

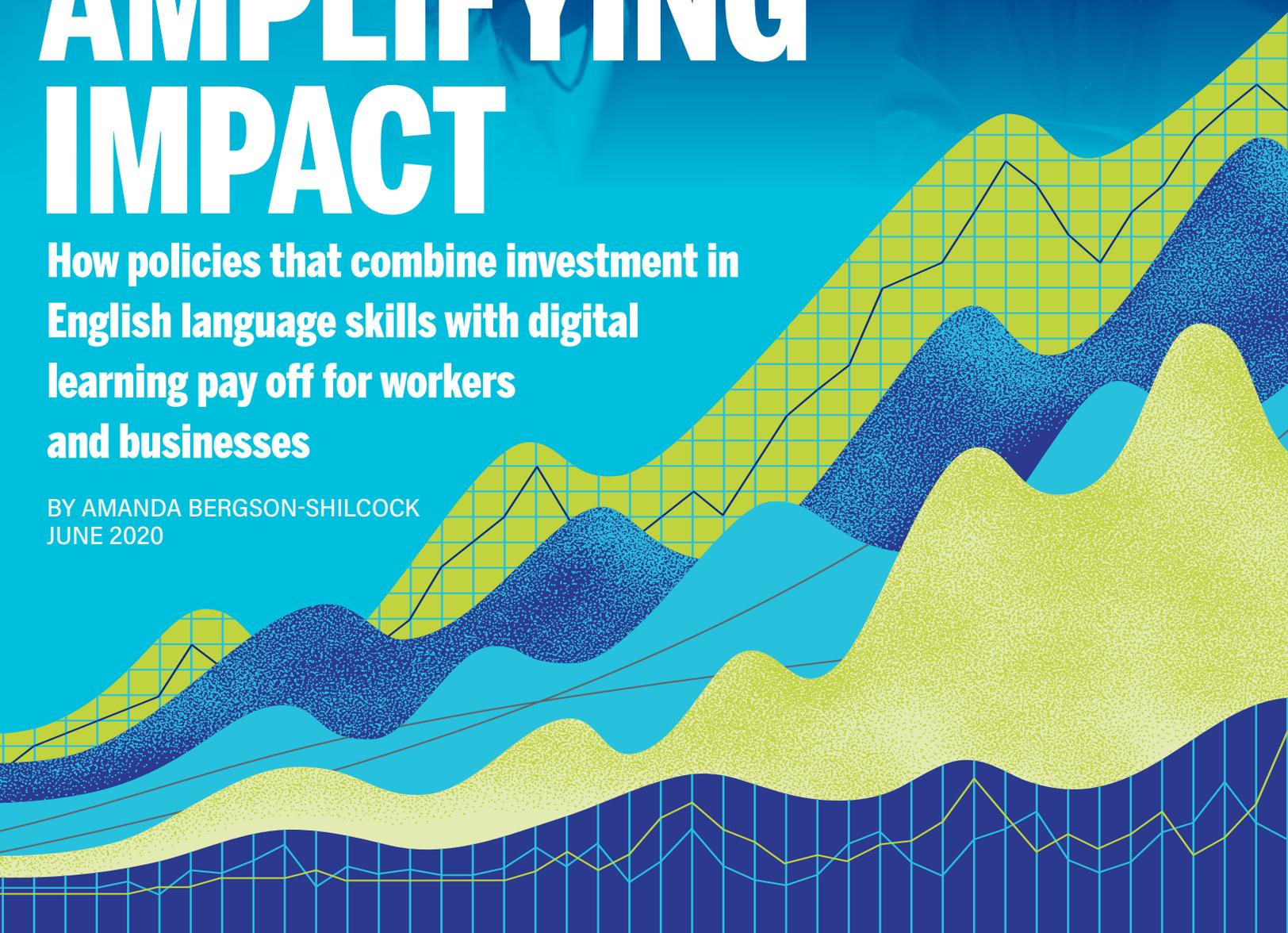


NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION  
Every worker. Every industry. A strong economy.

# AMPLIFYING IMPACT

**How policies that combine investment in  
English language skills with digital  
learning pay off for workers  
and businesses**

BY AMANDA BERGSON-SHILCOCK  
JUNE 2020





**Acquiring better English skills is one of the most powerful steps a worker can take to improve their earnings and economic prospects.**



## English is essential—especially for essential workers

The Covid-19 pandemic has vividly illustrated the centrality of frontline workers to the everyday functioning of the American economy and daily life. News stories and policy analyses have repeatedly documented how these newly-termed “essential workers” are caring for people who are aged or ill, delivering food and medicine, cleaning hospitals and transit stations, harvesting crops and milking cows, driving buses and trains, and in myriad other ways helping their fellow Americans maintain a semblance of normalcy during uncertain times.

