

# TALKING JOBS

Lessons from ENB's 2016 ESOL Student Employment Survey



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## About English for New Bostonians and Partners

**English for New Bostonians'** (ENB) mission is to increase access to high-quality English learning opportunities for immigrants. ENB provides program support, training, and technical assistance to 25 organizations citywide, and has piloted and brought to scale special initiatives including ESOL for Parents and Caregivers and ESOL for Entrepreneurs.

English for New Bostonians' **English Works Campaign** is a pioneering effort founded in 2008 that highlights the powerful impact that English language acquisition can have for immigrant workers and for the employers who benefit from their talents. The Campaign unites community, business, labor and civic leaders around the goal of creating a high-quality ESOL system and has resulted in greater attention to immigrant labor force needs, policy changes, and new workplace ESOL partnerships across the state. English Works Campaign Organizer Franklin Peralta oversaw the ESOL Student Employment Survey.

As part of its strategy to promote private sector investment in ESOL, ENB and English Works have collaborated with **Commonwealth Corporation** (CommCorp), a quasi-public agency whose mission is to strengthen the skills of Massachusetts youth and adults by investing in innovative partnerships with industry, education and workforce organizations. CommCorp helped to support this survey, with the goal of identifying Massachusetts employers that may have an interest in increasing the language and other workplace skills of their employees.

ENB is deeply grateful to the **National Skills Coalition**, especially NSC **Senior Policy Analyst Amanda Bergson-Shilcock**, who, recognizing the importance of listening to an immigrant voice as a roadmap on workforce issues, has analyzed the data for this *Talking Jobs* report. NSC is a broad-based coalition of advocates from business, labor, community colleges, community-based organizations, and the public workforce system. A nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, NSC works toward a vision of an America that grows its economy by investing in its people so that every worker in every industry has the skills to compete and prosper. NSC and its members engage in organizing, advocacy, and communications to advance state and federal policies that support these goals.

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## Executive Summary

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 coworkers' 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 for our state. Importantly, the survey also yielded information about 700+ MA businesses at which immigrants are employed, that will inform our outreach to employers regarding their workers' skill-building needs.

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 companies with 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.

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 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. 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.

Significantly, a full half (50%) of employed survey respondents said their coworkers 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 MA. 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/basic skills with occupation-specific training. Employers might also encourage or incentivize employees to take ESOL classes off-site. 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.

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## I. Introduction

In community centers and classrooms across Massachusetts, the quiet dreams and hopeful ambitions of hundreds of new Americans are flourishing. In these spaces, men and women who are just beginning to learn English come together with fellow classmates to acquire one of the most powerful tools an immigrant can possess: Fluency in their new country's language.

In their home countries, these immigrants were bankers and real estate agents, police officers and doctors, seamstresses and receptionists. They were homemakers and students, graphic designers and cashiers. They were television presenters, newspaper editors, and electricians. Some tended bar, others kept the books. One danced as a ballerina, another managed a baseball team. Still others faced economic despair, in countries where jobs were scarce and required connections.

Here, in Massachusetts, they put food on the table by taking whatever work they can find. They work for janitorial companies and in hospital kitchens. They sell coffee and doughnuts, flowers and pizza. They take care of elders and children. They clean homes and park cars.

In between work and family responsibilities, they study. Their hunger for more – the drive that propelled them to cross a continent or an ocean to reach the United States – now brings them into the classroom. English is their passport to economic opportunity, their ticket to the middle class. Regardless of how recently they have arrived, they know instinctively what research confirms: English is the single best investment they can make in their American future.

This report represents one small slice of their stories. Based on survey responses from nearly 1,500 immigrants across the Bay State, it captures key attributes of students in dozens of community-based English programs. The findings outlined here help to illuminate their current employment status, industry sector, type of employer, and size of company. Findings also explore the benefits available to respondents via their employers, including opportunities for training



and advancement, predictable schedules to allow for class participation, and more.

Crucially, the individual anonymous responses to this survey also provide basic information about hundreds of Massachusetts businesses in which immigrants are employed. As described below, the company data has been compiled separately, and will help to inform future outreach to these firms to discuss their workers' skill-building needs.

The findings presented here also provide a fresh perspective on the demand for English language classes. Typically, this information is calculated by surveying adult education organizations about their waiting lists, or by asking businesses about language needs among their employees. In this report, data comes from a novel source: immigrant workers reporting on whether their coworkers need English classes.

But perhaps the most significant finding is described above: The gap between the substantial human capital (often including foreign credentials) that immigrants bring with them to Massachusetts, and their ability to exercise their full talents and abilities in our Commonwealth. This untapped expertise represents a valuable opportunity for Massachusetts employers and for our economy and society as a whole. Bolstering our investment in the programs and policies that facilitate English language learning is a vital step in closing the gap and ensuring that today's immigrants can contribute to their highest and best abilities.

## Immigration in Massachusetts

Massachusetts is home to just over 1 million immigrants, who comprise 16% of the total population or just over 1 in 6 residents<sup>1</sup>. Among working-age (18-64) Bay State residents, 10% have limited English skills. In terms of educational attainment, adult immigrants in Massachusetts are more likely than US-born residents to have less than a high school education (23% compared to 7%), but also slightly more likely to have a graduate degree (19% to 18%).

Consistent with national trends, immigrants in Massachusetts have a slightly higher labor force participation rate (68%) than US-born individuals (67%).

