



# National Coalition For Literacy

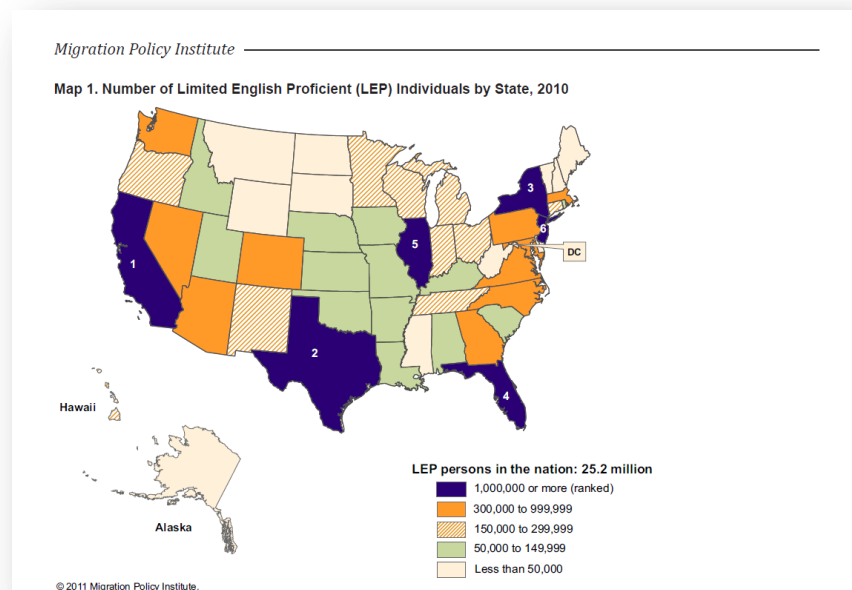
## Immigration and English Literacy Fact Sheet 2013

The National Research Council's 2012 report on improving adult literacy instruction defines English literacy as: "the ability to read, write, and communicate using the [English] symbol system and using appropriate tools and technologies to meet the goals and demands of individuals, their families, and U.S. society"<sup>i</sup>. What do we know about the state of U.S. adult immigration and English Literacy in 2013? This fact sheet, prepared by Research Allies for Lifelong Learning for the National Coalition for Literacy, provides statistics and recommendations.

### Where in the USA do immigrants and English Language Learners live?

According to estimates from the 2011 *American Community Survey*, nearly 40.4 million immigrants are in the

USA. About 1 in 6 workers is now an immigrant; the percentage of immigrant workers tripled, from 5 percent to 16 percent, between 1970 and 2011. Five US states with high immigrant populations were California (10.2 million), New York (4.3 million), Texas (4.2 million), Florida (3.7 million), and New Jersey (1.9 million)<sup>ii</sup>. These states, along with Illinois, also have the largest numbers in need of English Literacy (see map). Nevada, North Carolina, Georgia, and Arkansas also increased their share of need for English literacy more than 300% between 1990 and 2010.<sup>iii</sup>



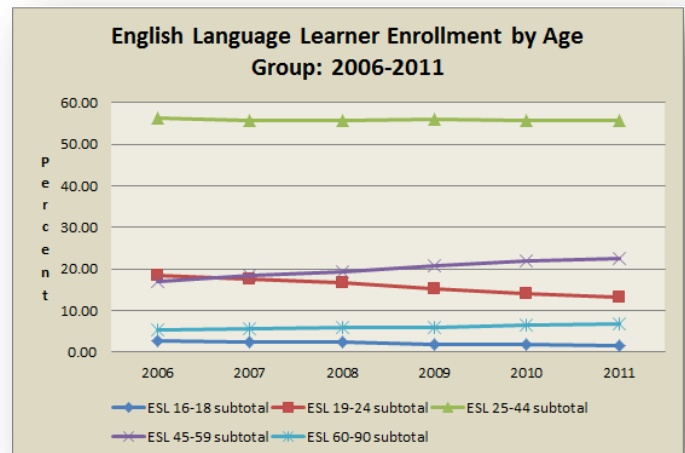
### Who are English Language Learners?

Adult education and family literacy (AEFL) programs serve a fraction of the millions of adults who have yet to learn English fluently, or English Language Learners (ELLs), and 49 states have waiting lists of adult learners due to limited funding<sup>iv</sup>. In 2011-12, AEFL programs served 733,000 adults, down from 1.1 million in 2006-7. ELLs make up 44% of all learners in AEFL programs, not including adults who go on to adult secondary education after gaining intermediate or higher English skills<sup>v</sup>. The most commonly spoken native language of ELLs is Spanish. Other native languages with high frequency are Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Tagalog, Russian, and Arabic<sup>vi</sup>.