But while some articles have mentioned the high proportion of *immigrant* workers in these roles,<sup>1</sup> there has been much less attention paid to the high number of **English learners** in particular.<sup>2</sup> In the US workforce overall, more than one in ten workers has limited English skills.<sup>3</sup>

The proportion of English learners is much higher in certain frontline jobs, such as meatpacking and home health care.<sup>4</sup> Even in ordinary times, these workers often lack opportunity for skill-building within their jobs—often because they are gig workers, have irregular hours, lack time or money for upskilling, or are working for a company that does not offer upskilling opportunities.<sup>5</sup> Many English learners are also people of color, who face additional

barriers in upskilling due to longstanding structural racism and related inequities in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Yet acquiring better English skills is one of the most powerful steps a worker can take to improve their earnings and economic prospects. Data from a rigorously designed assessment overseen by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) confirms that the US has a tighter connection between better foundational skills and higher earnings than many other industrialized countries.<sup>7</sup>

In other words: For each bit of English that a worker acquires, their earnings are likely to increase. More English equals more job opportunities, and better-paying ones. And it isn't just the worker's own economic mobility that is improved. Their increased earnings have an immediate effect on the household in which they live, and the broader society of which they are a part.

While strong public policy investments are important at any time, they are even more so as policymakers and skills advocates are hurrying to identify the best ways to build economic resiliency in a post-pandemic world. Policies that invest in English language skills can also help to narrow racial equity gaps, helping to remedy some of the policy-driven disparities faced by many English learners.<sup>8</sup>

Research even suggests that supporting foundational skill gains among adults who start off with lower skill levels (in this case, literacy) has a **more** powerful effect on per-capita Gross Domestic Product and labor productivity, compared to skill gains among adults who were already at a higher level to begin with.<sup>9</sup> As policymakers determine potential avenues for workforce investment as part of an inclusive economic recovery, these findings should be front and center in decisionmaking.

## What does the current landscape of adult English learning look like?

Workers who are eager to improve their English skills can pursue a handful of potential paths: Attempting to learn solo, such as via a book or an app; participating in an informal conversation group or learning circle;<sup>10</sup> enrolling in a formal course through a nonprofit agency or other organization; or matriculating at an educational institution.

Public policies support English learning primarily through the latter two options. In particular, Title II of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides roughly \$600 million annually to fund adult education classes at nonprofit organizations, school districts, and other providers. (These classes also include adult basic education and high school equivalency, in addition to English language classes.)

Additional federal funding for English language learning is provided through the Higher Education Act (HEA). Because of the way data is collected, it is difficult to tease out which portion of this funding supports English classes in particular. Overall, HEA provides \$30 billion in federal financial aid via Pell Grants (and even more through other avenues) to postsecondary students each year. This includes students in degree and certificate programs, as well as students who need additional developmental education before embarking on for-credit courses.<sup>11</sup>

Under both WIOA and HEA, the primary delivery mechanism for English classes has been a traditional in-person classroom format. However, even before the pandemic, select adult and higher education providers had launched online learning options for English learners. Since the pandemic began, an enormous percentage of adult English classes have moved to some form of distance

learning—much, but not all, of it taking place online.<sup>12</sup> Federal agencies have provided preliminary guidance to support this transition,<sup>13</sup> while several national organizations have worked to support program administrators' and instructors' professional development needs.<sup>14</sup>

Now, as learners, educators, and businesses alike adjust to the ongoing shifts in their learning and working environments, it is becoming vividly clear that English and digital literacy skills are more closely intertwined than many had previously grasped.<sup>15</sup> Workers who lack English skills are hampered in finding their way to the online learning opportunities that are their best (and often only) option for upskilling during the pandemic, many of which require at least some fluency in written English. Meanwhile, those who lack digital skills are prevented from accessing timely and even life-saving training opportunities that can prepare them for working in a Covid-transformed world.<sup>16</sup> For example, Niagara County (NY) Community College is offering virtual, industry-specific occupational safety training classes to prepare workers in businesses that are newly reopening post-pandemic.<sup>17</sup>

Conversely, workers who have the opportunity to develop *both* their English and technology-related skills can see a double win: improving their employability and earning power now, while also building skills to access future online upskilling opportunities.<sup>18</sup> (Notably, the combined English-and-digital-skills approach is also a pedagogical best practice.<sup>19</sup>) To this end, policymakers and advocates alike can learn from “early adopter” organizations that have already been providing technology-enabled English language learning programs, and can use that information to respond to the unprecedented re-employment and re-skilling challenge the US now faces.



