

Level-Fund Adult Basic Education and English for Speakers of Other Languages Line item #7035-0002 at \$27.7 million: A Critical Investment in the Future of our Commonwealth

WHAT WE BELIEVE

The Commonwealth's education and workforce development agenda should address the critical role that immigrants play at all levels of our state's economy. Immigrants comprise 17% of our workforce and work at every level in every industry, from retail to biotechnology to health care and higher education. Immigrants are an asset to our economy and our deployment of resources should recognize them as such. Access to English classes is a critical piece for immigrants to attain family supporting wages and economic success.

WHAT WE KNOW

- ▶ **The demand is huge.** Over one-third (1.1 million) of the state's 3.2 million workers need Adult Basic Education (ABE) and/or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes to meet the needs of our rapidly changing economy. Nearly 500,000, or 7 out of 10 adult immigrants in the state, are in need of services in order to fully participate in the state's economy.¹ The need continues to grow, particularly among *new* immigrants, who are increasingly from Latin America and Asia.
- ▶ **The system is overloaded: For every person in a state-funded ABE or ESOL class, another one is on a waiting list for classes.** Approximately 25,000 individuals annually utilize the ABE programs funded by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to learn English, earn a GED, or gain job skills. Nearly the same amount—20,580—are currently on waiting lists for these programs because there are not adequate resources. Almost 16,000 are waiting to enter ESOL programs. Waiting lists vary from 2 to 8 months for ABE and 6 months to 2 years for ESOL.
- ▶ **When immigrants have access to English classes, the benefits are clear:**
 - **Families benefit:** As wage-earners, immigrants who speak only English at home earn 2.5 times more (\$38,526) than immigrants who do not speak English well (\$14,221). As parents, English speakers can better support their kids in school.
 - **Communities benefit:** English—the ability to answer oral and written questions—is a requisite to citizenship, and citizenship is a requisite to voting.
 - **Businesses benefit:** Workers' ability to communicate in English leads to improved customer and patient care and increased capacity to implement new production modes.
 - **Our economy benefits:** Massachusetts is increasingly dependent on immigrants. Since 2000, the labor force has grown just 1% and without immigrants it would have shrunk. Immigrants make up 17% of the workforce and work in all the state's leading industries. If we fail to invest in the workforce of today and tomorrow, our economy will suffer.

¹ (MassINC, *The Changing Face of Massachusetts*, 2005).

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

- **Protect ABE/ESOL line item #7035-0002 under the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)** in order to maintain current ABE/ESOL capacity, intensity and access to services, and to retain the ABE infrastructure to serve adult learners across the Commonwealth. Fund line item 7035-0002 at the FY10 level of \$27.7 million in the FY12 budget.
 - ABE services are the primary education resource for Massachusetts adults, including immigrants and refugees, who lack high school level skills.
 - ABE includes English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), General Educational Development (GED) programs and basic skills (pre-literacy to pre-GED), with targeted services in workforce development, family literacy and transition to higher education.
 - ABE/ESOL services include classroom instruction, one-to-one tutoring, workplace learning and computer-assisted instruction and distance learning.
 - ABE/ESOL services are delivered by a diverse network that includes community-based organizations, local education agencies, community colleges, labor-management partnerships and correctional institutions.

Funding for ABE/ESOL has already been scaled back to what it was in FY2003 (\$28 million), not adjusted for inflation. ***We cannot afford to lose more. Especially in difficult economic times, our public and private investments should focus on preparing and integrating immigrant workers into economic recovery.*** In addition, recognizing that at least 60% of students in DESE-funded ESOL classes are already working, the service strategies need to reflect that reality. Priorities should be on:

- Workplace and contextualized models
- Advanced-level ESOL to facilitate the transition to GED and higher education
- Stronger links to skills training and employment
- Non-literate populations

*Some information for this fact sheet was drawn from the MA Coalition for Adult Education.

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