

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULT IMMIGRANTS TO LEARN ENGLISH

The preamble to proposed legislation before the Maryland General Assembly last year stated that nearly one million out-of-school youth need a high school diploma, need to learn to communicate in English or need to improve basic literacy skills. A total of 44% of adults with below basic literacy skills are not working. Maryland currently provides adult education and literacy services to only three or four percent of this group although demand is high and waiting lists are long. Business owners have stated that a solid grasp of English is the key empowerment tool to develop better pay, better benefits and a better quality of life.

Recognizing these facts, the Education Committee of the LWVMC chose to study adult education for immigrants when the study item "Responding to New Americans in Montgomery County" was adopted in 2005. The results of the committee's research are in this Fact Sheet, as are three consensus questions that could enable us to determine if our League members believe that we should become advocates in this area.

INTRODUCTION

All across the United States and Canada, public and private agencies and organizations offer varied courses and programs to help adults learn English. Sponsors include public school systems, colleges, workplaces and faith communities. Day and evening classes and tutoring programs range in focus from everyday conversation, listening, reading and writing to vocational and professional skills, college preparation, career and community interaction and preparation for taking the test for U.S. citizenship. Some programs integrate activities for parents and their children. Some programs use the Internet and computer technology for students to participate in language activities through e-mail, chat rooms and interactive projects. Program descriptions generally do not include effectiveness information.

ADULT LITERACY AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN MARYLAND

In 2001, the Maryland General Assembly created a task force whose assignment was to study adult education and report on the need for services, the impact of adult education on economic development, existing levels of service, current funding and how Maryland compared with other states. The task force recommended:

- A significant increase in public and private investment in the adult education system.
- The targeting of new resources for the improvement of adult education outcomes.
- Enhanced accountability to increase the return on investment.
- Improved services for the incarcerated and those on probation.

Since that report, the General Assembly has struggled with the issue of how to determine the level of funding to improve delivery of service. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) proposed a formula that was not adopted because the legislature felt that there was a lack of data to support the formula. Knowing that adult literacy was severely underfunded but not knowing what would be the proper amount, the General Assembly included \$1.2 million for adult education in the Bridge to Excellence Act.

In 2004, the Joint Chairman's report on the budget requested that MSDE submit a proposal to the budget committees for an ongoing method of funding and providing adult education services that would reduce the waiting list for these services. That same year, Dr. Nancy Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools, established the Superintendent's Panel on Excellence in Adult Education. It was composed of state and national leaders from business and labor, government, adult education, local school systems, community organizations and higher education. Montgomery County was represented by then council chair, Tom Perez.

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Their findings, published in December of 2005, were:

- The need for adult education in Maryland is immense - 927,264 out of school youth and adults lack literacy skills, a high school diploma or proficiency in English.
- The demand for adult education in Maryland significantly exceeds capacity – there is an annual waiting list of 5,000 residents.
- Maryland is seriously behind other states' investments in adult education – Maryland spent an average of \$77/student in FY 03 while other east coast states averaged \$477 per student in state funding.
- A budgeted 74% reduction in federal funding will virtually eliminate adult education services in half of Maryland counties.
- Current funding does not support a qualified instructional workforce for adult education.
- Additional investment in the quality of adult education is essential to maximize return on investment.
- Adult education is an economic issue – it is a strategy to reduce unemployment, incarceration and health issues.
- Adult education programs have been demonstrated to achieve results.
- The best system for delivering adult education services encompasses community colleges, local school systems and community-based organizations.
- It is the state's role to provide adequate funding.
- Adult education has a significant return on investment.

The panel made the following recommendations:

- Increase the investment in evidence-based adult education.
- Establish, in statute, a state funding formula. Consolidate the existing state funding streams for adult education within MSDE.
- Encourage workplace partnerships with businesses and provide incentives.
- Publish an annual state performance report on the adult education program to document accountability.

FUNDING ADULT LITERACY IN MARYLAND

As a result of the work of the Superintendent's Panel, companion bills (HB 1130/SB 650) were introduced during the 2006 legislative session that would have phased in a far higher level of funding for adult literacy programs than the \$5.4 million proposed in the FY 2007 state budget. State aid would have been \$8.854 million this fiscal year and would have reached a state funding level of \$23.3 million by FY 2011.