**Research suggests that supporting foundational skill gains among adults with lower skill levels has a *more powerful* effect on per-capita Gross Domestic Product and labor productivity compared to skill gains among adults who were at a higher level to begin with.**



## What can innovative English learning look like?

National Skills Coalition spoke with leaders in the education and educational technology fields to better understand emerging models for effective English language learning, especially those that feature digital learning components and well-established connections to local businesses' talent development needs.

The examples highlighted below are a few of the models that reflect promising practices in this rapidly evolving corner of the adult education field. Importantly, each of them reflect blended models that incorporate online elements (and in some cases can be transformed into fully online models). In addition to helping learners build digital skills, this approach also makes English skill-building opportunities accessible to a wider range of learners, such as those who work extended or irregular schedules, by decreasing the amount of in-person hours that are required compared to traditional classes.<sup>20</sup>

### A STANDOUT MODEL: Integrated Digital English Acceleration

One of the most robust examples comes from Washington State, where the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC)'s [Integrated Digital English Acceleration \(I-DEA\) program](#) teaches English language skills in the context of college and careers. Learners participate in 31 one-week-long modules on topics ranging from information literacy and navigating the community to professional communication and interview skills. Learners are engaged in 14-18 hours of instruction each week, at least 50 percent of which is provided online.

Traditionally, programs used one of two formats: either a "flipped classroom" model, or a computer-enhanced but in-person model.<sup>21</sup> (In a flipped classroom model, students do pre-work online at home to learn concepts and content, and then attend in-person classes to practice the concepts alongside fellow classmates with the help of an instructor.) However, as a result of the pandemic, some programs have shifted to an entirely virtual model as of Spring 2020.<sup>22</sup>

Overall, performance results show that I-DEA student learning gains are 9 to 12 percent higher than the gains of English language learners in traditional programs.<sup>23</sup> The program serves as an on-ramp to the state's vaunted [Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training \(I-BEST\) program](#), thus allowing participants to stack their learning and earn progressively more demanding credentials over time.

The program was launched in 2013 with seed funding from private philanthropy and is now supported through federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II funds. To facilitate broader replication of the I-DEA model, an extensive array of freely available curricula, training videos, and program development resources has been made available to the public by the Washington SBCTC.<sup>24</sup>

---

## Mobile Up!

In California, the state workforce development board used WIOA Title I discretionary funds to support an innovative project known as [Mobile Up!](#) The initiative brought together business and labor partners in several industries with significant percentages of English learners, including home healthcare and building and janitorial services. Each industry took a slightly different approach to English language learning for its workers.

On the home health side, a labor-management partnership between the California Long-Term Care Education Center and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) led the development of a module focused on nursing home and home care workers. The module was designed for maximum accessibility so that it could be delivered to workers across nine counties, including those in rural areas with limited internet access. In particular, it was accessible by learners who had only a traditional mobile phone, rather than a smartphone. These learners could participate by calling in to the program's phone number and then engaging with interactive text and audio English lessons and assessments.

For janitors, the lead organization was Building Skills Partnership, another labor-management partnership. This organization has been a trailblazer in providing vocational English classes to workers since 2005, including via blended learning models that help janitorial workers at companies like Google improve their language skills while learning to use tablet computers.<sup>25</sup>

For the Mobile Up project, BSP focused on increasing access to industry-specific vocational English instruction in areas of high demand. Specifically, the program was designed to help janitors develop the language needed to improve their customer service skills and be promoted to daytime work. The program was entirely distance learning, with no in-person component. Learners received support from bilingual mobile coaches. The program was highly successful in connecting with the lowest-level English learners—traditionally a difficult population to reach—via short, on-demand learning bursts (average learning time for an individual session was 15 minutes). Pre- and post-assessments demonstrated learning gains and strong student retention from one module to the next.<sup>26</sup>

---

## New American Workforce

The nonprofit National Immigration Forum partners with businesses and community colleges to offer English language classes to incumbent workers through its [New American Workforce](#) English at Work program.

