

SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

Communities across the United States are being reshaped by demographic change.

With changes come benefits and challenges as all community members, long-time residents and new arrivals, acclimate to the new normal. Montgomery County, Maryland has changed dramatically over 20 years, and it continues to change. As the county has welcomed immigrants from around the globe, neighbors and neighborhoods look different. With the influx of immigrants, comes economic opportunity, new cultural traditions, and new perspectives.

The differences between groups may be easily apparent; at the same time, the fact that all people and all communities share common goals may sometimes be hidden. Hidden but true—all people want to prosper and realize their dreams. To achieve their goals, individuals need to work together. To work together, people need to connect to one another, exchange ideas, and come to consensus or respect differences. When we come together to define what we want to see in our neighborhoods, our schools, and across our community, we can leverage our shared resources and assets to achieve a sense of belonging. When this occurs, a successful and thriving community is established.

There is sometimes an expectation by people in an existing community that new individuals should adapt to what exists—the immigrants should acculturate and accept the status quo. This has rarely occurred in the history of the United States. Integration is a two-way street—and communities are most successful when the new ideas and the vitality that immigrants bring are mixed with the ideas and energy of the long-time residents.

A common language is useful for sharing ideas and exchanging opinions. In the

United States, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) instruction has been shown to have a positive impact on the whole community. With improvements in English, immigrants participate in the broader economics, education, and health of the community, which benefits us all.

In Montgomery County, of the 130,000 limited English proficient individuals in the County, over 20,000 are in English classes. These individuals balance work and family while learning a new language. Adult students commit 2-10 hours a week, on average, to learn English in addition to

working 40 to 60 a week. With this time commitment, it will take a learner 7 years, on average, to achieve average fluency, which is defined as reading and speaking at a 6th grade level.

This series of white papers explores what it takes for communities to succeed, and connects these concepts to English language skills. We explored a variety of areas (economic, health, community assets, civic engagement and education) that define success for a whole community—not just for the immigrant community. The information provided on each page is linked to research and articles that delve into how the outcomes discussed can be realized. After reading these papers, we hope that you will see how adult English language learners can, as they acquire language skills, become strong, active members of the broader community. And ideally, that long time Montgomery County residents can be part of ensuring this success, and in so doing, ensuring the success of all residents.

English literacy helps us build stronger communities for everyone.



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