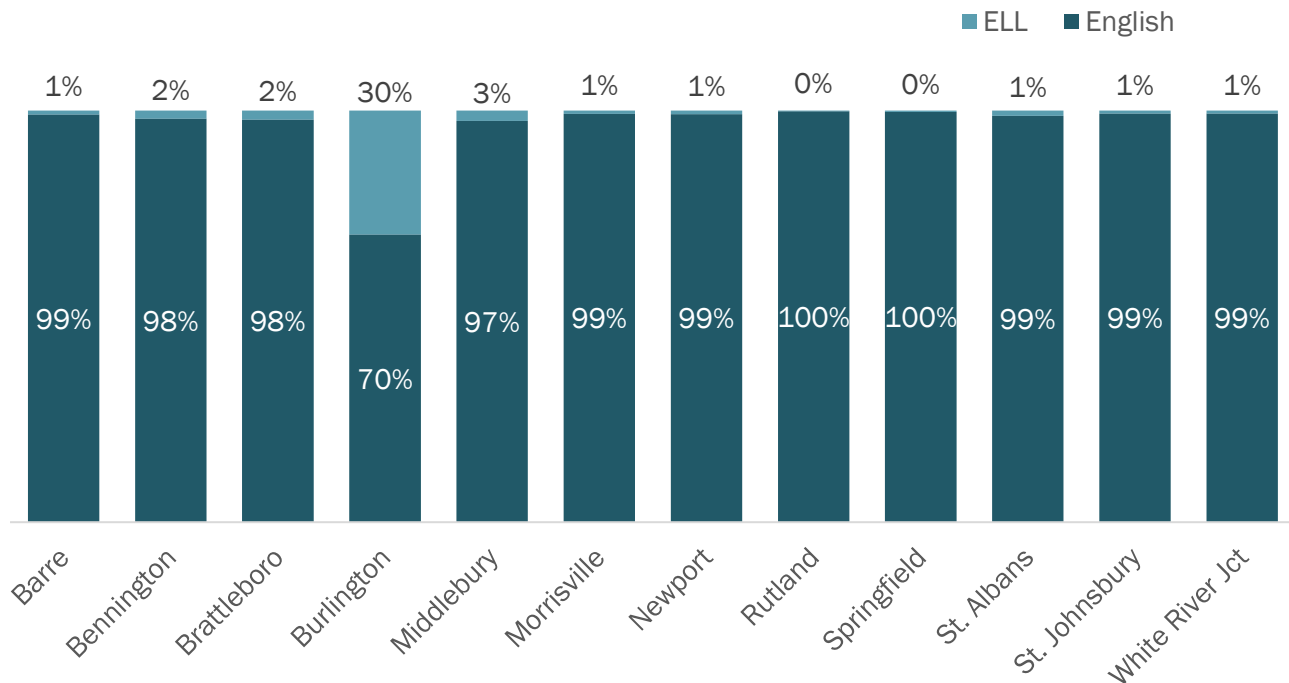Vermont WIC partnered with the Vermont Child Health Improvement Program (VCHIP) to determine patterns, similarities, and differences between households using WIC food benefits. The study included 13,510 participants from 8,318 households who were actively enrolled in the WIC program from July 2021 through June 2022. While the study included several indicators (drive time to grocery stores, race and ethnicity, and maternal education to name a few), this report focuses on the correlation between shopping patterns and preferred language.

Household Characteristics and Demographics

Ninety-four percent of WIC households list English as their preferred spoken language. The 6% that list another language will be referred to as English Language Learning Families (ELL) in this report. This ELL population includes families who, while they prefer another spoken language, do not need an interpreter and families who use an interpreter to communicate with WIC program staff.