Distribution of these funds would have been based on a complex formula, similar to the Thornton funding formula now implemented by the state for public elementary and secondary schools. If these bills had passed in their original form, Montgomery County would have received \$1.453 million rather than the budgeted \$353,877 state funding for FY 2007.

Due to the bill's complexity and the numerous other issues with which the legislators were dealing, HB 1130 was stripped of the proposed formula and was passed in a form that merely added \$1.5 million to the budgeted FY 2007 appropriation for FY 2008. Funds will still be distributed as Literacy Works Grants, competitive grants for adult education and literacy services, rather than through a Thornton-like formula, and the amount will be far less than the legislation initially required. Local governments are required to match these grants on a 75% state to 25% local match. To leverage the additional state funding, local expenditures statewide will increase by \$500,000 in FY 2008.

THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) TASK FORCE

In 2002, Council members Subin, Praisner and Ewing commissioned a study to closely examine the current local system of adult ESL programs. Montgomery College contracted with the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) to conduct the study. Their findings highlighted the following problems:

- A shortage of existing programs.
- Barriers to existing programs such as child care and transportation.
- Insufficient connections between the business community and those implementing adult ESL programs.
- Shortage of teachers.
- Scattered and diffuse delivery system.
- Lack of coordination and collaboration among providers.
- Adult ESL programs that do not always take into consideration the low-literacy levels in the native languages of participants.

Upon completion of the study in April of 2003, Tom Perez was appointed to chair the Adult ESL Task Force. The group was charged with developing a strategic action plan for improving the current system of delivery. This task force included representatives from MCPS, linguistic minority groups, business leaders, community based organizations and faith-based organizations. The task force developed the following goals for ESL instruction in the county:

- Support immigrants in becoming economically self-sufficient.
- Support immigrants in becoming life-long learners and actively engaged in civic life.
- Address the workforce development needs of Montgomery County businesses.

The task force recognized that current services were being provided by a variety of models. Approximately 23,800 adult residents were receiving some sort of English instruction. The largest providers at the time included:

- Montgomery College – 8,000 students.
- MCPS – 10,000 students. CASA of Maryland – 3,100 students.
- Literacy Council of Montgomery County – 1, 100 students.
- Other nonprofits and faith-based programs – 1,500 students.

Given the importance of expanding resources within fiscal constraints, the task force decided that it was important to build a system that maximizes private resources and builds on the current delivery system. They came up with what is called the “Hub and Spokes” model. The vision was to create a non-profit organization that would perform a wide variety of tasks designed to increase the quantity and quality of ESL services including:

- Offering training and technical assistance.
- Connecting teachers and curricula to businesses.
- Assuming a leadership role in advocacy, coordination and fundraising.
- Acting as a clearinghouse for research and best practices in the field.

As envisioned, there would be two “hubs”. One would be up-county and the other would be down-county. They would connect adult language learners to providers and other social services in the county. The provision of services, however, would continue to take place in communities and locations throughout the county.

A critical question that the task force asked was “Who is the point person in government that is accountable in adult ESL instruction?” The logical possibilities were MCPS and Montgomery College. The task force

recommended that, given the college's critical role in workforce development and adult education, it should be the primary government point of contact. However, they also assumed that MCPS would continue to play a critical role, and evening classes would continue to be coordinated through the Interagency Coordinating Board.

(M-CALESOL)

The Task Force Report was released in March of 2004. Following its release, the County Council and Montgomery College collaborated to open a coalition office with a full-time staff person to begin the work of coordinating language and literacy instruction. It operated under the auspices of Workforce Development and Continuing Education with the Montgomery College Foundation as the fiscal agent. In May, 2005, the providers voted to name the coalition the Montgomery Coalition for Adult Literacy and ESOL (M-CALESOL) and many of those involved in the Adult ESL Task Force formed a Board of Advisors. The coalition currently functions under the auspices of Montgomery College and hopes to become an independent, non-profit organization in the near future.

M-CALESOL is housed on the Takoma Park campus of Montgomery College. It hosts monthly meeting of providers on topics such as recruiting volunteers, developing program outcomes, workplace/ESOL connections, learning about each others' programs and capacity building. The Board of Advisors sets strategic goals for the Coalition and works with Workforce Development and Continuing Education at Montgomery College to implement them. They keep a directory and website listing adult literacy and ESOL providers which is especially useful when referring students to appropriate programs. The Coalition shares information about grant opportunities, job openings and regional trainings through an e-mail list. M-CALESOL also offers volunteer teacher trainings and co-sponsors an Adult ESOL Instructor Training course with Montgomery College.