### 1 IN 6 MA RESIDENTS IS AN IMMIGRANT



## II. About this Survey

The survey was completed by 1,463 participants in 39 English language programs across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Given ENB's local funding footprint and networks, a majority of programs were based

<sup>1</sup> Data about Massachusetts immigrants in general is drawn from the Migration Policy Institute's tabulation of 2014 US Census Bureau data, viewable at: [www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/MA](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/MA)

in the Greater Boston area. However, eight were based in other parts of the state, including Lawrence, Framingham, Brockton, and Springfield. These eight programs served approximately one in six (17%) of survey respondents.

Approximately half of all respondents completed the survey online and in English. The remainder of respondents completed paper survey forms, primarily in English. (A handful were administered the questions in Vietnamese.)

While survey respondents reflect a broad array of immigrants to the Bay State, the survey was not a random sample. In particular, there are important differences between survey respondents and Massachusetts immigrants overall in terms of their employment rate and industry of employment. We explore these differences further in our analysis below.

A copy of the survey instrument is included as an appendix to this report. ENB has made it available for service providers or advocates in other states to adapt for their own purposes. **If the survey tool is used in other settings, ENB requests that credit be given as follows:** "This survey is adapted from an instrument originally developed by English for New Bostonians ([www.englishfornewbostonians.org](http://www.englishfornewbostonians.org))."

In addition to this overall report, ENB is providing individualized reports to each of the programs whose ESOL students participated in the survey. These individual reports provide survey results from the subset of respondents who are enrolled in a particular ESOL program. Programs can use these results to better understand the issues facing their students, compare their students to survey respondents overall, and inform their outreach to employers and other potential program partners.

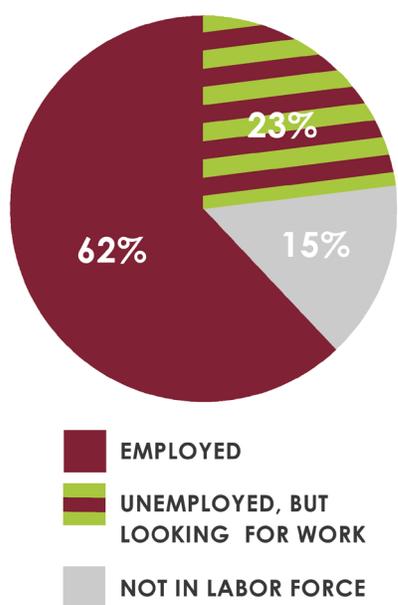
In addition, ENB anticipates that both the overall and program-specific survey results will help to inform the ongoing implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the primary federal funding stream supporting adult education and ESOL programs. Changes made to the WIOA legislation during Congressional reauthorization in 2014 place greater emphasis on the role of adult education

programs in preparing students for employment and postsecondary education, as well as the importance of employer engagement across the WIOA system.

### III. Overarching Trends

This section analyzes survey responses across all of the participating programs. As described above, a total of 1,463 students from 39 programs responded to the survey. Slightly more than quarter (28%) were beginner-level English students, 31% were at the low-intermediate level, and the remaining 42% at the high-intermediate level.<sup>2</sup>

#### RESPONDENTS' LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION



The overwhelming majority of respondents (85%) were in the labor force – that is, either currently employed or looking for work. This number is substantially higher than among Massachusetts immigrants overall, among whom just 68% are in the labor force.<sup>3</sup> However, although survey respondents were more

likely to be in the labor force than Massachusetts immigrants overall, they were not more likely to be employed. Sixty-two percent (62%) of all survey respondents were employed. Among the subset of respondents who are in the labor force, 14% were unemployed, versus 7% unemployed in Massachusetts as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Below, we explore trends in survey responses for both working and nonworking respondents.

### IV. Specific Results

#### a. Working Students

Among working ESOL students, just over half (53%, or 472 individuals) were employed full-time. An additional 44% were employed part-time, and 4% were employed on a per-diem basis. While comparison data for Massachusetts immigrants overall is not available, it is possible that part-time and per diem workers are over-represented among ENB survey respondents because attending classes is harder to do for full-time workers.

There were no statistically significant differences in terms of respondents' English class level by their employment status. In other words, full-time workers were no more likely than part-timers or per diem workers to be enrolled in a higher-level English class. The most likely explanation for this finding comes from ENB programs, which report anecdotally that when students' English improves enough to allow them to find full-time work, they often cease to attend ESOL classes because of conflicts with their work schedules.<sup>5</sup>

Five percent (5%) of respondents reported owning their own business. While this number is below the threshold of self-employed immigrants in

<sup>2</sup> Because different ESOL programs use different terms to designate their various class levels, our analysis categorized the data to ensure comparability across programs.

<sup>3</sup> Data is for adults age 16 and older. The source is Migration Policy Institute's tabulation of 2014 US Census Bureau data, viewable at: [www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state-demographics/MA](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state-demographics/MA)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> A second potential explanation is that this finding may be an artifact of other variables that were not measured by the survey, such as how recently a respondent had arrived in the United States. E.g., a new arrival with reasonably good English skills might have enrolled in a higher-level class, but not yet found full-time work.