There are at least 29 different languages spoken by families participating in Vermont WIC. The top five languages after English are Nepali, Somali, Spanish, French and Swahili. The Burlington District Office serves the highest percent of ELL families, with almost a third (30%) of households preferring a different language as shown in the graph below. Further, 85% of the State's ELL caseload access WIC from the Burlington WIC program.
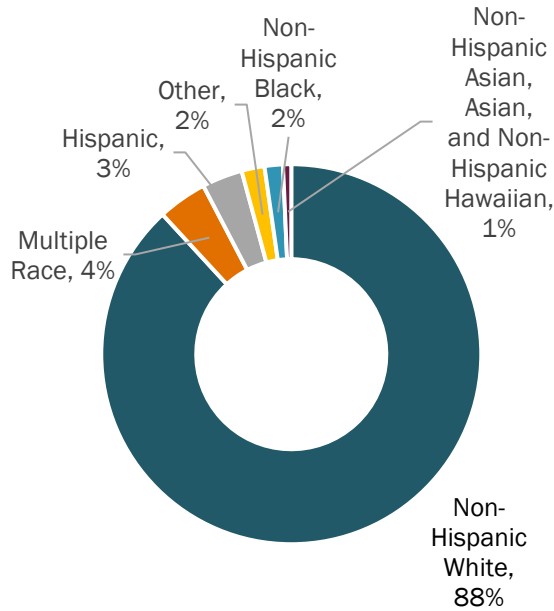
Proportion of Households by Preferred Spoken Language

Legend: ■ ELL ■ English

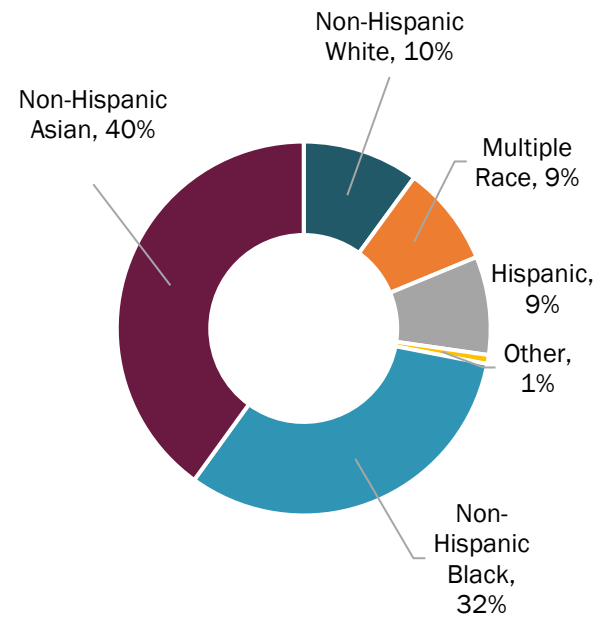| Barre	Bennington	Brattleboro	Burlington	Middlebury	Morrisville	Newport	Rutland	Springfield	St. Albans	St. Johnsbury	White River Jct
1%	2%	2%	30%	3%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%
99%	98%	98%	70%	97%	99%	99%	100%	100%	99%	99%	99%

WIC Food Redemption Among English Language Learning Households

Households with a preferred language other than English are more likely to have a higher number of WIC participants than those who prefer speaking English. ELL households are also more likely to be Non-Hispanic Asian or Non-Hispanic Black. English-speaking households are more likely to be Non-Hispanic white. Multiple Race is defined as a household made up of members of different races.