The program provides industry-contextualized English language training that blends 60 percent online learning (via smartphone or desktop computer) with 40 percent live instruction, offered either in-person or remotely depending on the employer's preference.<sup>27</sup> To date, the program has served over 1,500 workers in retail, manufacturing, and customer experience (ride share, casino, and amusement park) roles. Instruction is delivered by community college partners and the curricula is customized to assist each company in improving individual job performance and bolstering operations.

A third-party evaluation of the initiative was conducted in 2017 by RTI International.<sup>28</sup> The evaluation focused on

the program's implementation in the grocery retail sector, with Kroger, Publix, and Whole Foods as employer partners. The evaluation found that more than 74 percent of participants made learning gains as measured by a customized assessment,<sup>29</sup> and that between 34 and 40 percent (varying by geographic site) of participants were promoted in their jobs after taking the course. In addition, supervisors rated over 90 percent of participants as having made moderate or significant progress on specific indicators such as workers' understanding of safety guidelines and processes, morale and job satisfaction, and confidence on the job.

While the initiative has to date been funded through private investment by employers and philanthropic institutions, it represents an example that could be more broadly replicated through public investment.

## Destination Workforce

The nonprofit Literacy Council of Northern Virginia (LCNV) developed its [Destination Workforce](#)<sup>®</sup> program to provide customized English language training to businesses in the Washington D.C. metro area. The program, which typically lasts roughly 50 hours of instruction, has to date developed classes for DoubleTree Hotel by Hilton; chef José Andrés' Think Food Group; and Capital One Financial Corporation and its hospitality and building services partners, among others.

Notably, in addition to for-profit businesses, Destination Workforce has also been implemented in the public sector for frontline workers at the City of Alexandria (VA) Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities. This reflects an important recognition by municipal leaders that English language gaps among their workforce were detrimental to productivity and collaboration, and that remedying them would require intentional effort through a formal training program.

Destination Workforce classes are provided on-site at the workplace. Learners also have access to ancillary educational support via the Cell-Ed mobile learning program, which works on both smart phones and older model phones.<sup>30</sup> Success is measured via customized

assessments developed in collaboration with employers to ensure course alignment with job responsibilities and skills needed for career advancement. Sample indicators include the ability to effectively use digital technology, and the ability to demonstrate how and when to apply elements of the American Hotel and Lodging Institute's Guest Service Gold<sup>®</sup> training on the job.<sup>31</sup>

In early 2020, LCNV moved its Foundations of Customer Service course to a fully mobile environment via the Cell-Ed platform. The course's three-minute mini-lessons have already been embraced by a major hospitality industry association. Importantly, using the Cell-Ed platform—rather than a more data-heavy mobile app that requires learners to have a smart phone—makes English classes more accessible to learners who have flip phones or who have limited data plans for their smart phones, a common challenge for low-wage workers generally.

Funding for LCNV's English language programs comes from a blend of public and private sources, including WIOA Title II adult education funds.

Destination Workforce is made possible through a cost-share arrangement with the partner employer.

## English Readiness

A labor-management partnership that launched in 2019 with \$130 million in seed funding from healthcare giant Kaiser Permanente, Futuro Health has hit the ground running with a robust array of training programs for incumbent and new healthcare workers. Chief among them is the [English Readiness](#) program, which Futuro provides in partnership with online learning platform Voxy.<sup>32</sup>

Voxy's contextualized English for healthcare courses allow language learners to develop the proficiency they need to enter or advance in career pathways. Specific courses include English for Allied Health, English for Medical Assistants, and English for Certified Nursing Assistants.<sup>33</sup> The Voxy platform is a web- and mobile-based application that includes lessons based on authentic English language resources from a range of media (including articles, academic texts, emails, tweets, videos, audio recordings, and images). Lesson topics for

healthcare workers include the importance of infection control; safety and emergency procedures; and the care of cognitively impaired patients.

Voxy's collaborations with other partners such as the nonprofit Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians,<sup>34</sup> and Miami Dade College have affirmed the tool's value in a blended environment where in-person learning is supplemented by the online platform.<sup>35</sup> A quasi-experimental study of the Miami Dade collaboration by the nonprofit American Institutes for Research found that students with access to the platform increased their pre- to post-test gains on an English language proficiency exam more than peers who did not have access to the platform. On average, students with access to Voxy gained 92 points (a 15% increase) in one semester, while students in the comparison group gained an average of only 19 points (a 3.5% increase).<sup>36</sup>



## What can practitioners and skills advocates learn from these innovations?

As part of this research, National Skills Coalition conducted interviews with program providers and other key informants in the adult education field, and reviewed relevant literature. While the focus of this report is on how public *policies* can facilitate broader adoption of innovative English language learning approaches, it is important to recognize that effective *practice* can help to inform and spur the advancement of such policies.

