



# english for NEW BOSTONIANS

## ESOL Will Help Fuel Boston's Equitable Economic and Educational Recovery English for New Bostonians Position Paper, Fall 2021

*Boston's full recovery and reinvention as an equitable, inclusive city is integrally tied to that of its immigrant communities. Policy and resource investment strategies by our next Mayor and City Council should recognize immigrants as assets by ensuring availability of English classes for all.*

### THE CHALLENGE

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The Covid-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on Boston's economy, and crisis on immigrant workers, families and businesses. Rapid contraction of key sectors such as hospitality resulted in job loss for thousands of workers with limited English skills and no safety net.<sup>i</sup> Meanwhile, our region faces workforce shortages. The pandemic laid bare long-existing inequities and the reality that Boston's and Massachusetts' well-being is integrally tied to the well-being of immigrant communities. One in five Massachusetts workers is an immigrant.<sup>ii</sup> Foreign-born residents have buoyed population growth and the labor force. Recent Census data remind us: Immigrants, and welcoming immigrants, are central to Massachusetts' economic success.<sup>iii</sup>

The numbers bear review: Immigrants comprise 20% of our state's workforce<sup>iv</sup> and 24% of entrepreneurs<sup>v</sup> Yet close to 10% of MA residents speak limited English.<sup>vi</sup> Boston alone is home to 100,000 limited-English speaking adults – 11% of all Boston adults.<sup>vii</sup> In Boston Public Schools, English learners comprise 32% of students<sup>viii</sup> and nearly half of all students speak a language other than English at home,<sup>ix</sup> indicating many parents and caregivers may have difficulty communicating with their child's teachers. Recent data confirm English learners fell farthest behind during at-home schooling, their road back is the longest.

### WHAT'S NEEDED?

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**Adopt an Welcome to All ESOL Policy.** All limited English speakers — newcomers and others who have not had an opportunity to enroll in English classes — should have information, immediate access, and guaranteed ESOL hours and orientation to Boston as join the city's workforce, neighborhoods and school communities.

**Listen to employers. Leverage this historic labor shortage.** Employers nationwide and here at home are struggling to find and retain workers. City leaders, worker and immigrant advocates, and workforce and ESOL organizations should use this moment to press for job quality and English and workforce training. Boston's healthcare, hospitality, higher education and retail businesses large and small – rely on our immigrant workforce, while others such as high tech and finance *lack* diversity, especially at the top, They should be doing all they can to find, grow and promote immigrant talent. *English classes for employees at all levels should form part of the City and private employers' Equity, Diversity and Economic Justice Agenda.*

Businesses should be encouraged and assisted to examine wage and benefit scales, to provide release time for English and other training, and to ensure clear pathways to advancement are clearly communicated and accessible to all. Through its **English Works Business Council**, ENB is gathering input on job trends and workplace ESOL needs, unifying a business voice on immigrant workforce issues, facilitating collaboration and sharing best practices to meet needs of the fast-growing immigrant workforce.

**Expand Opportunities to Learn English at Work.** ENB has developed successful models for teaching English to incumbent frontline workers and managers, in partnership with manufacturing, restaurant, and supermarket employers. ENB also trains and assists ESOL providers to deliver high-quality workplace ESOL.

**Add \$10 million in American Rescue Plan Act and regular City funds over three years.** Additional dollars should support integrated English, workforce training, job coaching, and wrap-around supports such as childcare. Investments can help close the persistent funding gap in adult ESOL by: 1) addressing unmet need in both breadth and depth of services; 2) supporting innovation and bringing to scale tested approaches, and 3) turning the tide of widespread turnover among the largely part-time, underpaid ESOL teacher workforce.

**Stabilize and strengthen ESOL program capacity.** Through the pandemic, ESOL teachers and leaders have been stretched (beyond) thin, but also incredibly creative in delivering remote classes and connecting students with food, cash assistance and other resources. ESOL providers continue to test hybrid models and respond to shifting labor market conditions. Adaptations mean increased costs for new approaches to recruit and on-board students for remote or hybrid learning, planning and prep time, training, professional development, peer learning, and curriculum development. Equipment funds are also needed for devices, hotspots and Internet.

**Ensure diverse ESOL models for diverse immigrants.** Varying levels of formal education and previous work experience; current family/work circumstances; and goals for the future are just some of the factors that should influence program design. We need models realistic for adults who never held a pencil, for professionals seeking English to re-start careers in U.S. labor market, and everyone in-between.