ELLs represent a rich diversity of cultures, languages, and educational backgrounds, and their life situations reflect a variety of socio-economic circumstances. Even as they work long hours outside the home, their families may face financial difficulties. Still others may be refugees displaced due to social unrest or war in their native countries. English literacy in AEFL programs may serve adults with postsecondary education in

Europe, migrant workers from Central America with intermittent schooling, Asians with low native language literacy skills who emigrated to work in agribusiness, or refugees from Africa with little schooling and sometimes no written language<sup>vii</sup>.

Demographically, nearly two-thirds of ELLs in 2011-12 (64%) were women. Most ELLs entering AEFL programs are between the ages of 25 and 44 years, according to the National Reporting System (NRS) data (see graph)<sup>viii</sup>. In fact, the proportion of ELLs under 25 years is decreasing and the percentage of adults 45 years and above is on the rise.



### How long does learning English take?

Learning English takes time and practice; no “magic bullet” can truly shorten the time to proficiency, even with excellent instruction, research-based curricula, and access to a wealth of online resources. English language learning requires even more time for adults with low literacy skills in their native language and at later ages,<sup>ix</sup> which is certainly relevant given the increasing age of ELLs in AEFL programs. Adult immigrants may need to study more than 100 hours per year for 6 years to learn enough English for civic participation or to enter postsecondary education<sup>x</sup>. As of 2011-12, NRS data indicate that ELLs who took a pretest when entering and a post-test later in the year attended an average of 190 hours per year; approximately two thirds of them complete a full level of education, and about 40% complete multiple levels<sup>xi</sup>. However, most level completions occur at a beginning or low intermediate level; at these levels, ELLs would not yet have sufficient English literacy skills to participate fully in civic life or to be successful in college.

### How does family literacy foster learning English?

A family literacy model offers a two-generation approach that will not only help parents learn English but will support them in knowing what to do to make their children successful learners. Family literacy services and practices with immigrant families are evidence based and have been used successfully across the nation. Most family literacy sites are located at schools, early childhood centers, or community based organizations where there are already facilities for children, eliminating the need for childcare. Many also provide transportation and other wrap-around services that can increase attendance and success rates<sup>xii</sup>.

### Why is learning English important?

Language skills impact every aspect of adult life. Adults with high English literacy are more likely to:

- Be employed full time and earn a family-sustaining income;
- Pursue further education and career training;
- Read to their children in English and discuss learning and other school topics at home;
- Have digital literacy skills that allow them to access information and successfully perform tasks related to daily living, the workplace, and civic engagement.

**Support Immigration Reform and English Language Learning!** Promote the value and benefits of learning English in your community every day and advocate for increased investment in immigration reform through adult education and family literacy programs in your area.

<sup>i</sup> Lesgold & Welch-Ross, Eds. (2012). *Improving adult literacy instruction: Options for practice and research*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences.

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- <sup>ii</sup> Britz & Batalova (2013). *Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States*. Retrieved from: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?id=931>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Migration Policy Institute. (2011). *LEP Data Brief: Limited English Proficient Individuals in the United States*. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/integration/LEPatabrief.pdf>.
- <sup>iv</sup> National Council of State Directors of Adult Education. (2012). *Blue Book: Adult Education Services, the Success, the Impact and the Need*. Retrieved from: [www.ncsdae.org](http://www.ncsdae.org).
- <sup>v</sup> Research Allies for Lifelong Learning calculated data 2006-7 through 20011-12, using the United States Department of Education's Office of Adult and Vocational Education's National Reporting System figures retrieved from: <http://wdcrocolp01.ed.gov/CFAPPS/OVAE/NRS/login.cfm>.
- <sup>vi</sup> Russell, Batalova, & Pandya. (2013). *Limited English Proficient Individuals in the United States: Linguistic Diversity at the County Level*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.
- <sup>vii</sup> TESOL International Association. (2006). *Position Statement on the Diversity of English Language Learners in the United States*. Retrieved from: <http://www.tesol.org/about-tesol/press-room/position-statements/social-issues-and-diversity-position-statements>.
- <sup>viii</sup> See note v.
- <sup>ix</sup> See note i.
- <sup>x</sup> McHugh, Gelatt, & Fix. (2007). *Adult English language instruction in the United States: Determining need and investing wisely*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.
- <sup>xi</sup> See note v.
- <sup>xii</sup> See National Center for Family Literacy, <http://www.familit.org>, for more information.