To that end, practitioners and state agency leaders who seek to replicate the above examples should keep the following principles in mind:

- **Start from the ground up in conceptualizing a program**, rather than assuming it can be grafted on to an existing course or program offering. Deeply research what employers in the target industry or occupation need, and how to connect it to learners' own goals and aspirations.
  - **Be mindful that research has generally shown stronger results for blended or hybrid learning approaches** compared to purely virtual approaches.
- Provide support for program staff to explore and iterate techniques for increasing learner engagement in online learning, especially given the rapid changes occurring in a pandemic-affected world.
  - **Emphasize that technology tools should exist *in service to the broader goals of learners, workers, and employers***. Tech tools should not be an end in themselves. In particular, decisions to adopt any particular digital tool should assess the financial, logistical, and time costs associated with implementing the tool—for organizations, staff, and learners themselves—and whether there are less-burdensome alternatives.
  - **Ensure that program design and implementation budgets factor in sufficient support for professional development**. Innovative English language models, especially those that include robust online learning components, require substantive technology-related expertise and other skills to launch and carry out—skills that some adult educators themselves are still developing. For this reason, robust professional development resources and ongoing support for program administrators, teachers, coaches, case managers, and other staff is especially important.

- **Explore alternative methods for demonstrating learning outcomes.** As illustrated in the examples above, businesses do not always place a high value on standardized test scores as an indicator of learner success. Programs should experiment with alternative mechanisms for calculating skill gains without sacrificing rigor or quality. For example, programs that receive funding under WIOA Title II can take advantage of the opportunity to report measurable skill gains in a variety of ways, such as completion of On-the-Job Training milestones, or other documentation showing mastery of job skills.<sup>37</sup>
- **Consider how programs can analyze and respond to racial equity gaps.** Many English learners who are people of color face additional barriers to digital inclusion. These include challenges in obtaining home broadband internet access, lack of access to digital devices, and limited opportunities for skill-building.<sup>38</sup> Program providers should be mindful of the differential impact faced by English learners of color, and should analyze program data to better understand patterns and develop appropriate remedies.<sup>39</sup>
- **Articulate how the program will connect English learners to the next step(s) in their educational and career path goals.** This may include helping learners to acquire quality non-degree credentials,<sup>40</sup> preparing them for apprenticeship or other work-based learning opportunities, serving as an on-ramp to higher education, or assisting learners in meeting career promotion benchmarks within their current workplace.
- **Seek out non-traditional sources of funding.** While WIOA and HEA are vital pieces of the puzzle, English language programs can also be supported via SNAP Employment and Training, Community Services Block Grant, Community Development Block Grant, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and other federal and state policies.<sup>41</sup> Especially in a landscape newly opened by the Covid-19 pandemic, program providers should explore opportunities to access these funds by educating policymakers about how they can be creatively used to address English language and digital skill-building needs.<sup>42</sup>

## How can policymakers best support expansion of effective English learning models?

Policymakers play a vital role in tackling education and workforce skill development needs in local communities. Particularly as state and federal officials seek to identify effective tools to help their constituents navigate a tumultuous post-pandemic economy, English language learning models that include strong digital literacy components will be an important part of the solution. Advocates and others who wish to support public investment in new and emerging program models should encourage policymakers to keep the following principles in mind:

- **The “getting up to speed” costs to design and launch a new, online-friendly English language learning model are more than the “running costs” of an established in-person model.** Policymakers should invest sufficiently in technical assistance, capacity building, and professional development to help practitioners develop and implement programs that can respond to modern workforce needs. One avenue for such investment could be new Digital Literacy Upskilling grants.<sup>43</sup>
- **Businesses are central partners in designing English programs that can effectively meet their talent needs and reliably result in career advancement for their incumbent workers.** Policymakers should emphasize models that meaningfully involve employer voices at every stage of program design and implementation, and encourage businesses to co-invest in programs via industry sector partnerships or similar models.<sup>44</sup> In particular, state incumbent worker training policies should be explicitly inclusive of English language and digital skill-building as allowable activities.<sup>45</sup>



