

Underfunded English Training Limits Contribution from Georgia's College-Educated Immigrants

By Melissa Johnson, Senior Policy Analyst

The strength of Georgia's workforce is undermined by a lack of funding for English language programs. About 55,000 immigrants in Georgia hold a bachelor's degree or higher and also struggle to speak English, an impediment that prevents many from fully putting their expertise to work here.¹ Georgia's English language programs enrolled only about 12,000 adults in 2016.²

Many immigrants hold degrees in health care, science, technology, engineering and math fields where their skills can help fill staffing shortages for in-demand occupations.³ By underfunding English language programs, Georgia is missing a chance for immigrants to fully apply their skills in the workforce. This weakens the state's ability to fill and attract jobs.

Georgia directs only about \$2 million from federal adult literacy programs to improve the English language skills of non-native speakers. Thirty-six states spend more per person than Georgia on all adult literacy programs, including English language learning.⁴

Georgia can make its workforce more attractive to prospective employers by developing its growing immigrant population to help meet demand for talent.⁵ English language classes can help immigrants build the professional-level language skills that allow them to make the best use of their education and training right here in Georgia.

Adult English Classes Can Help Georgia Fill Workforce Needs with College-Trained Workers

Georgia's struggle to provide enough college-educated workers to meet the evolving needs of the 21st century economy is an ongoing concern of both lawmakers and employers. Georgia needs 250,000 additional graduates with both college credentials and degrees to meet its workforce demands by 2025, according to Gov. Nathan Deal's Complete College Georgia Initiative. Launched by the governor in 2011, the initiative aims to strengthen the state's competitiveness by significantly increasing the number of Georgians with postsecondary credentials.

By 2025, 60 percent of jobs overall will require some level of postsecondary education, ranging from certificate programs to university degrees. Today only 45 percent of the state's young adults have these credentials.⁶

55,000

Georgia immigrants age 25 and older have a bachelor's degree or higher but also have trouble speaking English

Source: Immigrants and WIOA Services: Comparison of Sociodemographic Characteristics of Native- and Foreign-Born Adults in Georgia, December 2015.

Improved access and more funding for English language programs is a low-cost, targeted way to help reach this goal. English language classes can unleash the unrealized potential of an estimated 55,000 adult immigrants who already have college degrees yet struggle with their English.

Limited English proficiency is a top factor behind brain waste for educated immigrants. Brain waste is when people with a college degree work in low-skilled jobs or are unemployed. This is a big concern for immigrants educated in other countries since they face significant barriers to transferring their education, training, and work experiences to the U.S. labor market. About 133,000 immigrants in Georgia hold a degree from a college outside the United States, putting them at significant risk for brain waste. Many hold degrees in health care, science, technology, engineering and math fields. Those skills are in high demand among Georgia’s employers.

If properly funded and accessible, adult education programs can provide the instruction to help these immigrants acquire professional-level English. Georgia is better off if they can fully apply their education and training here.⁷

Georgia’s Spending for English Language Classes Falls Short

Georgia’s adult education budget funds three key services: Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education and English as a Second Language programs. Adult Basic Education provides instruction to adults whose literacy, math, speaking or problem-solving skills are at the elementary or middle school level. Adult Secondary Education provides instruction to adults with high school-level skills, and focuses on GED exam preparation. English as a Second Language programs help adults who struggle to speak English make progress toward fluency.