**TABLE A: Type of Employment Based on Company Size**

<i>Employee Status</i>	<i>Company with less than 10 employees</i>	<i>Company with 10 to 50 employees</i>	<i>Company with more than 50 employees</i>	<i>Total (may not sum to 100 due to rounding)</i>
<i>Full-time</i>	26%	28%	45%	100%
<i>Part-time</i>	22%	37%	41%	100%
<i>Per diem</i>	54%	18%	29%	100%

Massachusetts overall (7%), it is consistent with practitioner experience that it is challenging for entrepreneurs to find time to attend ESOL classes, particularly if they own retail businesses that require their constant presence. Moreover, general ESOL classes may not provide content that meets the specific needs of a small business owner.

The overwhelming number of respondents (88%) reported that they work directly for a company, with 12% of respondents saying that they work for a temporary agency. While comparison data for Massachusetts immigrants overall is not available, 2013 figures from the US Department of Labor suggest that temp workers comprise less than 2% of the U.S. workforce.<sup>6</sup> Other recent reports have affirmed that temp agencies represent a significant pathway to employment for immigrants in some industries.<sup>7</sup>

Unsurprisingly, ENB survey respondents who reported working per diem were far more likely to be working for a temporary agency, at 32% compared to 12% of part-time workers and 10% of full-time workers.

<sup>6</sup> US DOL statistic cited in “The 4 a.m. Army” (ProPublica/Time Magazine, June 27, 2013.) Viewable at: <http://nation.time.com/2013/06/27/the-4-am-army/#ixzz2XW4uyZ00>. Percentage computed based on US Census American Community Survey 2014 data showing total US workforce of 159.5 million.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., “Immigrants Turn to Job Agencies for the American Dream” (Los Angeles Times, March 7, 2014), viewable at: [www.latimes.com/local/la-me-ff-cl-chinese-employment-agencies-20140307-dto-htmistory.html](http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-ff-cl-chinese-employment-agencies-20140307-dto-htmistory.html) and A City of Immigrant Workers: Building a Workforce Strategy to Support All New Yorkers (Center for an Urban Future and Center for Popular Democracy, 2016), viewable at: <https://nycfuture.org/research/publications/a-city-of-immigrant-workers-building-a-workforce-strategy-to-support-all-ne>

There was substantial variation in the size of the employer for which respondents worked. A plurality (43%) of respondents work for companies of more than 50 employees. Another 32% work for companies of between 10 and 50 employees, and the remaining 25% work for very small companies with fewer than 10 employees.



By comparison, among all Massachusetts employers, 62% of workers (including both US-born and immigrants) work for companies of 50 or more employees, 25% of workers are employed in companies of 10 to 49 employees, and just 13% are employed in very small companies of fewer than 10 employees.<sup>8</sup>

There were small but statistically significant differences among survey respondents in the size of the company by type of employment. **See Table A.** Perhaps unsurprisingly, full-time workers were more likely to work for a company with more than 50 employees. A full 45% of full-timers worked at these larger

<sup>8</sup> Data from Massachusetts Department of Labor and Workforce Development, “Establishments and Employment by Size,” 2015. Viewable at: <http://lmi2.detma.org/lmi/sizeclass.asp>

companies. Part-time workers were more likely than other workers to be employed by mid-sized companies of 10 to 50 employees, with 37% of part-timers falling into this category. Finally, per diem workers were by far the most likely to report working for small businesses of fewer than 10 employees. More than half (54%) of per diem workers were employed at such businesses.

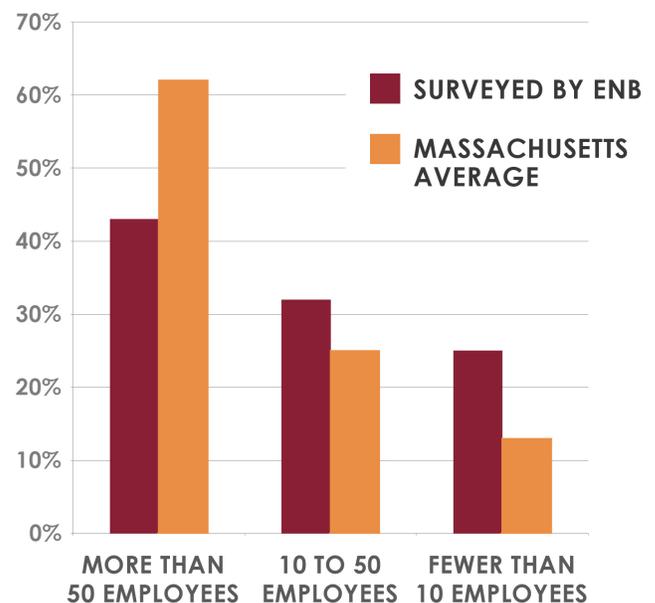
Respondents' industry of employment reflected heavy concentration in four major sectors: accommodation and food services; retail trade; other services (which includes facilities support such as janitorial services); and healthcare and social assistance. See Table B.

**TABLE B: Distribution of Workers Across Industries**

Industry Sector	Percentage of Working Students Employed in Sector
Accommodation and food services	24%
Retail trade	18%
Other services	18%
Healthcare and social assistance	17%
Manufacturing	8%
Educational services	4%
Transportation and warehousing	4%
Administrative support and waste management	2%
Construction	2%
Wholesale trade	1%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	1%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	1%
Finance and insurance	0%

Included within the accommodations and food service industry category are hotels and a wide variety of restaurants, from large chains to smaller establishments. The retail trade industry category encompasses businesses such as gas stations, clothing stores, supermarkets, and convenience stores. The "other services" category covers a broad range of industry sub-sectors, from barbers and beauty salons to cleaning services and auto repair. The healthcare and social assistance category includes childcare businesses, home health agencies, hospitals, and rehabilitation centers, among others.