**Program providers should be mindful of the differential impact faced by English learners of color, and should analyze program data to better understand patterns and develop appropriate remedies.**





**Policymakers should invest in English learning approaches that incorporate Integrated Education and Training or other models that help learners attain industry-recognized credentials and are directly responsive to local labor market needs.**



- **Digital tools are a crucial component, but cannot be the *only* component, of English language learning.** Policymakers should support high-quality blended or hybrid models when possible, and should provide sufficient flexibility to allow practitioners to experiment with a rich variety of online-only formats as learners and employers alike adjust to a post-Covid world.
- **Public agencies should allow providers flexibility in performance measures used to demonstrate learning outcomes.** As illustrated by several of the examples in this brief, employers may not prioritize standardized test scores as the end-all and be-all measure of success. Programs should be allowed to calculate skill gains in alternative, but equally rigorous, ways. For example, policymakers should encourage providers to utilize the full range of Measurable Skill Gain indicators for programs funded under WIOA.<sup>46</sup>
- **Models that have been successful as individual or boutique examples need deeper study to aid in future replication.** Policymakers should set aside a portion of new or existing education investments to support research and evaluation to document findings as these isolated examples are scaled up.
- **An inclusive economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic will require adaptable models that allow people to build in-demand skills, even as those skills continue to evolve in a transforming labor market.** Policymakers should invest in English learning approaches that incorporate Integrated Education and Training or other models that help learners attain industry-recognized credentials and are directly responsive to local labor market needs.
- **Existing racial inequities faced by English learners of color in the US labor market have been magnified by the impact of Covid-19.** Policymakers should draw on data to understand the differential effects experienced by these workers and jobseekers, and ensure that upskilling policies are responsive to the specific barriers they face.<sup>47</sup>
- **English and digital skill-building should be supported not only by the traditional education and workforce policies such as WIOA and HEA, but also by other significant public investments.** Policymakers should encourage the usage of SNAP Employment and Training, Community Services Block Grant, Community Development Block Grant, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and other such policies to support innovative English and digital literacy program models emerging in a post-pandemic world.<sup>48</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 See, e.g., Muzaffar Chishti and Jessica Bolter, "Vulnerable to COVID-19 and in Frontline Jobs, Immigrants Are Mostly Shut Out of U.S. Relief," Migration Policy Institute, April 24, 2020, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/covid19-immigrants-shut-out-federal-relief>.
- 2 However, some analyses have acknowledged this issue. See, e.g., "Bay Area's Essential Workers Are Disproportionately People of Color, Women and Immigrants, New Study Finds," San Francisco Foundation, : <https://sff.org/bay-areas-essential-workers-are-disproportionately-people-of-color-women-and-immigrants-new-study-finds/>
- 3 Migration Policy Institute tabulations of the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) and Decennial Census data, viewable at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/US>
- 4 For example, see: <https://cepr.net/meatpacking-workers-are-a-diverse-group-who-need-better-protections/>
- 5 For more on barriers to upskilling for frontline workers, including English learners, see *Foundational Skills in the Service Sector*, National Skills Coalition, 2017.
- 6 For a detailed analysis of these issues, see *The Roadmap for Racial Equity: An Imperative for Workforce Development Advocates*, National Skills Coalition, 2019. Viewable at: [https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Racial-Equity-Report\\_6x9\\_web.pdf](https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Racial-Equity-Report_6x9_web.pdf)
- 7 Eric A. Hanushek, Guido Schwerdt, Simon Wiederhold, and Ludger Woessmann, "Returns to Skills Around the World: Evidence From PIAAC," (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 2013), viewable at: [https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/13114\\_-\\_hanushek\\_schwerdt\\_wiederhold\\_and\\_woessmann\\_-\\_returns\\_to\\_skills\\_around\\_the\\_world\\_-\\_evidence\\_from\\_piaac.pdf](https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/13114_-_hanushek_schwerdt_wiederhold_and_woessmann_-_returns_to_skills_around_the_world_-_evidence_from_piaac.pdf)
- 8 *The Roadmap for Racial Equity: An Imperative for Workforce Development Advocates*, National Skills Coalition, 2019. Viewable at: [https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Racial-Equity-Report\\_6x9\\_web.pdf](https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Racial-Equity-Report_6x9_web.pdf)
- 9 "Literacy and growth: Policy implications of new evidence from PIAAC," Guido Schwerdt, Simon Wiederhold, and T. Scott Murray (2018) <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/51bb74b8e4b0139570ddf020/t/5c1928fecdd8366551dc39797/1545152766907/Final+1-page+summaries.pdf>