Race / Ethnicity Among WIC Households with English as Preferred Spoken Language
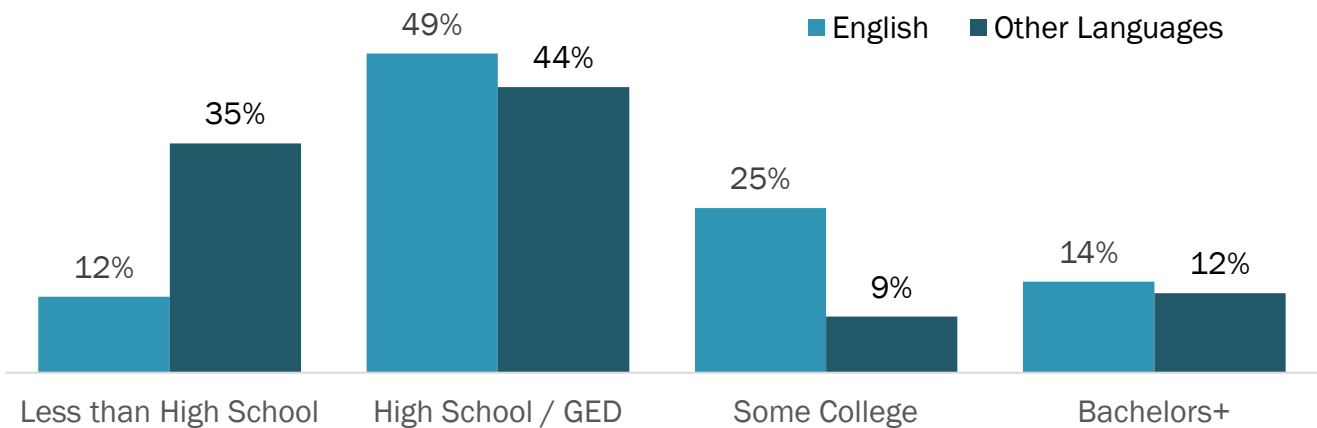
Other, 2%
Non-Hispanic Black, 2%
Hispanic, 3%
Multiple Race, 4%
Non-Hispanic Asian, Asian, and Non-Hispanic Hawaiian, 1%
Non-Hispanic White, 88%

Race / Ethnicity Among WIC ELL Households

Non-Hispanic Asian, 40%
Non-Hispanic White, 10%
Multiple Race, 9%
Hispanic, 9%
Other, 1%
Non-Hispanic Black, 32%

When comparing maternal education rates, English speaking households have higher education rates. Thirty-five percent of ELL households report less than a high school education, 44% report high school or GED, 9% have some college, and 12% have a bachelor's degree or more.
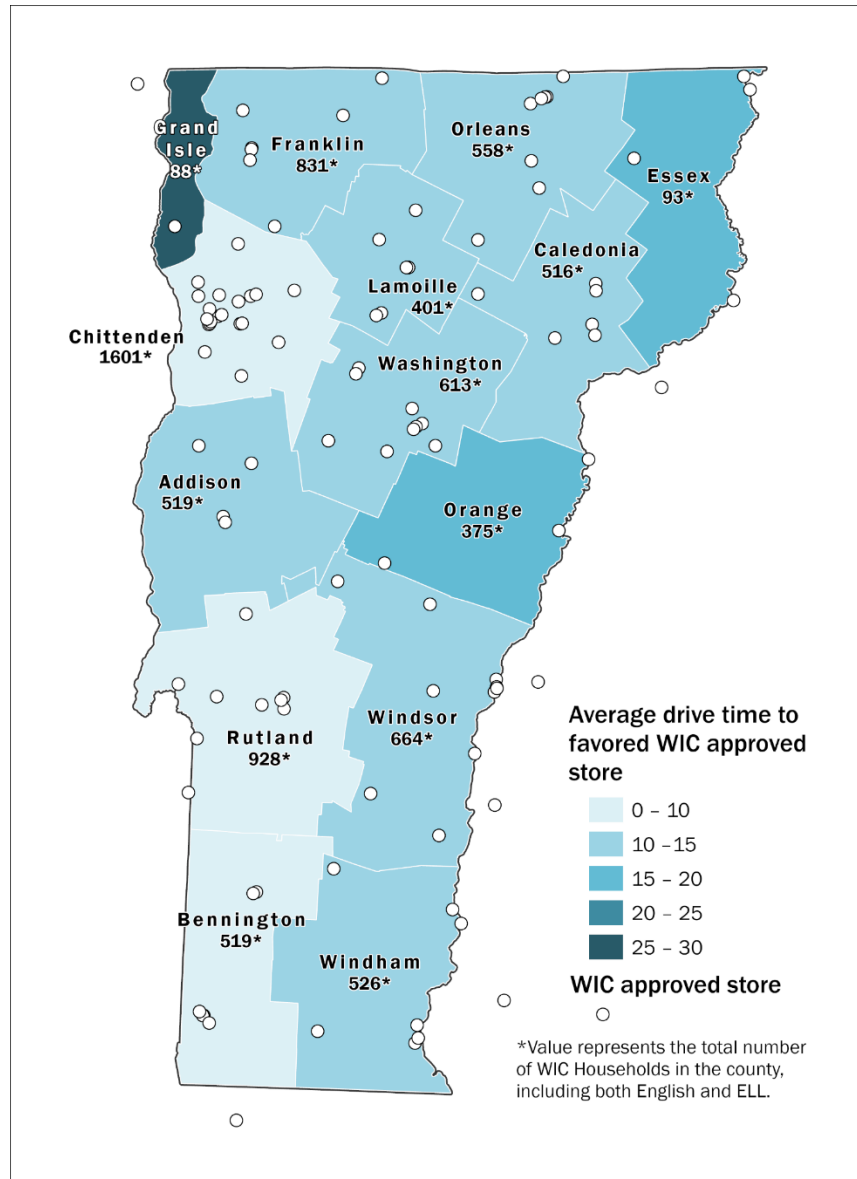
Maternal Education and Preferred Spoken Language