Individuals seeking English language instruction can locate services in various parts of the county by going to their web-page. By clicking on a Montgomery County map in a location that is convenient, potential English language learners can find out what services are available. In order to be listed by M-CALESOL, providers must provide the following information: Name of their organization, contact, person, address, location of classes, phone, e-mail, website where classes are listed, cost (registration and/or tuition and/or books), class times, if classes are near public transportation, if child care provided during class hours, if there are restrictions (such as age minimum, membership in organization), if other social services are available for class attendees and a description on them. They must also describe what literacy and ESOL courses are offered, how many registrations for classes they have each year, what texts are used and whether teachers are volunteer or paid.

Current funding for Adult Literacy Programs at Montgomery College comes primarily from three sources. In FY 2006, just over \$1.3 million came from the federal government, \$319,186 from state grants and \$400,000 from local sources. In addition to support from the county and Montgomery College, M-CALESOL has received funding from businesses such as Adventist Health Care, Atlantic Realty Associates, Chevy Chase Land Company and Folger-Pratt Construction, Inc. Individuals and foundations have also contributed financial support.

A Profile of one English Language Instruction Model in Montgomery County

English language instruction is provided in multiple kinds of venues that each have their own curriculum, requirements for teachers and students, and methodologies. Some are very informal and others are quite structured. An example of one of the larger private programs is described below.

Literacy Council of Montgomery County

The Literacy Council of Montgomery County (LCMC), founded in 1963, is the largest county volunteer program that helps adult foreigners become proficient in English. Nearly 500 tutors volunteer each year.

About 790 adult students are helped, but 400 remain on the waiting list. The average wait is a year; however, up county students wait longer, because there are fewer tutors there. Most tutors work with one student at a time, but a few are able to take on two or three at once.

Eighty percent of the students in the ESOL program are foreigners; the rest, American born, were formerly special education students now in the Basic Literacy program. While 21% have an eighth grade education or less, 38% have at least some college experience. The most recent (2004) annual report showed foreign-born students from 74 countries, speaking 63 different languages. Both groups use the Laubach curriculum but different texts for the first three levels before converging at the fourth level. Completing this level, they reach the proficiency of fifth graders in reading, writing and speaking. Also available are specialized classes in finance, citizenship and extra conversational groups with peers.

The program is open to any adult not enrolled in high school who lives or works in Montgomery County and plans to remain in the U.S. permanently. After paying a one-time registration fee of \$15, they receive all lessons and materials free. On the other hand, tutors pay for their training: \$25 if they expect to take LCMC registrants, \$40 if they plan to take other people. Their first textbook is given to them to keep; the others are loaned for as long as needed.

Training for new tutors is offered several times a year. A two-hour orientation is required at which the curriculum is explained and the books displayed. At the most recent, held last summer, 40 adults aged about 25 to 80, primarily female but of all races, listened avidly, and at the end most rushed to add their names to the fast-closing list for the next step – two consecutive all-day Saturdays from 10 to 4, at the end of which the new tutors would meet their own new students and work out logistics. Most tutoring sessions are held in public libraries, some in churches, coffee shops or at job sites. “Follow-up” and “Drop In” sessions regularly support tutors. The time commitment is at least one hour twice a week and commitment to the program for at least six months. No teaching experience or knowledge of a foreign language is necessary, but patience is a plus. All tutors must phone in to the central office monthly progress reports, including the number of hours worked. Funding agencies receive these progress reports.

Funding is primarily through service contracts with the Montgomery County government. A recent fund raiser at Strathmore Hall targeting corporate donors brought in over \$28,000. Private contributions are also important.

The main office and library for MCLC has been at the Wheaton Library, but they are expected to move to the newly constructed Rockville Library this fall. Most training will continue at Wheaton, though Gaithersburg has occasional sessions as needed.

Citizenship classes are available free to anyone with a green card. These are offered throughout the county through the Refugee Training Program.

ESOL AT MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

Montgomery College is the largest provider of ESOL instruction in the county. As mentioned below, it took over the role of adult education from MCPS. This was partly in response to a desire of the Montgomery County ESOL Task Force to have a single government entity to hold accountable for adult ESOL instruction. It is the recipient of all state funds for adult literacy education that are awarded through the Literacy Works program.