### EMPLOYER FIRM SIZE



While exact comparison data is not available, there are some suggestive differences between survey respondents and Massachusetts immigrant workers overall. For example, more than twice as many survey respondents (18%) work in retail trade, compared to Massachusetts immigrants overall (8%).<sup>9</sup> In contrast, while less than 1% of survey respondents works in finance and insurance, 6% of overall MA immigrants are employed in finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing. Survey respondents are similarly under-represented in professional, scientific, and

<sup>9</sup> Numbers for MA immigrants overall are drawn from Migration Policy Institute's tabulation of US Census Bureau data, viewable at: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/workforce/MA>

technical services compared to the state's immigrants overall.

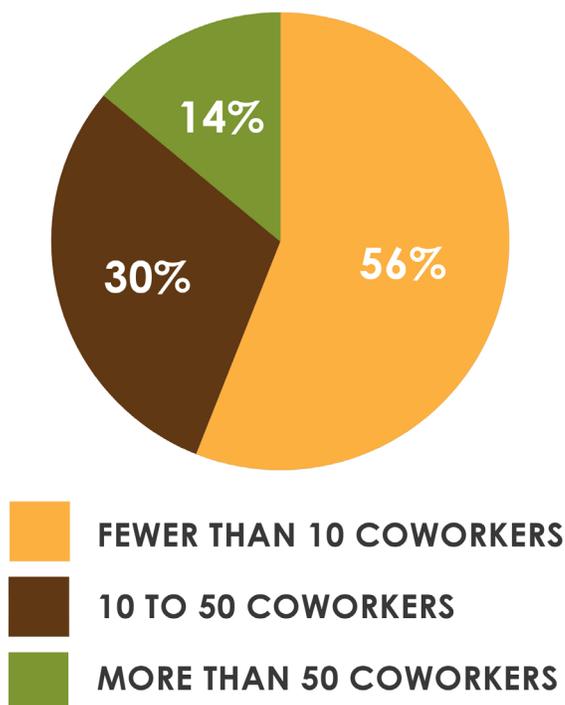
A key factor underlying these findings is language skills. Fully 60% of Massachusetts immigrant workers overall are native English speakers or speak English very well.<sup>10</sup> This is in stark comparison to the population of survey respondents, who by definition have limited English skills. These findings also affirm the reality that the lack of language skills may prevent even immigrants who have foreign credentials and professional experience from obtaining white-collar employment.

Respondents were also asked about the potential demand for English language classes at their workplace. In particular, they were asked: "Are there other workers at the company who need English classes?" Half of respondents (453 people) said yes. Of those, 14% estimated that there were more than 50 employees at their companies who needed such assistance. Another 30% of respondents said between 10 and 50 employees needed English classes, and 56% said there were fewer than 10 employees who needed such assistance. The remaining half (453 people) said they were uncertain whether other workers at their company needed English classes.

In order to help gauge employer awareness of the need for English language classes among their employees, and their employees' participation in such classes, respondents were also asked if their supervisor knew they were taking ESOL classes. A strong majority (77%) of respondents reported that their supervisor did know they were taking classes. Just 12% said their supervisor did not know, and 11% were not sure if their supervisor knew.

Perhaps not surprisingly, workers at smaller companies were slightly more likely to say that their supervisor was aware they were taking English classes. Eighty-four percent (84%) of workers in companies of fewer than 10 employees reported that their supervisor knew, compared to 79% of workers in companies of 10 to 50 employees, and 71% of workers in companies of more than 50 employees.

## NUMBER OF COWORKERS NEEDING ENGLISH CLASSES\*



\*Among respondents who identified English as a need

### *Employee Benefits*

The survey also explored whether respondents' companies were making investments in their skills and providing opportunities for growth. Respondents were asked about whether their company provided tuition assistance or reimbursement, fixed schedules, opportunities for promotion, and training to help employees do their jobs better.

Each of these benefits has important implications for English learners: Fixed schedules can make it easier for students to attend classes regularly, while having opportunities for promotion can inspire them to build English and other skills in order to qualify for promotion. Tuition assistance is both a symbolic and a tangible investment in a worker's continued upskilling, while in-house training can also signal the company's interest in retaining and promoting workers.

As the analysis below explains, individuals who work for large employers of more than 50 employees are

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* Number is for immigrant workers age 25 and older.

## RESPONDENTS RECEIVING WORK BENEFITS



more likely to report having access to many of these benefits. This is especially important to note given that over half (57%) of survey respondents are employed in smaller companies that are less likely to offer such benefits.

Sixty percent (60%) of respondents reported that their company provides them with a fixed schedule. However, one-third (33%) said their company did not provide such a schedule, and 7% were not sure. It is notable that a full 1 in 3 survey respondents do not have a predictable work schedule. Anecdotal evidence from English language programs indicates that students whose work schedules are constantly changing often struggle to maintain consistent class attendance.

Only a very small minority (9%) reported that their employer provided tuition assistance or reimbursement, although another 26% said that they did not know if such reimbursement was available. The remaining 66% said that their company did not offer such a benefit. As is true in the general population in the U.S., individuals who worked at larger companies were more likely to report having tuition benefits.

A small number of respondents (34%) said that their employers offered them opportunities for promotion. An additional 22% said they were not sure, and a full 43% said that their companies did not offer them opportunities for promotion. Without additional data it is difficult to know for certain what factors may

lie behind this finding, although it is likely that that respondents' occupation plays a role. For example, individuals who are working as home health aides may not see a career ladder for themselves within their current company, even if there are opportunities in the healthcare field overall.

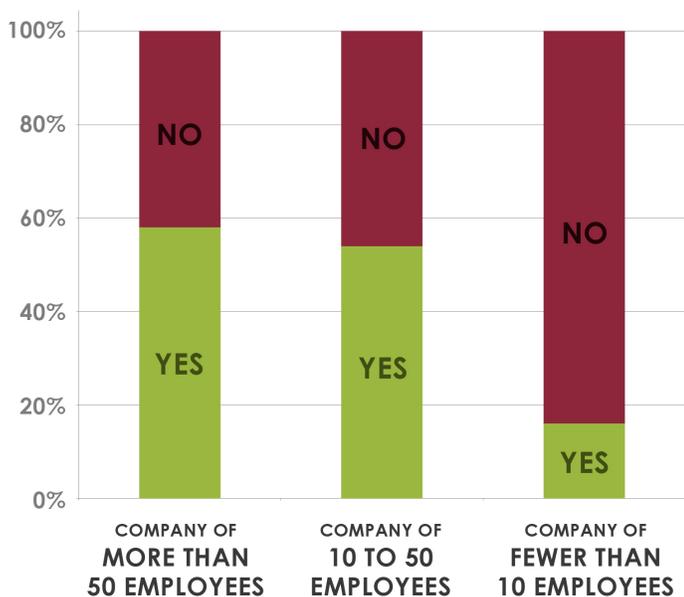
Again, those working at larger companies were more likely to report having opportunities for promotion. This is not surprising given that large companies by definition have more employees, and may have a greater number and/or variety of mid-level roles into which entry-level workers could be promoted.<sup>11</sup> What is more surprising is that even in larger companies, the results demonstrate that fewer than half of respondents have such opportunities. Forty-two percent (42%) of respondents working at companies of more than 50 employees reported having opportunities for promotion, compared to 34% of those at companies of 10 to 50 employees, and just 24% of those at companies of fewer than 10 employees.

Approximately half (49%) of respondents said that their employers provide them with training, while 37% said their company did not provide training and 14% were not sure. Respondents reported participating in a wide range of training opportunities. A few were

<sup>11</sup> However, some companies in the retail or home-health sectors are characterized by an abundance of entry-level positions and very few mid-level positions, so it cannot be assumed that companies with large numbers of employees automatically have numerous opportunities for promotion.

narrowly task-oriented, such as learning how to sort recyclables, operate a sewing machine, or make a sushi roll. Many were transferrable skills, such as food safety, infection control, patient safety, and computer skills. A smaller number described more sophisticated training that involved reflection and iteration, such as providing high-quality customer service, engaging in legal advocacy, working with Alzheimer’s patients, or

### EMPLOYEES OFFERED TRAINING BASED ON COMPANY SIZE



discussing real-life case examples from an educational program with colleagues.

Individuals at the largest companies were more likely to be offered training, with 58% of those at companies of over 50 employees reporting that their company provided such training. Nearly as many (54%) respondents at mid-sized companies of 10 to 50 employees reported that their company offered training, and just 16% of those at businesses of fewer than 10 employees. A handful of respondents volunteered the manner of training they received – online or in-person – and unsurprisingly, all of the respondents who reported having online training were working for large chains.

### *b. Nonworking Students*

Overall, just over one-third (38%) of respondents said they were not currently working. More than half

of nonworking students (62%) said that they were currently looking for work. Perhaps partially explaining their unemployed status, just 42% of nonworking students reported that they had any past US work experience.

As noted above, survey respondents in general were more likely to be in the labor force than Massachusetts immigrants overall, but also more likely to be unemployed. Indeed, individuals’ very presence in English classes means they are trying to improve their language skills, often because they want to obtain a job or advance in the workplace.<sup>12</sup>

Nonworking students were asked about what types of work they would like to do in the future. They were allowed to select more than one answer to the question. See Table C on page 13 for responses.



### *c. Comparison of working vs. nonworking students*

While the categories are not directly comparable, it is notable that nonworking students’ ideas about their future occupations as shown in Table C diverged somewhat from how working students reported their current industries in Table B on page 9.

It is possible that differences here reflect the fact that the survey allowed nonworking students to select more

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Adult Education Participation in 2004-05, “Reasons for Participation.” (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006.) Viewable at: [https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/adulted/tables/table\\_2.asp?referrer=report](https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/adulted/tables/table_2.asp?referrer=report)

**TABLE C: Type of Work That Respondents Would Like to Do**

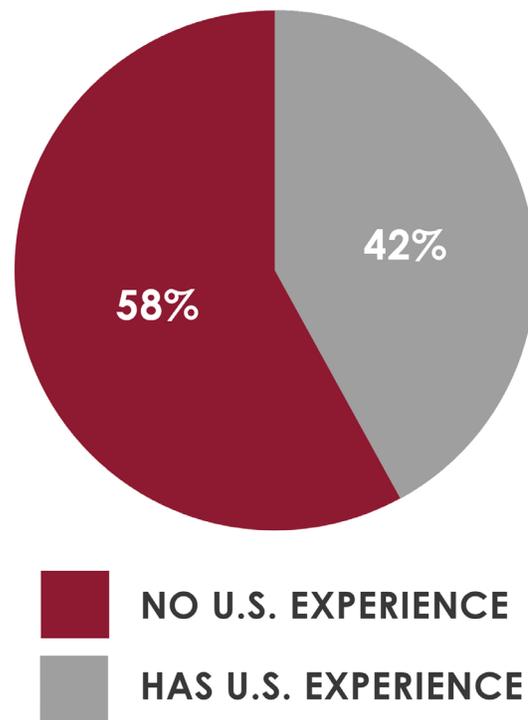
Type of Work	Percent (could select more than one)
Healthcare (nursing, C.N.A., technician, home health aide, etc.)	32%
Customer Service (store clerk, server, etc.)	23%
Child development (childcare provider, etc.)	22%
Other	18%
Small business owner (store, restaurant, beauty salon, etc.)	18%
Food operation (cook, etc.)	17%
Education (teacher, etc.)	17%
Cleaning and maintenance (housekeeping, janitorial, etc.)	17%
Factory worker (manufacturing, food production, etc.)	16%
IT (computer technician, electronics, etc.)	11%
Financial operations (accountant, teller, etc.)	11%

than one occupational category as being of interest. In other words, they may have been demonstrating open-mindedness about a variety of career possibilities, rather than unrealistic expectations about their prospects.

For example, while 17% of nonworking respondents expressed an interest in working in education, just 4% of working students are currently employed in the educational services sector. Similarly, 11% of nonworking students were interested in financial

operations, while less than 1% of employed students were in the finance and insurance sector. Interestingly, twice as many nonworking students (16%) expressed an interest in manufacturing jobs, as working students (8%) were in such jobs.

### EXPERIENCE OF NONWORKING STUDENTS



There were no statistically significant differences in English class levels between working and nonworking students. That is, working students were no more likely to be in a higher-level English class than nonworking students. There are a variety of potential explanations for this finding, but the most likely – as noted above in the discussion on English class levels and employment – is that as students’ language abilities increase, they are more likely to find work, and to find full-time work in particular, thus leaving less time to participate in classes.

Finally, both working and nonworking students were asked about their occupation in their home country. Respondents’ open-ended answers included an extraordinarily rich variety of careers, from tour bus drivers and factory workers to web developers,



pharmacists, and accountants. There were no glaring differences between the former occupations of employed students versus those who are not working. This congruence suggests that home country occupational background is not the primary factor that has thus far prevented jobseekers from finding work. It is more likely, as mentioned above, that the lack of US job experience is hampering their efforts.<sup>13</sup>

## V. Policy and Programmatic Implications

The findings described above affirm the integral role that English language programs play in the lives of immigrant workers in Massachusetts. Survey results also provide a vivid illustration of the breadth and diversity of the immigrant workforce in our Commonwealth. From small companies to large ones, from service-sector jobs to manufacturing, adult English learners are deeply interwoven in the labor force.

Survey findings also point to the sobering reality of so-called “brain waste” – that is, immigrant professionals who are working in low-wage jobs that do not draw on their education and training. Data from an open-ended question about what kind of a job respondents had held in their home country yielded numerous

<sup>13</sup> Previous research has found that US workplace experience is correlated with success in the American job market. See, e.g., *Steps to Success* (World Education Services/IMPRINT, 2015.) Viewable at: [www.imprintproject.org/steps](http://www.imprintproject.org/steps)

vivid examples of the contrast between their former occupation and their current employment situation in the United States. For example, responses included a former human rights official now selling groceries, a former lawyer now working in a retail clothing shop, a dentist now making fruit smoothies, and another dentist driving a taxi. Other former professionals included an architect now selling cell phones, an auditor working in a pizzeria, and a banking expert now selling Vietnamese food. Still more immigrant professionals are now unemployed, including numerous engineers, a psychiatrist, and the former executive editor of a scientific journal.

Perhaps most importantly, though, the survey results provide a potentially powerful roadmap for further improving the linguistic, economic, and civic integration of Massachusetts immigrants<sup>14</sup> – a goal that can not only improve the lives of individuals, but also position Bay State employers to benefit from the full talents and abilities of new Americans.

A wealth of prior research has demonstrated that investments in adult English learners pay substantial dividends for workers themselves as well as for their families, employers, and the wider community.<sup>15</sup> Bearing in mind this well-established finding, there are several important implications of ENB’s survey results from both programmatic and policy perspectives:

- **There is unmet demand for adult ESOL classes in Massachusetts.** This is most visibly

<sup>14</sup> These three elements of integration have been identified by the White House Task Force on New Americans and other federal agencies as crucial pillars of immigrant integration efforts. See e.g., *Adult Education and Immigrant Integration: Networks for Integrating New Americans Theoretical Framework* (World Education et al., 2013). Viewable at: [https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NINA\\_theoretical-framework.pdf](https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NINA_theoretical-framework.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Research that confirms the positive impact that increased English skills have on individuals’ earnings, and thus on the communities in which they live and pay taxes, include: “How Does Ability to Speak English Affect Earnings?” (US Census Bureau, 2005). Viewable at: [https://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/PAA\\_2005\\_AbilityandEarnings.pdf](https://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/PAA_2005_AbilityandEarnings.pdf). In addition, findings from the international Survey of Adult Skills demonstrate that the United States has a greater correlation between increased skills and increased wages than other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. See *Time for the US to Reskill?* (OECD, 2013.)

illustrated by the fact that fully half of all survey respondents indicated that they had coworkers who could benefit from English language classes. This finding is a clear indication that current resources are not reaching all of the workers who could benefit.<sup>16</sup> To address this issue, advocates can support greater investment in adult English programs through public and private sources. In particular, state and local government officials and other stakeholders can work closely with companies identified through this survey -- and other companies in industries that employ large numbers of limited English proficient workers -- to design and offer ESOL classes to their employees. These could be offered as on-site classes and could utilize a customized curriculum tailored to employer specifications, and/or be integrated with other technical training required by the company. Employers can also encourage or incentivize employees to take ESOL classes off-site by providing tuition reimbursement, paid release time, or other mechanisms.



- **While direct supervisors are aware that their employees are participating in ESOL classes, it is not known whether higher-level managers are similarly well-informed.** As noted above, a strong majority of respondents (77%) reported that their supervisors knew they were studying English. However, the survey did not inquire

<sup>16</sup> A detailed exploration of English language learning needs in Greater Boston can be found in *Breaking the Language Barrier*, a 2011 report commissioned by The Boston Foundation. Viewable at: [https://www.tbf.org/~media/TBFOrg/Files/Reports/ESOL\\_Report\\_Final18.pdf](https://www.tbf.org/~media/TBFOrg/Files/Reports/ESOL_Report_Final18.pdf)

(and respondents may not have known) whether higher-level managers or corporate leaders were aware of their employees' participation. This is a potentially fruitful area for further exploration and outreach. Employers' familiarity with skill gaps in their workforce is an important element in remedying such gaps, as is evidenced by the robust results of industry sector partnerships.<sup>17</sup> In addition, some companies have tackled skill issues internally after finding that their employees needed better English skills in order to understand instructions and communicate with customers, auditors, coworkers and supervisors. At one Massachusetts-based company, Foxboro's Accutech, the CEO implemented workplace English classes because he saw that limited English was preventing employees from understanding how their tasks fit into the company's overall operations. Workers lacked the confidence to ask for clarification when they didn't completely understand something, and were unable to effectively participate in process improvement training. English classes helped the company improve quality and efficiency as workers boosted their performance. As their English improved, employees received wage increases and promotional opportunities.

- **Immigrant workers may be unaware of opportunities for promotion, or may lack such opportunities.** The relatively low number of respondents (34%) who reported that their employer offers opportunities for promotion is notable. Without further data, it is difficult to know what lies behind this finding. A potential area for further exploration lies in understanding workers' awareness of career pathways at their company or in their industry. Advocates seeking to ensure that immigrant workers can access

<sup>17</sup> Industry sector partnerships bring together multiple employers in the same industry, along with education and training partners and other stakeholders, to analyze industry skill needs and develop talent pipelines. There are at least a half-dozen such partnerships operating in Massachusetts; information on them can be found at the National Fund for Workforce Solutions website: [www.nfwsolutions.org/industry-partnerships](http://www.nfwsolutions.org/industry-partnerships). Learn more about how state policy can support effective sector partnerships: [www.nationalskillscoalition.org/state-policy/sector-partnerships](http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/state-policy/sector-partnerships)

such pathways can support state and federal policies that help provide pathway navigation and other services to help workers attain industry-recognized credentials and move up the career ladder.<sup>18</sup>

- **The mismatch between a worker’s home-country profession and his or her current occupation can be dramatic.** As detailed in the introduction to this report, hundreds of ENB survey respondents reported holding skilled or professional jobs in their countries of origin, as described in their answers to an open-ended question about their home country occupation. Our analysis of this data compared with their responses on other survey questions about employment reveals that only a relative handful are currently employed in such positions. While some of the skill-mismatch is doubtless attributable to respondents’ limited English skills, other research (including two reports focusing on Massachusetts) confirms that the under-employment of immigrant professionals is a widespread problem. Each of these reports provides ample recommendations for policy and programmatic interventions to address this issue of so-called “brain waste.” Significantly, access to more and better English language learning opportunities is a key recommendation across the studies.<sup>19</sup>
- **There are opportunities to further engage employers in key industry sectors.** The high concentrations of ESOL students in select industry sectors – including accommodation and food services, retail, and healthcare and social assistance – suggest a natural starting point to further engage employer partners. As described above, there are a variety of approaches that individual employers

can be encouraged to undertake to support skill-building among their workers, including relatively simple steps such as providing a fixed schedule to facilitate employee participation in ESOL classes. There are also opportunities for industry trade associations to take a leadership role in forming collaborations across employers, especially in the case of smaller firms that may have limited capacity to engage in this work on their own. Finally, both state and local policymakers, as well as ESOL providers, can consider how they may attune policy and resources to key sectors and to small firms.



In addition to these specific areas for further exploration, there are several key policy levers by which advocates can advance opportunities for adult English learners. First, the ongoing implementation of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) presents several avenues for action. Required activities under WIOA include creation of industry sector partnerships and implementation of career pathways. Other approaches that are supported and encouraged under WIOA are work-based learning, incumbent worker training, and integrated education and training approaches that combine basic skills (in English, math or reading) with occupation-specific training.

Each of these activities can be undertaken in ways that are intentionally inclusive of immigrant workers in general, and adult English learners in particular. Advocates can work through state and local workforce

<sup>18</sup> Further information about effective career pathways policies is available from the National Skills Coalition ([www.nationalskillscoalition.org](http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org)).

<sup>19</sup> Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, 2008). Viewable at: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/uneven-progress-employment-pathways-skilled-immigrants-united-states>; Steps to Success (World Education Services/IMPRINT, 2015.) Viewable at: [www.imprintproject.org/steps](http://www.imprintproject.org/steps); Rx for Strengthening Massachusetts’ Economy and Healthcare System (MIRA Coalition, 2014): [www.miracoalition.org/images/stories/gac\\_task\\_force\\_report\\_final-12.18.14.pdf](http://www.miracoalition.org/images/stories/gac_task_force_report_final-12.18.14.pdf)

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and adult education agencies and workforce boards to identify and pursue specific opportunities.

At the state level, resources such as the Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund (WTFP), the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund and the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Adult and Community Learning Services' workplace education grants are important tools for incentivizing employer investment in incumbent workers, and providing public investment for upskilling of new and existing workers, respectively.

In recent years, such investments have increased as a result of efforts by Commonwealth Corporation, the English Works Campaign and diverse training partners. From FY13 to FY15, the WTFP ESOL allocation grew from \$158,380 to \$496,320 (and the number of ESOL trainees from 184 to 337). This affirms the crucial role that the WTFP and other public resources play in supporting English language acquisition among immigrant workers in Massachusetts, and emphasizes the importance of continued advocacy in support of these investments.

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## Appendix A: Survey Tool

### ENB/English Works Campaign ESOL Student Employment Survey 2016

#### [Page 1: Basic Information]

This survey asks questions about the use of English at your workplace. The answers will help the English Works Campaign and your ESOL Program to be better informed about employers who may want to set up workplace ESOL classes. Your answers are anonymous and confidential and will not be shared with your employer or your fellow employees. Responses to this survey will be combined, and they cannot be tracked as individuals.

[\* = answer required]

- \*1. Program Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
2. Class Level: \_\_\_\_\_  
\*3. Are you currently working?  
Yes  
No [If “no”, please go to question number 14]

#### [Page 2: Working Students]

- \*4. Is your current job full time, part time, or per diem?  
Full Time  
Part Time  
Per diem  
\*5. Do you have your own business?  
Yes  
No  
6. Where do you work?  
Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Company Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
7. What does the company do? \_\_\_\_\_  
8. Are you employed directly by the company or by a temp agency?  
Company  
Temp Agency  
9. How many people work at the company?  
Fewer than 10  
Between 10 and 50  
More than 50  
10. Are there other workers at the company who need English classes?  
Fewer than 10  
Between 10 and 50  
More than 50  
Not sure

11. Does your supervisor know you are studying English?  
Yes  
No  
Not sure  
12. Does the company offer you these benefits:  
\* Health insurance Yes No Not sure  
\* Paid sick days Yes No Not sure  
\* Fixed schedules Yes No Not sure  
\* Tuition assistance or reimbursement Yes No Not sure  
\* Opportunities for promotion Yes No Not sure  
\* Training to help you to do your work better Yes No Not sure  
If Yes, what kind of training? \_\_\_\_\_  
13. What was your job in your home country? \_\_\_\_\_

#### [Page 3: Not Working Students]

- \*14. Do you have any work experience in the U.S.?  
Yes  
No  
\*15. Are you looking for work now?  
Yes  
No  
16. What kind of work would you like to do?  
Financial operations (accountant, teller, etc.)  
Education (teacher, etc.)  
Health Care (nursing, technician, CNA, home health aide, etc.)  
Customer Service / Retail (store clerk, server, etc.)  
Food Operation (cook, etc.)  
Factory Worker (manufacturing, food production, etc.)  
Cleaning and maintenance (housekeeping, janitorial, etc.)  
Child development (childcare provider, etc.)  
IT (computer technician, electronics, etc.)  
Small Business Owner (store, restaurant, beauty salon, bodega, etc.)  
Other \_\_\_\_\_  
17. What was your job in your home country?  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## Appendix B: List of Programs Participating in Survey

ABCD South Side Adult ESOL	JPCC Adult Learning Program
Asian American Civic Association (AACA)	JVS (Jewish Vocational Services)
Boston Centers for Youth & Families / Cleveland	Ludlow Area Adult Learning Center / HCC
Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center	Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH)
BPS Adult Learning Center	North Shore Community Action Program (NSCAP)
Brazilian Worker Center	Notre Dame Education Center/Boston
Cambridge Community Learning Center (CLC)	Quincy Asian Resources, Inc. ESL Program
Catholic Charities OfficeWorks	Randolph Community Partnership
Catholic Charities/Haitian MultiService Center	Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Center
Charlestown Adult Education	South Boston en Accion
College Bound Dorchester	Springfield Adult Learning Center / STCC
East Boston Ecumenical Community Counsel	St. Mark Community Education Program
East Boston Harborside	The Immigrant Learning Center
Educational Development Group (EDG)	The Welcome project
ENB English Innovations	Training Resources of America/Brockton
Framingham Adult ESL Plus (FAESL Plus)	United South End Settlements (USES)
Gardner Pilot Academy	Vietnamese-American Civic Association
Gilbert Albert Community Center	Worker Education Program (WEP)
International Institute of Greater Lawrence	YMCA International Learning Center
Jackson Mann Adult Education	

### Notes on Methodology

Numbers may not sum to 100% due to rounding. All cross-tabulations are statistically significant at the level of  $p=.05$