

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# TALKING JOBS

Lessons from ENB's 2016 ESOL Student Employment Survey

English for New Bostonians' Student Employment Survey offers us a fresh perspective on the demand for ESOL, drawing data from a novel source: immigrant workers, reporting on their own aspirations and on their co-workers' need for English classes. Analyzed in partnership with the National Skills Coalition, *Talking Jobs* demonstrates, above all, the substantial untapped human capital – in terms of foreign work experience, professional credentials, determination and aspiration – that immigrants have to offer our state. Importantly, the survey also yielded information about 700+ MA businesses where immigrants are employed, that will inform our outreach to employers regarding their workers' skill-building needs.

## SURVEY RESPONDENTS

This report draws on data from 1,463 adult students in 39 ESOL programs statewide. Among respondents, 85% are in the labor force (employed or looking for work). Of those who are employed, 53% work full-time, 44% part-time, and 4% on a per-diem basis. Company size varies: 43% work for



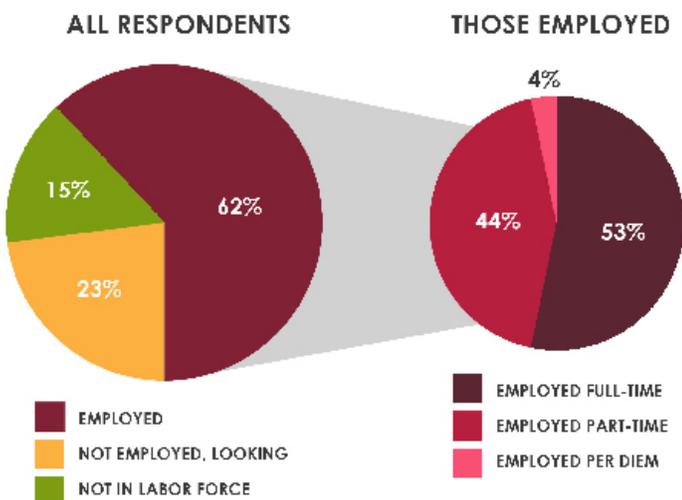
ESOL students at Workplace ESOL Fall River Consortium

companies with more than 50 employees, 32% for firms with between 10 and 50 employees, and 25% work for businesses with under 10 employees. In comparison to the state's overall working population, these ESOL students were roughly a third less likely to work for a large firm, and nearly twice as likely to work for a firm with fewer than 10 employees.

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**Talking Jobs highlights an unmet demand for adult ESOL classes in Massachusetts.**

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## EMPLOYMENT SECTORS

Key employment sectors include accommodation and food services, retail, other services (such as barber, auto repair), and healthcare and social assistance. Survey respondents, who are by definition limited English speakers, are under-represented in finance; insurance; scientific, professional, and technical services; and other white collar jobs compared to Massachusetts immigrants overall.

High concentrations of ESOL students in select industry sectors suggest a natural starting point for

engaging employer partners. Trade associations might take a leadership role in forming collaborations across employers, especially in the case of smaller firms. State and local policymakers, as well as ESOL providers, might also attune policy

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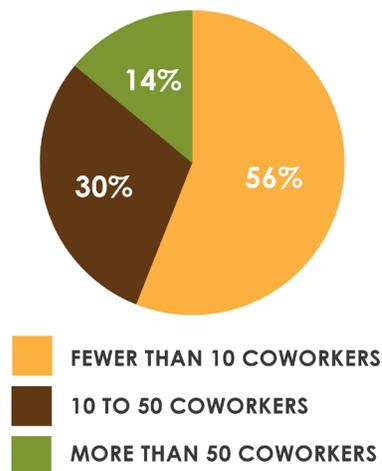
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and resources to key sectors, as well as to small and mid-size firms. Survey findings also align with recent reports that temp agencies represent a significant gateway to employment for immigrants in some industries, suggesting another entry point for collaboration and policy and resource focus.

### IDENTIFYING NEEDS

Importantly, survey results point to “credentials waste” – an immigrant architect now selling cell phones, an auditor working in a pizzeria, a dentist making fruit smoothies – suggesting **the need for customized ESOL for professionals**, and, again, corresponding policy and resources.

**NUMBER OF COWORKERS  
NEEDING ENGLISH CLASSES\***



\*Among respondents who identified English as a need

Significantly, **a full half (50%) of employed survey respondents said their co-workers also need English classes**. And while 77% of respondents said their supervisor knows they take ESOL classes, it is not known whether higher-level managers are similarly informed – a key area for exploration, as employers’ familiarity with skill gaps is crucial to initiating remedies.

*Talking Jobs* points to unmet demand for adult ESOL classes in Massachusetts. Going forward, ENB and participating ESOL programs can work closely with employers identified by respondents – plus additional companies in industries that employ large numbers of limited English proficient workers – to design and offer on-site ESOL classes for employees. **At a policy level, key levers can include work-based learning, industry sector partnerships to create career pathways, incumbent worker training, and combined**



*ESOL student, formerly a biologist in Iraq*

**ESOL/basic skills with occupation-specific training.** The findings are particularly timely as ESOL programs redesign and deepen their labor market connections under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

*Talking Jobs* fuels our optimism for the possibilities ahead as well as our commitment to continued advocacy. The report makes a data-informed case for investments in the untapped human capital that is found throughout Massachusetts.