■ English   ■ Other Languages

Education	English	Other Languages
Less than High School	12%	35%
High School / GED	49%	44%
Some College	25%	9%
Bachelors+	14%	12%

Average Drive Time to Favored Store Across All Households

Analysis also included drive time to their favored WIC-approved store. "Favored store" is defined as the store where household WIC benefits are redeemed the most. As shown in the map below, among all households in the analysis, both those that prefer English and ELL, just over half had a drive time of less than 10-minutes to their favored store. Grand Isle has the highest average drive time to a favored store. The shortest average drive times are in Bennington, Chittenden and Rutland Counties.

Grand Isle
88*

Franklin
831*

Orleans
558*

Essex
93*

Caledonia
516*

Lamoille
401*

Chittenden
1601*

Washington
613*

Addison
519*

Orange
375*

Windsor
664*

Rutland
928*

Bennington
519*

Windham
526*

Average drive time to favored WIC approved store

- 0 – 10
- 10 – 15
- 15 – 20
- 20 – 25
- 25 – 30

○ WIC approved store

*Value represents the total number of WIC Households in the county, including both English and ELL.

ELL households are more likely to have a drivetime of less than 10 minutes to their favored store compared to English preferred households (71% vs 53%). This is likely due to the high number of ELL households in the Burlington District Office service area, which has the highest concentration of WIC-approved grocers. ELL households are not displayed separately in the map above to protect privacy due to small numbers in some regions.
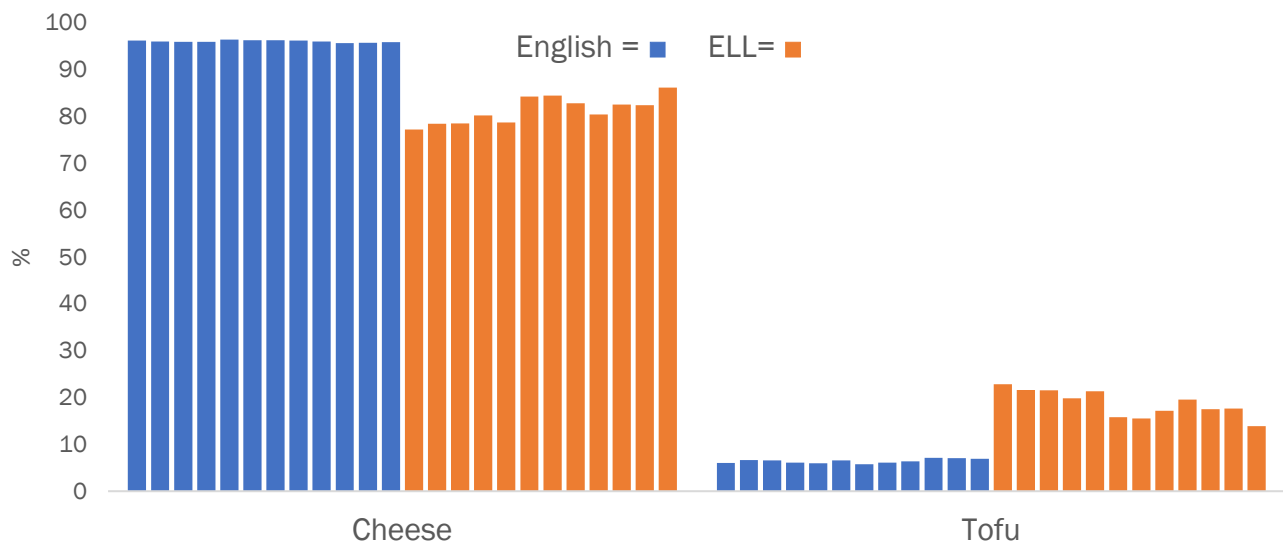
Food Redemption

