



METRO NORTH WORKFORCE BOARD CASE STUDY

THE IMPORTANCE OF ESOL CLASSES

OBJECTIVES

To demonstrate the significance of ESOL classes. This case study will examine the role of these classes in facilitating language acquisition, promoting social integration, and enhancing economic opportunities for non-native English speakers.

BENEFITS

Improved Employment Opportunities

Enhanced English skills enable individuals to apply for a broader range of jobs and improve their chances of securing employment.

Business and Community Support

Small businesses benefit from having employees who can communicate effectively with customers and suppliers.

Personal Empowerment

Improved language proficiency boosts self-confidence and empowers individuals to be more independent in their daily lives.

AT A GLANCE

Challenges

- Limited Employment Opportunities
- Access to Services
- Educational Barriers

Solutions

- More ESOL classes
- Job Readiness Training offered in different languages
- Partnerships with local employers to create job placement programs for ESOL graduates



“Think about young people coming here learning the language and then being able to find a path that they can get a good job and have a career.”

Jocelyn Marte

Director of Continuing
Education (SCALE)

OVERVIEW OF ESOL NEEDS

34%

Of Metro North residents speak a language other than English at home

25%

Of MA residents speak a language other than English at home

25%

Of Somerville residents speak a language other than English

This data was pulled from the [American Community Survey \(ACS\) of 2023](#).

MassInc published a report [“The Changing Face of Massachusetts”](#) emphasizing the critical role of immigrants in the state’s economy and the urgent need for expanded ESOL services. Today, this need is even more pressing, with nearly **480,000 working-age residents (one-tenth of the Commonwealth’s workforce)** having limited- English proficiency, a figure that significantly impacts the workforce.

The Metro North region, like many areas across the United States, has seen a significant **increase** in its foreign-born population. In 2021, the American Community Survey (ACS) reported that 30% of residents in the Metro North were foreign-born, and 27% of Somerville residents were foreign-born. This shift has brought a wealth of cultural diversity and economic potential, but it has also highlighted a critical need for ESOL programs. Non-native English speakers often face substantial challenges that hinder their ability to integrate into the community, access essential services, and secure stable employment.

Jannette Marte (ABE Advisor at SCALE) stated, *“Language is a huge barrier to employment, understanding the laws about employment, understanding how to communicate with co-workers or their bosses, asking for rights that they have. If you are afraid to ask something because you don’t have the language, it’s almost impossible to initiate any conversations with your employees. When we empower people to speak and to communicate, that’s when the magic happens.”* Individuals arrive with limited English proficiency, which creates barriers not only in communication but also in navigating everyday tasks, such as finding equitable employment.

Through a \$413,000 one-year grant from the City of Somerville’s ARPA fund, The MassHire Metro North Workforce Board (MNWB) addressed the need for ESOL, or “Skill Building,” by launching several successful cohorts in partnership with the City of Somerville, Somerville Center for Adult Learning Experiences (SCALE), and The Welcome Project (TWP). Participants showed significant improvements in language skills, leading to increased confidence, community engagement, and better employment outcomes. The impact extends beyond individual success. By enhancing language skills among immigrants, these programs contribute to the economic health of the Metro North region, filling labor gaps and enriching workplaces with diverse perspectives. Despite successes, demand for ESOL services still exceeds supply. As Massachusetts attracts more immigrants, expanding ESOL programs is both a social and economic imperative, ensuring all residents can fully contribute to the state’s economy and society.

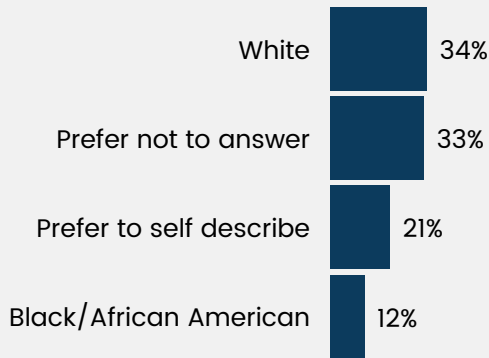
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

91%

Spoke a language other than English at home.

Languages included Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole

Race/Ethnicity

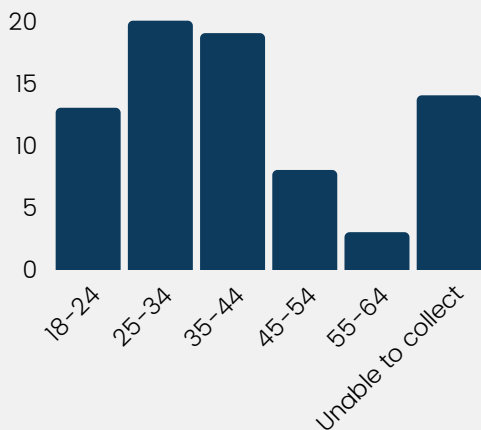


86%

of participants identified as Hispanic/Latino.