- 10 Readers interested in the learning circle model can learn more about [one particularly robust pilot version](#) of this approach, led by the Boston-based nonprofit World Education. Titled English Now! and funded by the Dollar General Literacy Foundation, the program used a peer coaching model known as Peer 2 Peer University (P2PU) to serve adult learners who were on a waiting list for traditional English classes. In early 2020, P2PU also published a [Virtual Learning Circles Facilitator's Handbook](#) which provides more background on how the model can be adapted to an online-only format.
- 11 This latter group includes some students who lack a high school diploma or equivalent, but have demonstrated an "Ability to Benefit" from higher education. Learn more about AtB: <https://www.clasp.org/resources-ability-benefit>
- 12 For examples, see "COVID-19 shines a spotlight on digital skills: Updates and key questions for advocates and policymakers," National Skills Coalition, April 21, 2020, <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/news/blog/covid-19-shines-a-spotlight-on-digital-skills-updates-and-key-questions-for-advocates-and-policymakers> In cases where students or teachers lack digital access, some programs are providing old-fashioned "distance learning" paper packets to students via contactless drop-off. Those efforts are outside the scope of this paper.
- 13 "Federal government releases COVID-19 guidance for adult education programs," National Skills Coalition, March 30, 2020, <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/news/blog/federal-government-releases-covid-19-guidance-for-adult-education-programs>
- 14 For example, the federal LINCS bulletin board has hosted [lively discussions](#) among adult educators on how to move to online education. The EdTech Center at World Education has launched a [Tips for Distance Learning](#) website to assist adult basic education programs in launching or improving their distance learning program. The International Society for Technology in Education has created an [educator help desk](#), while the National Digital Inclusion Alliance has created a [COVID-19 resources page](#).
- 15 For more on this issue, see the immigrant and English learner section of [Applying a Racial Equity Lens to Digital Literacy](#) fact sheet, published by National Skills Coalition in April 2020.
- 16 This can be true even when training information is offered in languages other than English, as in this example of a [Spanish-language COVID-19 safety training video](#) from Building Skills Partnership.
- 17 Learn more: [https://www.lockportjournal.com/news/local-news/nccc-set-to-offer-training-ahead-of-reopening/article\\_f319b9bc-48be-51ae-8335-08dbe23aeccc.html](https://www.lockportjournal.com/news/local-news/nccc-set-to-offer-training-ahead-of-reopening/article_f319b9bc-48be-51ae-8335-08dbe23aeccc.html)
- 18 Even before the pandemic, businesses were increasing the amount of employee upskilling that is provided via online tools. Companies ranging from L'Oreal Cosmetics to [Nationwide Insurance](#) to [Walmart](#) have all launched online trainings in recent years. Learn more about these issues in *The New Landscape of Digital Literacy* (National Skills Coalition, 2020). <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/the-new-landscape-of-digital-literacy>
- 19 Alison Ascher Webber, "Integrating Digital Literacy and Language Instruction," Ed Tech Center at World Education, September 8, 2017. Viewable at: <https://edtech.worlded.org/digital-literacy-second-language-instruction/>
- 20 Related issues are explored in Alison Ascher Webber, "Innovative Digital Learning," Ed Tech Center at World Education, December 14, 2017. Viewable at: <https://edtech.worlded.org/innovative-digital-learning/>
- 21 More about the format options: <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/programs-services/i-dea/idea-ways-to-teach.aspx>
- 22 Jon Kerr and Will Durden, Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, personal correspondence with the author, May 18, 2020.
- 23 Source: <https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/about/facts-pubs/idea.pdf>
- 24 View materials: <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/programs-services/i-dea/idea-curriculum.aspx>
- 25 Learn more about BSP's ADVANCE English program: <https://www.buildingskills.org/advance-program>
- 26 Information in this section was provided by Mobile Up technical assistance provider Alison Ascher Webber of World Education's Ed Tech Center, via personal correspondence with the author, May 19, 2020.
- 27 Learn more about the program's expansion to an online-only format: <https://immigrationforum.org/article/upskilling-new-americans-innovative-english-training-for-career-advancement/>
- 28 Evaluation summary: [https://immigrationforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Executive-Summary\\_RTI\\_Evaluation-of-SONAW.pdf](https://immigrationforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Executive-Summary_RTI_Evaluation-of-SONAW.pdf)
- 29 The evaluation also found that 42 percent of participants made learning gains as measured by a standardized assessment. This finding emphasizes the importance of the recommendation made later in this paper about ensuring that English language training is assessed using metrics that are meaningful to the educational and career goals of the participants and their current or prospective employers. While standardized tests can be very useful in this regard, they should not be considered a sole measure of success.
- 30 Learn more about Cell-Ed: <https://www.cell-ed.com/>. In 2016, New