There were not large differences among English-speaking and ELL households in the mean redemption trends in most food categories, including ELL households who use an interpreter and those who do not. The Cheese or Tofu category had a higher redemption among English-speaking households and Eggs had a higher redemption among ELL households.

Analysis of the subcategory level revealed that redemption patterns were similar within the Breakfast Cereal, Whole Milk, and Yogurt, and Whole Grains (with the exception ELL households purchasing somewhat more 100% whole wheat bread than English-speaking households), categories. There were differences in Cheese and Tofu, Legumes, Fruits and Vegetables, Low Fat and Fat Free Milk, and 48 oz. Juice in comparisons between English and ELL households. In the graphs below, redemption patterns are shown comparing English speaking and ELL households. Each bar represents one month, the months are broken out to show seasonal variation. The purchases per category each month add up to 100%. This total is then divided by subcategory to show the differences in subcategory purchases. The months are ordered according to the study period, beginning with July 2021 and ending with June 2022.

Cheese and Tofu

ELL households purchased a higher percent of tofu and a lower percent of cheese than English preferred households
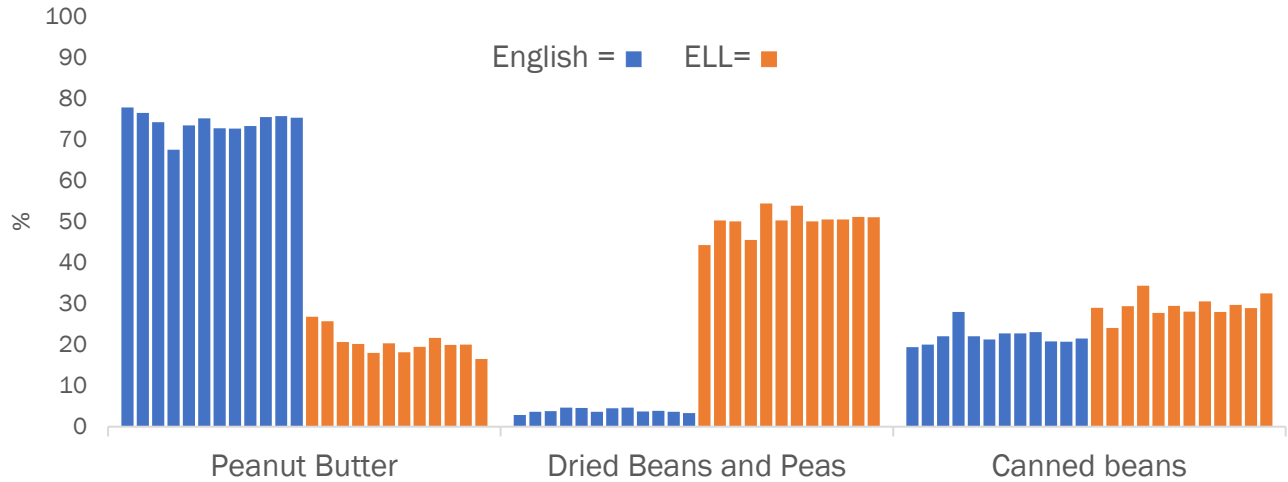

Each bar represents one month in the study period, ordered July 2021 through June 2022.