43%

of those who reported had a household income of \$25-\$49k.



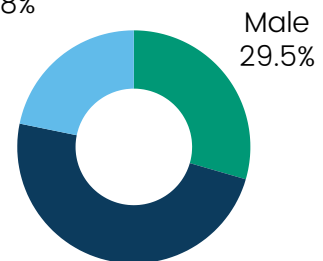
26%

of participants reported to be between the ages of 25-34

Average family size was 2.8 people

Gender Breakdown

Unable to collect 21.8%



Female 48.7%

Participant Pre- and Post-Survey Results

Participants were asked to take a Pre- and Post-survey at the start and end of the program to help program staff understand the knowledge and skills gained through participation, what they liked best, and areas for improvement. 68 participants completed the pre- and post-surveys leading to an 81% response rate. 12 of the participants that filled out the pre- and post-surveys were returning students.

Participants reported they gained confidence in general communication, as well as speaking, reading, and writing English at work.

57% Gained confidence in writing English at work



56% Gained confidence in reading English at work

54% Gained confidence in speaking English at work



50% Gained confidence in general communication

TESTIMONIALS

The ESOL program is one of the most popular programs here because the teachers and the administrators here are really people who are invested in teaching and providing the students with what they need to improve their skills and that's something that the students are always looking [for] because if they are investing time away from their job and their family, they want to come to a program [where] they can really learn those skills they need.

-Jannette Marte, ABE Advisor (SCALE)

The ESOL program is popular because the staff truly invest in helping students gain vital skills.

I feel more confident speaking English—people understand me now.

I feel more confident now when I talk [in] English. Native speakers say they can understand when I am talking. I can talk and communicate. I feel confident, more than I was

-Camila , ESOL Student (SCALE)

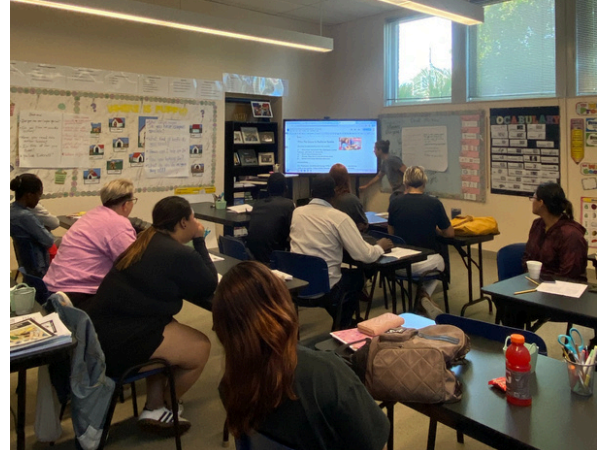
They arrived from the Dominican Republic, she and her husband, and they enrolled in our night program and now she became a family daycare provider, she lives in Somerville, so she opened her own center, and her husband is her assistant. She's exiting the program this summer because she has her own little business and she and her husband were one of the first ones to sign-up when they heard we were going to have the SkillBuilding class. They just got here less than a year ago, but they are thriving and trying to make their lives better.

Joselyn Marte, Director of Continuing Education (SCALE)

One year after arriving, she and her husband are thriving with their own daycare business

CONCLUSION

The need for expanded ESOL services in Massachusetts is undeniable.



As highlighted by the MassInc report, immigrants play a crucial role in the state's economy, yet nearly 480,000 working-age residents face barriers due to limited English proficiency. This impacts their ability to find equitable employment, participate in community life, and access essential services. The Metro North region, with its significant foreign-born population, illustrates both the potential and challenges of this demographic shift.

MNWB's efforts in providing ESOL programs have proven that with the right support, non-native English speakers can overcome language barriers, enhancing their confidence, community involvement, and job prospects. However, the demand for these programs still exceeds supply. As Massachusetts continues to attract a diverse workforce, it is essential to invest in, and expand ESOL services. Doing so will not only help immigrants integrate and thrive, but also strengthen the state's economy, fill labor gaps, and enrich the cultural fabric of the community.

Ultimately, ensuring broader access to ESOL programs is a step toward a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous future for all residents.



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