- York State's Office of New Americans became [the first state agency to contract with Cell-Ed](#) to provide English language learning services. The program successfully served more than 1,000 participants in its first year, including the hard-to-reach population of dairy farm workers in rural upstate NY.
- 31 This latter indicator is an example of aligning performance outcomes with industry-recognized credentials, an important tool in facilitating employer buy-in for worker upskilling.
  - 32 Learn more about Voxy: <https://voxy.com/features/vpa/>.
  - 33 Learn about an earlier version of the English for CNAs class: <https://voxy.com/blog/2019/12/featured-voxy-course-introduction-to-english-for-certified-nursing-assistants/>
  - 34 Learn more: <https://learn.voxy.com/wcnp-case-study-en.html>
  - 35 Ann-Marie Faria, Rebecca Bergey, Ashley Simpson Baird, and Alex Lishinski, "Using Technology to Support English Language Learners in Higher Education," American Institutes for Research, January 2019. Viewable at: <https://www.air.org/system/files/downloads/report/Using-Technology-to-Support-ELLs-in-Higher-Education-Voxy-January-2019.pdf>
  - 36 *Ibid.*
  - 37 Learn more about these and other possibilities: Judy Mortrude, "The Potential of Measurable Skill Gains: Beyond Pre/Post Testing," World Education/COABE, May 2020.
  - 38 These issues are discussed in depth in Applying a Racial Equity Lens to Digital Literacy, National Skills Coalition, 2020. Viewable at: <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Digital-Skills-Racial-Equity-Final.pdf>
  - 39 For more on using program data to inform racial equity efforts, see *The Roadmap for Racial Equity: An Imperative for Workforce Development Advocates*, National Skills Coalition, 2019.
  - 40 Learn more about how policymakers and advocates can identify such credentials in *Expanding Opportunities: Defining quality non-degree credentials for states*, National Skills Coalition, 2019. Viewable at: <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/news/blog/defining-quality-non-degree-credentials-is-crucial-to-putting-students-on-a-path-to-success>
  - 41 Examples of how many of these policies can support English language learning are provided in *Upskilling the New American Workforce*, National Skills Coalition, 2016. Viewable at: <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Upskilling-the-New-American-Workforce-1.pdf>
  - 42 Related issues are further explored in *The New Landscape of Digital Literacy*, National Skills Coalition, 2020. Viewable at: <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/the-new-landscape-of-digital-literacy>
  - 43 More detail about this proposal can be found in Leticia Lewis and Molly Bashay, "Digital Fluency for a Resilient Economy," National Skills Coalition Medium page, April 21, 2020. Viewable at: <https://medium.com/national-skills-coalition/digital-fluency-for-a-resilient-economy-38bf4a9e569c>
  - 44 Learn more about sector partnerships: <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/federal-policy/sector-partnerships>
  - 45 These issues will be further explored in a new publication from National Skills Coalition, forthcoming in Summer 2020.
  - 46 Learn more about these and other possibilities: Judy Mortrude, "The Potential of Measurable Skill Gains: Beyond Pre/Post Testing," World Education/COABE, May 2020.
  - 47 For more on using data to drive more racially equitable policies, see *The Roadmap for Racial Equity in Workforce Development*, National Skills Coalition, 2019.
  - 48 Examples of how many of these policies can support English language learning are provided in *Upskilling the New American Workforce*, National Skills Coalition, 2016. Viewable at: <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Upskilling-the-New-American-Workforce-1.pdf>

---

This research was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the author alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation.

*Photos on cover and pages 7 and 9 are courtesy of the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges. They are published here under a [Creative Commons BY 4.0 license](#).*



NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION  
Every worker. Every industry. A strong economy.

1250 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 200, Washington DC 20036

[www.nationalskillscoalition.org](http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org)