WIC Food Redemption Among English Language Learning Households
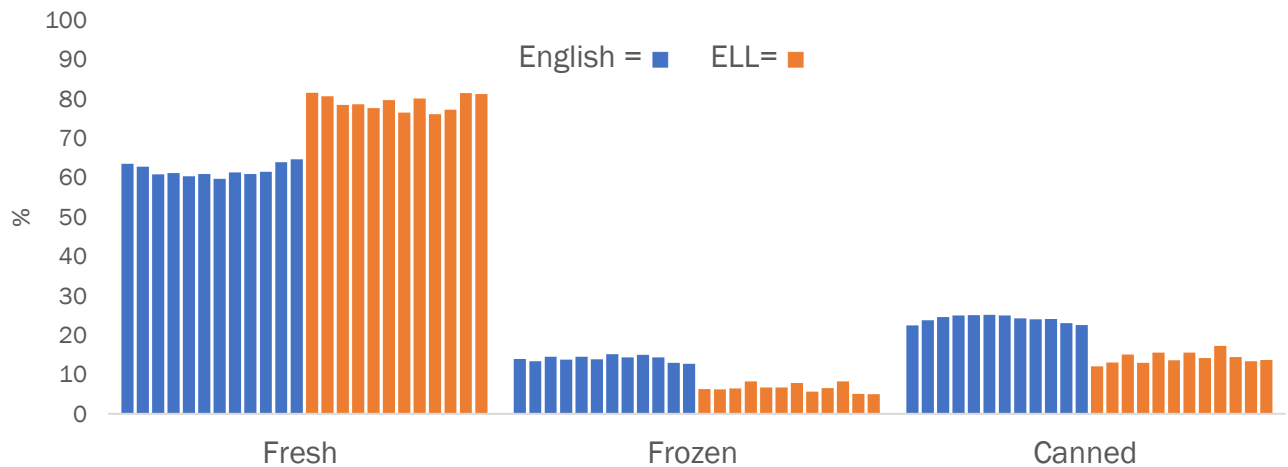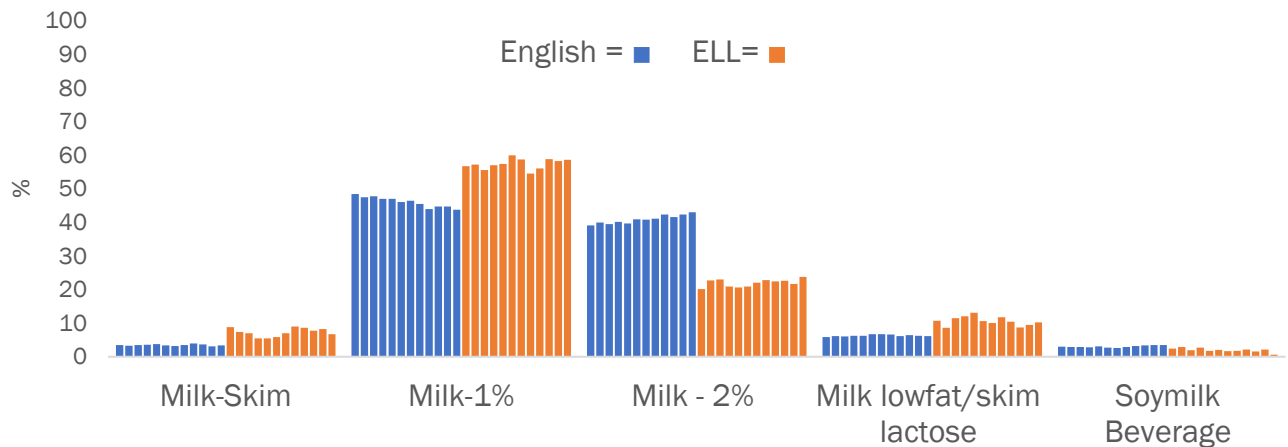
Legumes

ELL households purcahsed a higher percent of dried beans and peas and a lower percent of peanut butter than English preferred households

Each bar represents one month in the study period, ordered July 2021 through June 2022.

