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## Local

Enrollment soars in Montgomery County adult English classes

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Current rank: *Not ranked*

### Montgomery County -

Enrollment in Montgomery County adult English classes for immigrants has jumped about 34 percent since the county spent nearly half a million dollars to reduce massive waiting lists in the past year.

Program leaders, however, say hundreds of immigrants are still waiting to take courses.

In spring 2006, providers at 12 of the county's more than 50 English for Speakers of Other Language programs volunteered to be part of a Waitlist Reduction Initiative. Those 12 programs served 1,918 students. By spring 2007, enrollment had grown by 650 students, to 2,568.

County Council Member Mike Knapp, chairman of the County Council's education committee, said he was pleased to see improvement on two fronts: increased enrollment and standardized instruction.

"Any students taking courses through [labor union] SEIU, [immigrant advocacy group] CASA or anywhere, the standards for completion are the same now," Knapp said. "That is important to know for our investment, so we know everybody is learning the same material."

Jaime Contreras, area director for the Service Employees International Union 32BJ, said about 1,000 people participate in the union's Washington and Montgomery County ESOL courses, but the waiting list consistently has 200 to 300 people.

"It is growing," Contreras said. "As we open the classes in Montgomery County, both the enrollment and the people on the waiting list has increased. There are just not enough facilities or funding available to do all the classes that we want to do."

Donna Kinerney, Montgomery College's dean of adult ESOL and literacy programs, said the college's waiting list had 864 names on it in fall 2006. After the school added six classes this fall, the waiting list fell to 435 people.

"My impression, though, is that the demand for these classes is stable," Kinerney said. "The wait list has been so long for such a long time that many people don't even try. Hopefully, these people will come out of the woodwork if they hear we have more options."

A report from the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy said that "the wait list itself is merely the tip of the iceberg that represents the need for adult ESOL services within Montgomery County."

Knapp said the county is still committed to adding ESOL courses.

"If somebody has to work two jobs because they can't speak English and then they master English and get one job that pays the same, hopefully then they can stay at home at night with their family," Knapp said. "They can help kids with homework, have health benefits and do a number of things that are good for the whole community."

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