

Support Adult English Language Education to Invest in Future

By Melissa Johnson, Senior Policy Analyst

One in five Georgia children lives with at least one immigrant parent and nearly half of immigrants in Georgia struggle to speak English. When parents struggle to speak English, it not only hurts their ability to bring home higher pay to support their families, it also limits their involvement in their children's education. This reduces the likelihood their children will succeed in school and one day reach their potential in the workforce.

More than 509,000 Georgia children have immigrant parents and 45 percent of immigrants in Georgia don't speak English well.¹ Yet Georgia's English language programs enrolled only about 12,000 adults in 2016.² **Georgia is also one of just two states that ban undocumented immigrants from basic literacy and other adult education programs.**³ This ban hurts children, including U.S. citizens, by making English language education inaccessible for their parents.

It is in the best interest of the state for lawmakers to improve the educational opportunities for immigrants because Georgia is likely to continue to diversify and attract newcomers from many different countries. The country's immigrant population is projected to increase at double the rate of the U.S.-born population over the next five years.⁴ Georgia's workforce will likely add more immigrants as the state continues to capture a large share of the nation's population growth.⁵ Putting up unusual roadblocks to literacy and training programs and underfunding English language education undermines Georgia's future workforce and its ability to compete.

Georgia Needs Educated and Trained Workers to Attract Employers

To meet the demands of a changing economy and replace retiring workers, Georgia needs the students of today to become the educated and trained workers of tomorrow. The state needs 250,000 new college graduates to meet its workforce demands by 2025, according to Gov. Nathan Deal's Complete College Georgia initiative. Georgia employers need more graduates with either technical college credentials or university degrees.

The governor launched the initiative in August 2011 to strengthen the state's competitiveness by significantly increasing the number of college graduates. The initiative calls for more African-American, Hispanic and other students traditionally underrepresented in college to complete their degrees.⁶

The aging of Georgia's workforce also means workers will be needed in many critical industries. Employers who met with Georgia's educational and economic development leaders in 2014 through the governor's High-Demand Career Initiative expressed concern about the state's shortage of trained workers. The governor launched the initiative to gauge the workforce needs of private-sector employers. Executives with 19 companies involved cited concerns about an aging workforce and a large number of expected retirees.⁷

Georgia can make its workforce more attractive to employers by preparing a growing immigrant population to help fill talent shortfalls.⁸ In 2015, only 56 percent of English language learners in Georgia high schools graduated within four years compared to nearly 79 percent of high school students overall.⁹ Closing this gap in graduation rates can help Georgia add jobs to its economy.

Teaching Parents English Helps Georgia Children, its Future Workforce, Succeed

Students with involved parents achieve more. Involved parents can help with children's homework, track their grades and provide them with vital encouragement. A body of research executed over 10 years finds that, regardless of family income, parental education level or ethnic group, students with involved parents are more likely to:

- Enroll in higher-level programs
- Earn higher grades and test scores
- Attend school regularly
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school
- Graduate and go on to postsecondary education¹⁰

Some immigrant parents are not as involved with their children's education as they'd like because they struggle to learn English. Many of Georgia's children find it tougher to compete academically when their parents are less involved than the English-speaking parents of their classmates.

English language classes can help parents who speak another language get more involved in their children's education. An excellent example of the improvement these classes can make is found in DeKalb County, Ga. Literacy Action, an adult literacy nonprofit, launched a partnership with the DeKalb County School District in spring 2015 to increase the involvement of parents with limited English proficiency. The school district knew parents with limited English skills struggled to get involved in school activities.

During weekly classes throughout the school year, Literacy Action teaches more than 30 parents basic English language skills, including words needed to communicate with teachers and administrators. All parent participants in the class improved English speaking and listening skills in their ability to ask for an interpreter, complete basic school forms with personal information, and understand how to contact their child's teacher. All of the parent participants also learned to access an online grading portal during the class.

Expanding the success of this program to serve more of Georgia's 509,000 children with immigrant parents requires more funding. Literacy Action's program is not supported by federal Title III education funding, which is reserved for language instruction for immigrants and other students who have trouble speaking English.¹¹ Title III funding in DeKalb is already obligated for other purposes. Austin Dickson, executive director of Literacy Action, says the partnership with the county's schools aims to provide a "nonprofit solution to a systemic problem."

22%

Share of Georgia children with at least one immigrant parent

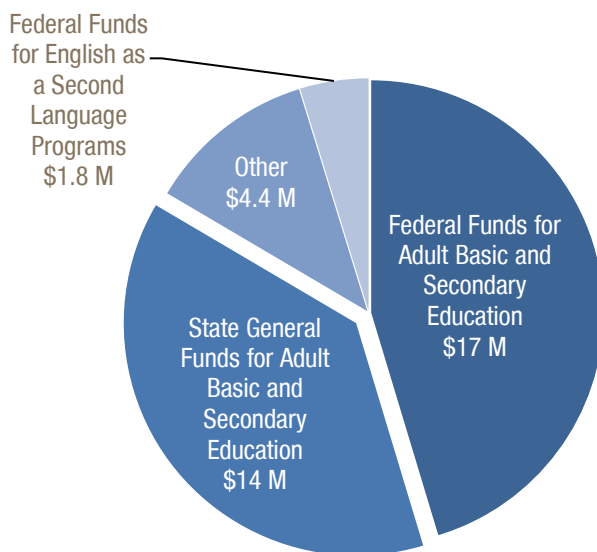
Source Author's analysis of U.S. Census Bureau 2015 American Community Survey, 1-yr.