College Credit Courses

Students whose first language is not American English must take the Levels of English Proficiency (LOEP) test. If needed, these students take American English language credit courses, available at five levels, with laboratory and Writing Center participation required.

Workforce Development and Adult Education Non-Credit Courses

English as a Second Language (ESL) courses are provided at Montgomery College campuses. New students must take a two-hour English as a Second Language Assessment (ESLA) for placement. Classes range from beginning to advanced levels and include reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, etc. Tuition costs are similar to other non-credit courses.

Adult ESOL Classes

These classes, funded by the Maryland State Department of Education, were formerly provided through Montgomery County Public Schools. They serve some 12,000 persons annually at high schools and community centers throughout the county. Designed to meet the needs of working people and family members, the classes are mostly held weekday evenings but also in early morning hours, daytimes and Saturdays.

New students take the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment for appropriate placement in one of the five levels. Students are not charged for courses at the lower levels but tuition is charged for the upper level courses at a rate somewhat less than for the Montgomery County credit or non-credit courses. Due to high demand, many students are placed on waiting lists.

AN ESOL TEACHER'S STORY

An article in Education World in 2001, now on its web site, gives an insight into the students who seek English language instruction. The article noted, "immigrants who attend ESL or EFL classes in continuing education programs are usually highly motivated and willing to work hard to learn the language of their new country, but they face a number of obstacles." What follows is an excerpt from the article, quoting an ESL teacher.

"Many of my students work from 4:00 p.m. until midnight or later," said Mary Ellen Rund, an adult ESL teacher in East Hartford, Connecticut.... "They arrive at school tired. Because they usually speak their native language at home, the amount of time available for practicing English is limited. I adjust my lessons to the needs of the group and simply teach what they don't know yet. In the lower levels, speaking is stressed.

"My main goal is communication: helping students get their point across even if their grammar is poor. Students who achieve basic communication skills go on to learn specific vocabulary for daily living. I cover emergencies, school conferences, telephone conversations, and so on.

"I try to think of every possible way to present a lesson. Audiotapes, written work, and lots of listening and conversation...scavenger hunts to teach students to follow written directions, vocabulary BINGO to teach new words, and role-playing to practice daily living skills....field trips to grocery stores, fast-food restaurants, and libraries.

"Students practice such conversational skills as ordering food, interviewing, and asking for help or directions. Often students bring in job applications, government papers, financial aid applications, or bills, and we use them as learning tools as well."

The article also notes, “Computer technology lends itself especially well to adult ESL/EFL instruction. The Internet, in particular, offers an abundance of opportunities -- through e-mail, chat rooms, and interactive projects -- for students to participate in authentic language activities.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT ADULT LITERACY AND ESL INSTRUCTION

In Maryland and at the national level, resource centers provide evidence-based information, standards, model curricula, toolkits, and other resources for program sponsors, planners, administrators, teachers, and tutors. The Maryland Adult Literacy Resource Center, located in the University of Maryland, Baltimore County has extensive resources through its web site (<http://www.umbc.edu/alrc/>). Nationally, the U.S. Department of Education funds two clearinghouses, both located in Washington, DC, also with varied resources available through their web sites. These include CAELA: Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (<http://www.cal.org/caela/>) and the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (<http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/>). Searching the Internet on the term “Adult ESL Programs” is a way to find further resources and sample programs.

SOURCES

Education World Article: <http://www.education-world.com/>

Stepping – Adult Literacy Challenges at Work, at Home, and in the Maryland Community, Findings of the Superintendent’s Panel on Excellence in Adult Education, December 2005, Maryland State Department of Education, December 2005 <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/nr/rdonlyres/517d465a-f0b5-40dd-bb4b-e98ea716ec46/8366/final2superintendentsreport.pdf>

Adult ESL Task Force Findings and Recommendations, Chair Council Vice President Tom Perez, March 11, 2004

Education Committee members who contributed to this Fact Sheet: Joan Karasik, Carla Satinsky - Chair, Nancy Soreng, Lois Stoner, Nancy Wiecking, Cherry Wunderlich

CONSENSUS QUESTIONS

1. Should free or low-cost basic English language instruction be available for non-English-proficient adults who are Montgomery County residents? (Yes or No)

2. Should government have a role in provision of this instruction? (Yes or No)

3. If government has a role, what should it be? Select as many of the responses below as you think are appropriate.

a. Primary funder

b. "Safety Net" funder

c. Coordination

d. Information Source

e. Facilitation