

# Montgomery County Adult ESOL and Literacy Services Fact Sheet

Updated March 2009

## What is the need in Montgomery County for Adult ESOL and Literacy services?

- There are close to 125,000 people in Montgomery County who speak English less than well, or about 14% of the population (American Community Survey 2006). This is a 20% increase from 2002 data.
- In FY2007, there were close to 15,000 ESOL students enrolled in MCPS – about 11% of school enrollment. (MCPS website) Many have parents that also are in need of ESOL services.
- Statewide, almost one million Marylanders need literacy skills, a high school diploma, or English language skills (*Research Triangle Inst.*) Despite this need, Maryland's per learner state investment is 78 percent below the average of the East Coast states.

## Who provides Adult ESOL and Literacy services in Montgomery County?

- Montgomery College is the largest provider of services
- In addition, more than 55 non-profit and faith-based organizations offer programs throughout the community.
- More than 1,500 paid and volunteer instructors work in Montgomery County

## How many people are being served?

- Estimated number of annual enrollments: approximately 43,184
- Estimated number of individuals served annually: over 22,000

## How many people are on waiting lists?

- Over 1,600 learners are currently on waitlists. However, waitlists can be a poor measure of demand, because they do not account for issues such as access, provider capacity to maintain waitlists, and students who become discouraged and do not maintain their name on a list.

## Why should the community support adult literacy and ESOL programs?

### English Literacy is a Key Workforce Development and Driver of Economic Development

In Montgomery County, one out of three workers is an immigrant. According to the Urban Institute, the average hourly wage of immigrant workers who speak English "well" or "very well" is much higher than that of immigrant workers with limited English skills. In fact, a fluent English-speaking immigrant earns nearly double that of a non-English speaking worker. (Urban Institute 2007) That equates to higher spending and taxes paid – which benefits us all.

Every dollar invested in adult education yields a return of \$3.15 to Maryland economy in increased earnings within 18 months (MAACCE Maryland).

Learners achieve significant annual wage gains within 18 months after program exit, ranging from \$1,817 to \$2,579, an 18 to 25 percent gain for minimum wage workers. (Source: U.S. Department of Commerce's *Educational Attainment in the United States*)

Literacy has a profound impact on family income. Forty three percent of adults at the lowest level of literacy proficiency live in poverty compared with four percent of adults with strong literacy skills. (*The State of Literacy in America, 1998*)

A rise in of 1% in literacy scores leads to a 2.5% rise in labor productivity and a 1.5% rise in G DP per person. (*The Economist, August 28, 2004*)

American businesses are estimated to lose over \$60 billion in productivity each year due to employees' lack of basic skills. (U.S. Department of Education, 1998)

### **English Literacy is a Healthcare Issue**

Annual health care costs in the U.S. are four times higher for individuals with low literacy skills than they are for individuals with high level literacy skills. (ProLiteracy Worldwide)

The health care industry estimates \$73 billion per year of unnecessary health care expenses attributable to poor literacy. (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Statistics, 2004)

In one U.S. study, having a ninth-grade reading level or less appeared to double the risk of mortality among elderly people over a five-year period. (National Institute on Aging, 2006)

When family members or untrained interpreters are used to assist with communication, an average of 31 translation errors are made per health care visit. (American Medical Association, 2005)

### **Adult Learners are the Parents of Child Learners**

A parent's literacy level is one of the most significant predictors of a child's future literacy ability. Poor school achievement and dropping out before completing school are commonplace among children of illiterate parents. (REACH Educational Foundation, 2003)

Illiterate adult parents stand a much greater chance of parenting children who are less likely to succeed in school than those with literate parents. These children are more likely to be "Left Behind" no matter what we do in our schools, unless we help the parents to improve their own literacy and English language skills. Adults currently enrolled in Maryland adult education programs have about 22,000 school-age children (Source: 2007 Literacy Works Report).

There are close to 15,000 ESOL students in MCPS – more than 10% of the student population (MCPS website). Based on national averages, four out of five will have parents who are limited English

proficient. Beyond this population, over half of foreign-born children who speak English “very well” have only limited English proficient parents (Urban Institute).

### **Literacy Makes for Good Citizens and Strong Communities**

A 2003 Urban Institute study found that 60 percent of legal immigrants who were eligible to become citizens but had not done so were Limited English Proficient (LEP).

An estimated 30 million adults, or 14%, have "below basic" literacy skills. This means they cannot perform basic literacy functions like read a map, fill out a job application, or calculate the total cost from a purchase order. Of this 30 million, 11 million are considered "not literate in English" (National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2002)

### **Foundations and Other Donors Must Play a Key Role**

“The shortage of high-quality ESL programs poses one of the most difficult challenges for foundations interested in improving the economic and social wellbeing of communities with sizable or growing newcomer populations. Funders who have prioritized broader goals such as better health and education outcomes may want to consider addressing ESL needs as part of their grantmaking strategy. (Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, 2008)

# A View of the System: Montgomery County Adult English Literacy Programs

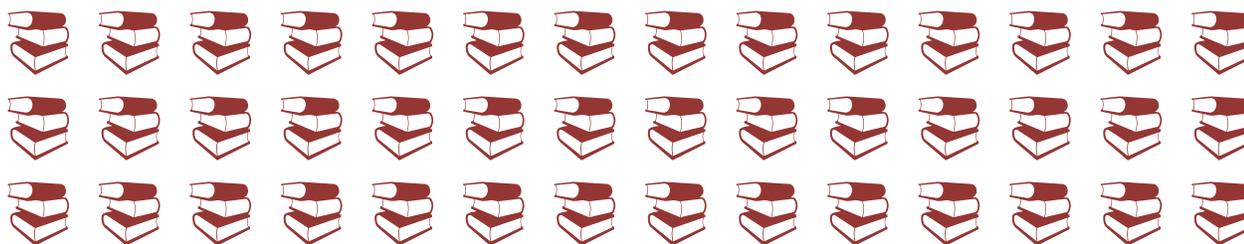
Number of adult English literacy programs 61

Students enrolled at any given time



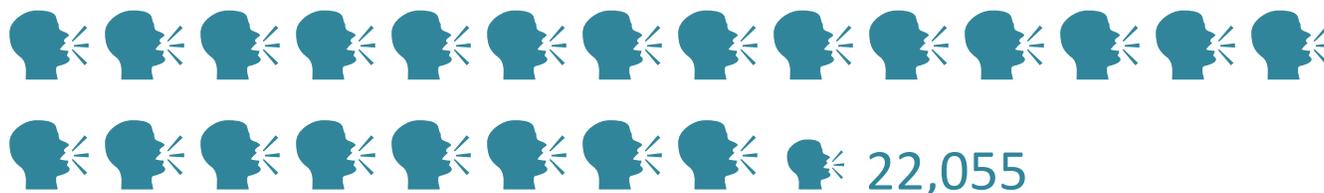
13,367

Annual total student enrollments



43,184

Annual estimated number of unique students served



22,055

Number of instructors



1,548

(612- paid; 936 volunteer)

= 1,000 people    = 1,000 seats    = 100 instructors

As reported by programs surveyed through MCAEL's fall 2008 Provider Directory update. Total number of students served annually is estimated by assuming an average of 65% persistence rate between semesters.