Georgia's Funding for English Language Learning 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 whose skills are at high school level with a focus on preparing them to pass the GED® exam. English as a Second Language programs help adults who have trouble speaking English progress toward fluency.

State Funds About 38% of \$38 Million Spent on Adult Education

Fiscal Year 2016 Expenditures



Sources: Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) Office of Adult Education and GED® Testing "Other" includes fees from GED testing and local grants. U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2016 1-yr. estimates.

37

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

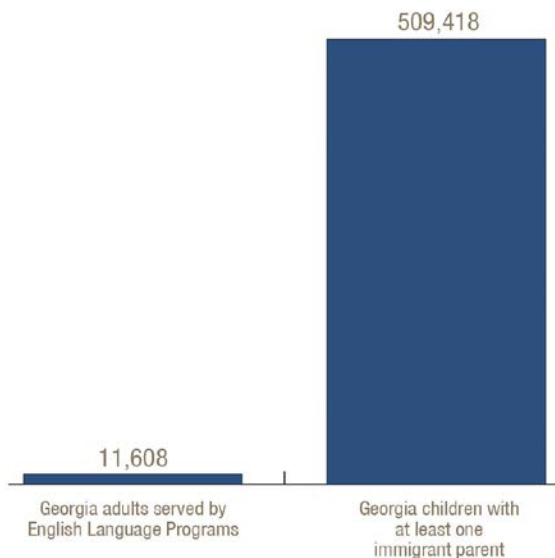
Source: Working Poor Families Analysis of US Department of Education data from 2013-2014 and American Community Survey, 2013

Thirty-seven states spend more than Georgia on all adult education services, including English as a Second Language classes.¹² This relatively low funding coupled with Georgia's restrictions on adult education means parents who struggle to speak English will also have trouble finding a class where they can learn the language. Georgia's English language programs enrolled only about 12,000 adults in 2016.¹³

Georgia Blocks Adult Education for Immigrants

Georgia restricts access to literacy and training programs for undocumented immigrants in addition to underfunding initiatives. **Georgia is one of only two states that ban undocumented immigrants from accessing basic literacy and other adult education programs.** About 40 percent of Georgia immigrants are undocumented.¹⁴ The U.S. Supreme Court recognizes the right to an education through high school for all children regardless of immigration status.¹⁵

Georgia's English Language Programs Not Meeting Needs



Sources: Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) Office of Adult Education and GED® Testing “Other” includes fees from GED testing and local grants. U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2016 1-yr. estimates.

60%

Drop in adult enrollment in English language courses following the passage of immigrant verification legislation

Source: 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

Georgia’s ban stems from a 2009 state law that requires all state agencies and contractors that provide adult education verify each student is lawfully present in the United States. In the year following the effective date of that law, Georgia experienced a 60 percent drop in adult enrollment in English language courses.¹⁶

Conclusion: Georgia Can Boost Children by Investing in Parents’ English Education

Georgia’s restrictions on English classes for immigrants and significant underfunding of the programs hurt the state’s children – its future workforce. When parents struggle to speak English, their involvement in their children’s education is hindered. Limited parental involvement damages the likelihood that students will succeed in school and eventually in the workforce.

One in five Georgia children lives with at least one immigrant parent and nearly half of immigrants in Georgia have difficulty speaking English. Georgia can improve the graduation rates and future economic contributions of children from immigrant families by increasing funding for English language programs and allowing enrollment for undocumented immigrants.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2015 1-yr estimates and 2010 1-yr estimates
- ² Technical College System of Georgia Scorecard: <https://kms.tcsg.edu/DPR/Scorecard/>, Accessed April 6, 2017.
- ³ 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.
- ⁴ Pew Research Center, 2015. “Modern Immigration Wave Brings 59 Million to U.S., Driving Population Growth and Change Through 2065: Views of Immigration’s Impact on U.S. Society Mixed.” Washington, D.C.: September.
- ⁵ Meredith Gunter, “UVA Study: National and State Populations Show Slow Growth,” UVA Today, May 9, 2016.
- ⁶ “Georgia’s Higher Education Completion Plan 2012,” Complete College Georgia, November 2011.
- ⁷ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Four Year Unified State Plan, State of Georgia, April 2016.
- ⁸ 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.
- ⁹ U.S. Department of Education, “Ed Data Express,” accessed November 4, 2016, <http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/>
- ¹⁰ “Research Spotlight on Parental Involvement in Education: NEA Reviews of the Research on Best Practices in Education,” National Education Association, <http://www.nea.org/tools/17360.htm>, accessed October 12, 2016.
- ¹¹ Every Student Succeeds Act, Public Law 114-95.
- ¹² Working Poor Families Project Analysis of US Department of Education data for 2013-2014 and American Community Survey, 2013. Ranking reflects states’ spend on all adult education services, including English as a Second Language classes, per adult without a high school diploma or its equivalent.
- ¹³ Technical College System of Georgia Scorecard: https://kms.tcsg.edu/Scorecard/AL_Enroll.aspx, Accessed October 12, 2016.
- ¹⁴ Author’s calculation based on “Unauthorized Immigrant Population Profiles,” Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/us-immigration-policy-program-data-hub/unauthorized-immigrant-population-profiles>, accessed November 14, 2016 and U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2010-2014 1-yr estimates
- ¹⁵ Plyler v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202 (1982).
- ¹⁶ 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.