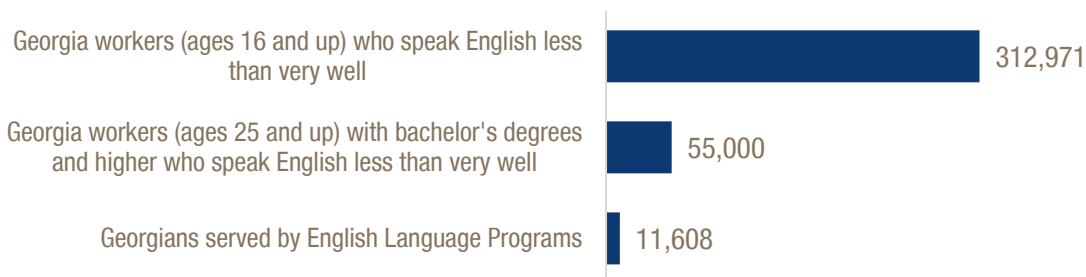
Georgia’s investment in all of these key English training services falls well below most other states and far short of existing need. Lawmakers invested only \$14 million in state money in overall Adult Basic and Secondary Education in 2016, in addition to nearly \$19 million in federal funds. **The state directed less than \$2 million in federal funds to English as a Second Language Programs in Georgia in 2016.** Thirty-six states spend more than Georgia on all adult education services, including English as a Second Language classes. This limited funding results in service gaps.⁸

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States spend more than Georgia on Adult Education per adult without a high school diploma or GED®

Source: Working Poor Families Analysis of US Department of Education data from 2011-2012 and American Community Survey, 2011

Georgia's English Language Programs Not Meeting Needs



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2015 1-yr. estimates. Migration Policy Institute analysis of pooled data from U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2009-2013; Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) Office of Adult Education 2016 Enrollment

More than 300,000 members of Georgia's current workforce report a lack of English proficiency. The state's English language programs enrolled only 12,000 people in 2016, leaving the vast majority of the 55,000 college-educated immigrants who struggle with the language on the outside looking in. Insufficient funding for needed English as a Second Language courses means immigrants are less likely to be able to help Georgia compete for the skilled jobs of the 21st Century.

Conclusion: Georgia Is Missing Out on Educated Workers

Georgia's underfunding of English language programs is at odds with its workforce needs. An estimated 55,000 adult immigrants in Georgia already hold college degrees and struggle with speaking English. Yet Georgia's English language programs enrolled only about 12,000 people in 2016.⁹ Increased funding for English language programs is a step Georgia can take on the path to reach its broader goal to produce enough workers to fill jobs requiring college education.

ENDNOTES

¹ This represents an estimate of adults ages 25 and older with limited English proficiency. Margie McHugh and Madeleine Morawski, "Immigrants and WIOA Services: Comparison of Sociodemographic Characteristics of Native- and Foreign-Born Adults in Georgia," December 2015.

² Technical College System of Georgia Scorecard: <https://kms.tcsg.edu/DPR/Scorecard/>, Accessed April 6, 2017.

³ Margie McHugh and Madeleine Morawski, "Immigrants and WIOA Services: Comparison of Sociodemographic Characteristics of Native- and Foreign-Born Adults in Georgia," December 2015.

⁴ Working Poor Families Project Analysis of US Department of Education data for 2011-2012 and American Community Survey, 2011.

⁵ Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, "Upskilling the New American Workforce: Demand-Driven Programs that Foster Immigrant Worker Success & Policies that Can Take Them to Scale," National Skills Coalition, June 2016.

⁶ "Complete College Georgia: The University System of Georgia," <http://www.completegeorgia.org/>, Accessed April 19, 2017

⁷ This represents an estimate of adults ages 25 and older with limited English proficiency. Margie McHugh and Madeleine Morawski, "Immigrants and WIOA Services: Comparison of Sociodemographic Characteristics of Native- and Foreign-Born Adults in Georgia," December 2015.

⁸ Georgia is also one of only two states that bans undocumented immigrants from accessing basic literacy and other adult education programs. Sarah Hooker, Michael Fix and Margie McHugh, "Education Reform in a Changing Georgia: Promoting High School and College Success for Immigrant Youth," Migration Policy Institute, March 2014.

⁹ Technical College System of Georgia Scorecard: <https://kms.tcsg.edu/DPR/Scorecard/>, Accessed April 6, 2017.