- **Design classes around schedules and skills immigrant workers need. Most adult English learners are employed, but too often *under-employed in low-wage, part-time or temporary positions.*** Job coaching is essential for entry, retention and advancement. For example, **ENB's Immigrant Futures in the Food Industry** includes contextualized English, food safety and manufacturing best practices, and job coaching – offered in the evening, in hybrid format both pre *and* post-employment, with participant stipends and employer agreements in place. The goal is full-time, permanent employment with benefits and advancement opportunities—a win win for workers and companies.
- **Enable immigrant to support their children's education and have a voice in school and district decision-making.** ENB's ESOL for Parents and Caregivers classes helps two generations by enabling parents to learn English and navigate the school system; advocate for their children; assist with homework; build literacy skills; and prepare for college. ESOL for Parents leads to increased engagement in children's learning and in schools. With current Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds, plus far-reaching innovations in online and hybrid (virtual+face-to-face) learning models developed during the pandemic, ENB has proposed to Boston Public Schools an expansion of ESOL for Parents.
- **Provide a pathway to economic sustainability for students of *all* immigration statuses.** Our nation's broken immigration system leaves some who've been our neighbors for decades without a pathway to citizenship or work authorization. Yet *all* Bostonians need a family-sustaining income. In addition to integrated English+skills training for jobs in robust economic sectors, the City's workforce development and ESOL system should offer immigrants options in entrepreneurship, cooperative ownership, and independent contracting. City staff should review restrictions on adult ESOL, workforce training and business technical assistance funds and, where possible, eliminate any that curtail options for immigrants.

In ENB's English for Immigrant Entrepreneurs, business owners gain skills and confidence to pitch products and services to customers and lenders, to build websites and business plans. Co-op owners learn English and skills via a social cohesion model familiar to many participants from their home countries.

**Double down on remote learning and digital literacy skills.** Remote learning eased barriers to access for many with childcare, transportation and work or other schedule conflicts. In surveys, many students said they preferred the convenience, though they missed practice time, extra help, and informal time to ask questions and socialize

with classmates. ENB helps teachers creatively accommodate these needs through volunteer-led breakout groups, and conversational opportunities. Investment in testing and scaling remote learning options will help integrate many who would not otherwise access English classes.

Every student should gain experience learning online, blending English and digital literacy with skills training for in-demand occupations or business ownership. ENB's digital literacy curriculum helps teachers prepare incoming students to access remote and blended ESOL classes; once connected and enrolled, those students continue to build digital skills essential for completing on-line applications, communicating with supervisors and co-workers, and carrying out basic job functions.

**Draw on Bostonians' good will to assist their immigrant neighbors in learning English.** Remote instruction makes tech-savvy, volunteers more essential, and volunteering easier. City leadership can have a significant impact by calling upon professionals, students, retirees and neighbors to step up and join Allies for Immigrants ESOL Corps (led by ENB and Boston Cares). Allies support teachers and help students get online and build confidence through individual and small group practice sessions.

## **ENGLISH FOR NEW BOSTONIANS – LEADING ESOL INNOVATION AND EXCELLENCE**

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English for New Bostonians (ENB) is the City's partner in creating opportunities for immigrants to learn English and pursue their educational, economic and civic aspirations. ENB was spearheaded in 2001 by the Boston Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement and Office of Workforce Development, local foundations, and immigrant leaders to address the urgent need for English classes to meet the needs of Boston's burgeoning immigrant population. ENB is now an independent non-profit; City nominations to ENB's Board of Directors are made by the Mayor of Boston. Grants, donations, and service contracts from the City of Boston, foundations, donors and businesses support ENB's innovation and system leadership.

ENB provides citywide ESOL coordination, program support, teacher training, piloting/evaluation of customized initiatives (e.g., workplace, parent, and entrepreneurs), plus oversight to enable 23 high-caliber ESOL programs to serve immigrant jobseekers, parents, and small business owners. Funded programs include grassroots immigrant-led organizations and larger human service and housing agencies. ENB forges multi-sector partnerships that address mutual educational, career readiness, and racial/ethnic equity goals. ENB also conducts intensive data and best practice analysis, sharing findings across adult education and workforce development fields.

Through its longstanding English Works Campaign, ENB highlights the critical role of immigrants and the imperative for ESOL funding and system coordination. Early in the pandemic, ENB launched the English Works Business Council to provide input on job trends and workplace ESOL needs, to elevate a business voice on immigrant workforce issues, and to facilitate collaboration/best practices to meet the needs of Greater Boston's fast-growing immigrant workforce.

ENB is laser-focused on policy change and program expansion to help immigrants regain their economic footing and support their children's educational recovery and success. ENB has the staff talent, experience, and know-how to test, refine, and bring to scale economic advancement models designed to unlock the talents of immigrants. ENB initiatives offer not only a way for new Bostonians to regain their voices and find a route out of poverty, but a key strategy to fuel just and equitable economic recovery.

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<sup>i</sup> Boston Indicators Project: Fund Rapid Reemployment for a Just and Equitable Recovery, March 19, 2021.

<sup>ii</sup> American Immigration Council, August 6, 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> Boston Business Journal, September 18, 2020. (Editorial: James E. Rooney, CEO and President of Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce).

<sup>iv</sup> American Immigration Council, August 6, 2020.

<sup>v</sup> New American Economy "Entrepreneurship and Immigrants in America."

<sup>vi</sup> Boston Planning and Development Agency, 2019.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> Boston Public Schools data.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid.