

# ABOUT MCAEL

MCAEL is a community coalition of public, nonprofit, and business partners that supports more than 75 adult ESOL and literacy service programs, 1,500 instructors and staff, and over 15,000 adult learners. Together, the coalition members strengthen the community by assisting adults to gain the English literacy skills needed to reach their potential as parents, workers and community members. Montgomery County government and local nonprofits form unique partnerships with MCAEL. The work of the coalition aligns with county initiatives to support workforce development efforts and families.

MCAEL expands opportunities for high-quality English language and literacy instruction in the community through two programs: Capacity Building and Public Engagement. MCAEL works to advance adult literacy and language learning, and to bring the vision and principles of these disciplines to our work. Research has demonstrated that adult education is most

effective when it builds from the experience of the learners and connects directly to their needs and interests. Likewise, in our capacity building work, MCAEL draws upon the knowledge that already exists in the community, while also introducing adult English literacy practitioners and volunteers to research and evidence-based practices. MCAEL is a coalition working collaboratively to connect the issue of literacy to everyone.

MCAEL sees a diverse professional community as a significant asset to the county, and believes our community can achieve more for adult learners by activating the talent, knowledge and passion of instructors and program managers. The support from the county government, businesses and community members is key to MCAEL's success. MCAEL encourages collaboration and community building. MCAEL exists to connect professionals to knowledge and information, and to each other, as resources for learning and

support. By investing in the skills, talent and capacity of adult English literacy instructors and providers, MCAEL's work leads to sustainable, long-lasting results.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

MCAEL focuses on the following activities to strengthen the capacity of adult English literacy service providers to deliver high quality, effective programs that meet the needs of learners.

### FOR PROGRAM STAFF

- Community Grants
- Workshops
- Technical Assistance
- Networking Meetings
- Resource Library
- Provider E-News List
- Online Tools

### FOR INSTRUCTORS

- Trainings
- Resource Library
- Professional Development Scholarships
- Networking Meetings
- Instructor E-News List
- Job/Volunteer Postings
- Online Tools

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

MCAEL also serves as a community resource and knowledge center for information on adult English literacy in Montgomery County. MCAEL works in the following ways to engage the broader community in supporting and addressing English literacy:

### KNOWLEDGE CENTER

- Data Collection and Analysis
- Reports
- Provider Directory
- Learner Stories

### ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH

- Promoting Community Literacy
- Coalition Building
- Connecting Business, Government, Nonprofits and Individuals
- Local, State and National Policy Advocacy



## SUPPORT ADULT ENGLISH LITERACY

1. Donate and provide financial support to MCAEL for instructional initiatives.
2. Work with MCAEL on advocacy efforts to benefit the coalition and the learners.
3. Distribute the MCAEL Provider Directory and other materials to help spread the word to students, businesses, and the community.
4. Volunteer to contribute your time to MCAEL or one of the coalition's partners.

# ACTIVE COMMUNITY



## Communities are stronger when people are informed and active.

Being a citizen or being civic-minded is more than calling a country one's own. It is when people come together as a community to improve their quality of life through shared ideas, dedicated efforts, and infrastructure.

Civic engagement and social capital is about how we see ourselves in, and connected to, our community.<sup>7</sup> As a democracy, we believe in people involving themselves in the community at various levels—neighborhood, county, city, state and federal. At the same time, we understand and respect that individuals have different levels of participation at which they feel they are contributors to the community. This participation can be defined into three levels of civic engagement or citizenship.<sup>8</sup> A 'personally responsible citizen,' is one who pays taxes, obeys laws and helps people in emergencies. A 'participatory citizen,' is a person who is informed and engages at a variety of community levels (local, state or federal). A 'justice-oriented citizen' is one who looks for the root of a problem and works to create solutions by critically assessing situations and making change. Each of these types of citizens adds value to a community and all are needed. Engaged and active individuals and communities are characterized by successful outcomes.

### SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES EQUAL STRONGER COMMUNITIES

- Each person recognizes one's personal responsibility and respects oneself and others.
- Individuals believe their actions are important and trust that an individual can affect change.
- Everyone is an active participant at some level of their community (neighborhood, county, city, state, nation).
- People advocate for issues important to them.
- Individuals support and actively influence the social and political success of the community.
- Individuals critically analyze what happens around them and make choices

to support or challenge concepts that affect their community.

### STRATEGIES

Communication is a key component to an active community. Language is a tool, and it is power. A more connected and active community is created through acquisition of knowledge via flyers, advertisements, other media and exchanges with other people. Individuals with stronger literacy skills will be better informed, and:

- Read and follow the news and what is happening in the community;
- Write a letter to the editor or a county council person adding their voice to the conversation;
- Participate in a community forum, focus group or debate.

"I wanted to tell people why Rockville Senior Center is important, so I emailed the city to tell them that when I came to the United States in November 2011 to stay here forever with my family, I could not talk, and understand English, and my daughter was my translator in all of cases, doctors, pharmacies, shopping, barbers, and etc. But now I can do all of them by myself, and I can talk, read books by taking help from dictionary. That is the reason why I am happy. English can help me talk with everybody, and understand them, do my daily contacts and prepare for the citizenship test. I am happy and glad, when I can talk with my American friends, read books and newspapers."

— Azad, Rockville Senior Center

### ENGLISH LITERACY MAKES OUR COMMUNITY STRONGER

If a learner is in class for 6 hours a week for 40 weeks a year, he or she can...

#### IN A FEW MONTHS :

- Read a recycling postcard with many visuals sent out by the County.
- Greet and exchange limited small talk with a neighbor in English.

#### IN A YEAR OR TWO:

- Volunteer in a community and understand basic directions given to them.
- Understand a TV ad with vocabulary support and make a choice on an issue.

#### IN TWO OR THREE YEARS:

- Read a newspaper on their own in English.
- Follow a community meeting discussion and participate in it.
- Write a letter to advocate for or against an issue.

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# CONNECTED COMMUNITY



## Communities are stronger when a vibrant network of community assets exist and are utilized.

A vibrant network of community assets is made up of people connected to various community groups, public parks, a public transportation infrastructure, libraries and more.

A strong transportation infrastructure, including roads, bus systems, metros and light rails, improves a community's mental and physical health, economy and safety.<sup>9</sup> Libraries are transformative community hubs that support the education and culture of people as well as the history, sustainability and challenges in a community. Parks and playgrounds enhance property values, support public health and safer neighborhoods, promote community engagement (build relationships among neighbors) and support the environment by protecting green spaces.<sup>10</sup> All of these assets are utilized by community groups, an asset in themselves, to congregate, share ideas, and take part in activities that build character and connections. Community groups range from groups centered by religion to Kiwanis Clubs to sports teams. A vibrant network of community assets exists to form a more connected community when we have successful outcomes.

## SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES EQUAL STRONGER COMMUNITIES

- Individuals feel connected to other people and groups (i.e. people have diverse networks).
- People can use transportation through an effective infrastructure and have the independence and ability to navigate it (driving, walking, biking, bus or metro).
- People have knowledge of availability of assets (parks, services, libraries, etc.).
- Individuals utilize assets (safety services, picnic areas, recreational facilities).

## STRATEGIES

Access and communication are key components to a vibrant network of community assets. Thus, people need to

see flyers, advertisements, other media and be able to talk to other people in order to gain information that will provide them with awareness of the community's assets and encourage them to utilize the assets that exist. Individuals with stronger literacy skills will be better informed about the area we live in, which results in:

- People using the library for ongoing education for themselves and their children;
- Families relaxing in a park and connecting with their neighbors;
- Individuals using public transportation and supporting a green environment;
- Community members looking out for one's neighborhood and working together to make it a safe and inviting place.

## ENGLISH LITERACY MAKES OUR COMMUNITY STRONGER

If a learner is in class for 6 hours a week for 40 weeks a year, he or she can...

### IN A FEW MONTHS :

- Fill in a library card application
- Read a map
- Say what one likes or does not like to do in English

### IN A YEAR OR TWO:

- Give someone directions and understand directions given to one.
- Describe what one did or will do on the weekend in English
- Read notice from a library or community center

### IN TWO OR THREE YEARS:

- Apply for a permit for a picnic at a public site in English
- Talk with a group of neighbors about the Neighborhood Watch program
- Read a flyer about saving the environment



“Blanca obtained a library card while on a class field trip to the Rockville Library. After learning how to read a bus schedule in class and after taking the bus with her classmates on a field trip; Blanca reported that she and her children took the bus on their own to the library.”

*Blanca, Families Foremost*

## FURTHER READING:

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# EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS



## Communities are stronger when the general population is literate and educated.

An educated community is made up of people who have the ability to read, complete high school, attend community colleges, receive degrees (BA, MA, PhD) and continue their education (certificates, trainings, conferences, online courses) throughout their lives. To improve the educational success of a community, people need

access to education and to see education as a value.

Higher education levels equate to higher economic growth, higher wages via competition and promote entrepreneurship.<sup>2</sup> Increased education levels stimulate innovation in communities.

A more literate and better-educated population has a lower incarceration rate, due to an increased access to greater opportunities. Higher levels of literacy lead to less accidents on the job because people can understand warning signs. Participating in education allows individuals to develop and practice critical thinking skills and work in teams collaboratively. Higher education levels lead to more parental involvement in a child's education, which is a key to a child's success in school. Higher skills are connected to higher rates of volunteerism and civic engagement.<sup>3</sup> An educated community is characterized by successful outcomes.

### SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES EQUAL STRONGER COMMUNITIES

- Adults and children can access the highest level of education and/or training we want to achieve.
- Individuals understand the value of opportunities, choices and decisions.
- People have understanding and support for their learning.
- Individuals advocate for their own and their children's education.
- People have an opportunity to engage in learning on a consistent basis.
- Individuals demonstrate unlocked potential and the abilities one has.

### STRATEGIES

Access to and participation in education is the key to educational success. Education must be valued as a tool for betterment, affordable, and convenient- i.e., offered

at varied times and locations. To change people's education levels, people must be able to read flyers advertising classes, talk to experts about the benefits of additional schooling and share information across networks.

Individuals with stronger literacy skills will be better informed about opportunities, and:

- enroll in community college classes to invest in a career;
- make the choice to commit additional hours to education for longer-term benefits;
- support their children by participating in school activities;
- participate in a training to develop on-the-job skills;
- use information in parenting pamphlets to support their children's development on a regular basis.

"I was afraid to talk to teachers and doctors of my children because I did not understand or speak English. To me it was and is very important to speak and understand English, because I have 2 children in Elementary and Middle School. Now I can speak with the teachers about my children's progress and how to help them. I am so happy because I can do many things for myself and I can help my kids. "

- Patricia, *Linkages to Learning*

### ENGLISH LITERACY MAKES OUR COMMUNITY STRONGER

If a learner is in class for 6 hours a week for 40 weeks a year, he or she can...

#### IN A FEW MONTHS :

- Read a class schedule
- Write a sick note to a child's teacher in English

#### IN A YEAR OR TWO:

- State education goals in English (I want to be a nurse. I need to study health and math.)
- Read a schedule or course catalog in English

#### IN TWO OR THREE YEARS:

- Participate in a parent-teacher conference.
- Participate in on-the-job training in English as long as many visuals are used
- Read letters in English from the school with some assistance.
- Help a middle school student with homework.

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# FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY



Communities are stronger when there is a higher average earned income, created by self-sustaining individuals and families.

Individuals are self-sustaining when they can earn more than they need for basic necessities. To improve the income levels in a community, people need access to knowledge and skills.

Higher economic income as a community leads to improvements for all—in housing, amenities, infrastructure, education systems, and health systems.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the individuals in a community have higher standards and expectations, support the community through more taxes, children gain higher education levels and people live longer.

Economic sustainability means people can choose where to live—whether to rent or own a home. We manage our finances, pay our bills on time and have savings accounts. With more money in the community, we move from subsisting and looking only at basic needs to investing in people and systems around us. An increase in free time and/or expendable income leads to an awareness and heightened care for one's surroundings, and a more optimistic focus on—and investment in—the future.<sup>5</sup> In addition, children's educational gains increase with increased earnings.<sup>6</sup> Higher average earned income across a community is characterized by successful outcomes.

## SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES EQUAL STRONGER COMMUNITIES

- Families are financially healthy and comfortable.
- People are educated about and plan for own future and family.
- Individuals have the skills and finances to adapt to changes in life.
- Everyone understands, accesses and navigates financial systems.
- Each person capitalizes on one's own skills and knowledge.
- All have the ability to live on one's own as an individual or a family in a safe environment.
- Individuals have a job or career that one enjoys and at which one can excel at and see a future.

## STRATEGIES

Knowledge is the key to higher economic averages. What people know and can do improves both a person's employability as well as general economic growth. To improve their knowledge base, people need to participate in training, higher education, read books, talk to those with expertise and share knowledge across networks.

Individuals with stronger literacy skills will have the opportunity to gain more knowledge to:

- Acquire credentials for a desired job or career;
- Understand and take out home loans;
- Interact in a team on the job;
- Engage in financial planning for the future.

## ENGLISH LITERACY CREATES FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

If a learner is in class for 6 hours a week for 40 weeks a year, he or she can...

### IN A FEW MONTHS :

- Say the words to describe what he/she can do (I can drive a truck, I can work with computers.)
- Understand a timesheet/schedule in English.
- Identify U.S. money and amounts

### IN A YEAR OR TWO:

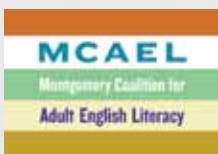
- Fill in an employment application in English
- Describe what he/she did on the job (I helped customers. I worked at the register.)
- Understand a sales receipt.

### IN TWO OR THREE YEARS:

- Read a flyer advertising employment
- Create a resume and interview for a job
- Articulate problems and solutions to a problem in English.

"I have more opportunity in the job in this country. I feel good about learning English, and I like to go to the school. It is hard to learn English. In my country, we speak Spanish and I did not go to high school. English is important... I have my own business. I speak to my customers. When I saw somebody I say they have to speak English in the US."

— Juana, Casa de Maryland



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# HEALTHY FAMILIES

Communities are stronger when the general population is healthy.



A healthy community is made up of physically and mentally healthy families.

To improve the health of a community, changes need to occur in three areas—health care, behavior and the socioeconomic structure<sup>1</sup>

People must know where we can go for healthcare—a general practitioner, an urgent care or a hospital. A change in healthcare is also an economic issue—for

people to go, we must feel we can afford treatment. People need to know that going to a hospital for a case of poison ivy is going to cost thousands of dollars vs. a hundred dollars at an urgent care facility. Additionally, we will all do whatever we can to stay healthy and make sure our child is healthy; however, we need to know what to do—vaccinations, annual checkups, healthy choices, etc. Healthy families and communities are characterized by successful outcomes.

## SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES EQUAL STRONGER COMMUNITIES

- Individuals and their children have long lives.
- People make healthy choices nutritionally along with other life-style choices.
- All human beings live lives with trust and safety in families and communities.
- Everyone feels confident, positive and connected to others.
- One and all have access to healthcare and utilize that care.

## STRATEGIES

Communication is a key component to a healthier community. A large percentage of change is based on personal behavior. To change personal behavior, people need to

be informed. The ability to gain information via flyers, advertisements, other media and talking to other people is vital. The ability to exchange this information provides us with knowledge and encourage us to reflect on our ideas and practices.

Individuals with stronger literacy skills will be better informed about the communities they live in, which results in:

- Families go to the doctor on a regular basis;
- Individuals choose to have fruit vs. fried foods;
- People treat one another respectfully;
- Children use safe walking routes to school;
- Family members talk to one another about their daily lives.

## ENGLISH LITERACY MAKES OUR COMMUNITY STRONGER

If a learner is in class for 6 hours a week for 40 weeks a year, he or she can...

### IN A FEW MONTHS :

- Say the words to describe ailments in English.
- Fill in a form with basic information if someone walks them through it.

### IN A YEAR OR TWO:

- Describe in simple full sentences how they feel.
- Read a medicine bottle/box and follow directions in English.

### IN TWO OR THREE YEARS:

- Read a flyer for a health clinic or a pamphlet on a health issue.
- Ask and answer detailed personal health questions, and communicate symptoms to a doctor in English.
- Discuss why he/she should stop smoking or lose weight.

“Maria went to an urgent care center and used the phrases she had learned in class to get the right medical care for her daughter. Most of the time, she told us, she would end up waiting for hours to get a translator. This time, she told the doctor what was wrong with her daughter in English, saying it was an infection in her eye. This helped the doctor to give a targeted examination and prescribe the necessary treatment. All in all, according to Maria, it took a half hour with the doctor before they were on their way home.”

– Maria, *Impact Silver Spring*

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**MCAEL**

Montgomery Coalition for

Adult English Literacy

# SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

## Communities across the United States are being reshaped by demographic change.

With changes come benefits and challenges as all community members, long-time residents and new arrivals, acclimate to the new normal. Montgomery County, Maryland has changed dramatically over 20 years, and it continues to change. As the county has welcomed immigrants from around the globe, neighbors and neighborhoods look different. With the influx of immigrants, comes economic opportunity, new cultural traditions, and new perspectives.

The differences between groups may be easily apparent; at the same time, the fact that all people and all communities share common goals may sometimes be hidden. Hidden but true—all people want to prosper and realize their dreams. To achieve their goals, individuals need to work together. To work together, people need to connect to one another, exchange ideas, and come to consensus or respect differences. When we come together to define what we want to see in our neighborhoods, our schools, and across our community, we can leverage our shared resources and assets to achieve a sense of belonging. When this occurs, a successful and thriving community is established.

There is sometimes an expectation by people in an existing community that new individuals should adapt to what exists—the immigrants should acculturate and accept the status quo. This has rarely occurred in the history of the United States. Integration is a two-way street—and communities are most successful when the new ideas and the vitality that immigrants bring are mixed with the ideas and energy of the long-time residents.

A common language is useful for sharing ideas and exchanging opinions. In the

United States, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) instruction has been shown to have a positive impact on the whole community. With improvements in English, immigrants participate in the broader economics, education, and health of the community, which benefits us all.

In Montgomery County, of the 130,000 limited English proficient individuals in the County, over 20,000 are in English classes. These individuals balance work and family while learning a new language. Adult students commit 2-10 hours a week, on average, to learn English in addition to

working 40 to 60 a week. With this time commitment, it will take a learner 7 years, on average, to achieve average fluency, which is defined as reading and speaking at a 6th grade level.

This series of white papers explores what it takes for communities to succeed, and connects these concepts to English language skills. We explored a variety of areas (economic, health, community assets, civic engagement and education) that define success for a whole community—not just for the immigrant community. The information provided on each page is linked to research and articles that delve into how the outcomes discussed can be realized. After reading these papers, we hope that you will see how adult English language learners can, as they acquire language skills, become strong, active members of the broader community. And ideally, that long time Montgomery County residents can be part of ensuring this success, and in so doing, ensuring the success of all residents.

## English literacy helps us build stronger communities for everyone.



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