Fruits and Vegetables

ELL households purchased a higher percent of fresh and a lower percent of frozen or canned fruits and vegetables than English preferred households

Each bar represents one month in the study period, ordered July 2021 through June 2022.

Low Fat and Fat Free Milk

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, 2% milk was temporarily allowed in the WIC program under special program waivers.

ELL households purchased a higher percent of skim, 1%, low fat or skim lactose free milk compared to English preferred households who purchased a higher percent of 2% milk

Each bar represents one month in the study period, ordered July 2021 through June 2022.

48 oz. Juice

ELL households purchased a higher percent of shelf-stable and a lower percent of 48 ounce frozen juice than English preferred households
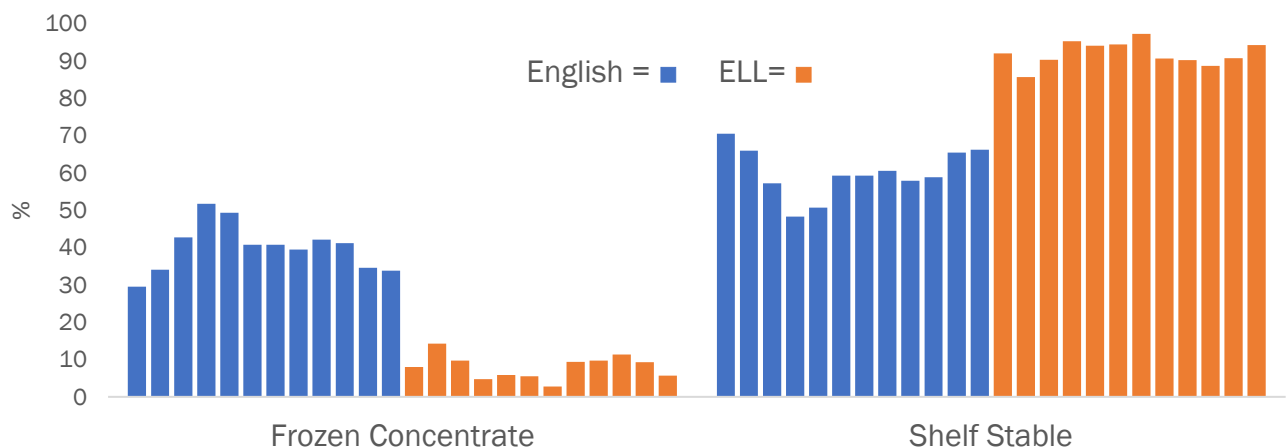
Each bar represents one month in the study period, ordered July 2021 through June 2022.

Key Takeaways

This report gives a better understanding of how language can affect food redemption patterns among WIC families in Vermont. Many ELL households live close to their preferred store and have redemption patterns at similar rates to households who prefer to speak English. However, there are some differences in food preferences at the food subcategory level.

It is important to note there are ELL families outside of Chittenden County who may face greater difficulty accessing a WIC-approved grocer and foods. Vermont WIC has several supports in place for these families like translated food guides videos, and the Shopper Helper program. Shopper Helpers are interpreters trained in the WIC shopping process contracted to provide in-person, in-store, culturally relevance shopping support to English language learining WIC families. The program is striving to improve and expand these services to make them more accessible across Vermont).

For more information, please contact Vermont WIC at wic@vermont.gov.

Families who prefer to speak a language other than English redeem at similar rates compared to families who prefer English, though have some preferences within food categories.