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## Introduction

America is a nation of immigrants. In the 1990s, the U.S. immigrant population grew rapidly, and in many states, the foreign-born population more than doubled between 1990 and 2000 (Capps, Fix, & Passel, 2002). Consequently, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of adult learners enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Data from the U.S. Department of Education, Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) indicate that 1.1 million ESL students were enrolled in federally funded programs in 2002, and almost 1.2 million in 2003. Of these 1.2 million adult learners, almost 50 percent were of Hispanic or Asian origin. Other learners were Africans, Eastern Europeans, and Pacific Islanders (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

States with the largest ESL enrollments include Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Texas, and Washington (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). These states have developed infrastructures and systems to serve English language learners (ELL). However, programs in states with smaller English language learner populations such as Alabama, Delaware, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, and North Dakota may not be as well equipped to serve the population. This is particularly true for many faith- and community-based providers in rural areas, as well as for smaller publicly funded projects. Many of the local providers in these new growth states lack experienced staff trained to work with adult English language learners, and their resources and infrastructure are limited.

The *Practitioner Toolkit: Working with Adult English Language Learners* is designed to give support to adult education and family literacy instructors who are new to serving adult English language learners and their families in rural, urban, and faith- and community-based programs. The *Toolkit* is designed to have a positive impact on the teaching and learning in these programs.

The results of two surveys helped shape the content of the *Toolkit*. The first survey, conducted in January 2003, was designed to determine challenges faced by educators and community leaders serving a sudden influx of Hispanic families. In order to expand the information to include a spectrum of those who work with English language learners, an electronic survey was conducted in December 2003 (National Center for Family Literacy, 2004).

In addition to the two surveys, a focus group was convened in January 2004, in Washington, DC, to obtain perspectives from practitioners across the country regarding the challenges that they experience in serving adult English language learners and to garner recommendations for the *Toolkit*. Participants represented adult education and family literacy practitioners from various backgrounds: a) practitioners experienced in serving English language learners and their families and those new to the field; b) practitioners from rural programs and those from urban centers; and c) practitioners from faith-based programs

and those from state-funded programs (National Center for Family Literacy and Center for Applied Linguistics, 2004). Their recommendations are reflected in the *Toolkit*.

This user-friendly *Toolkit* provides a variety of materials to help practitioners meet the language and literacy development needs of the adult learners they serve. It begins with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that address general aspects of adult ESL and family literacy instruction. Each FAQ references the section of the *Toolkit* that provides more complete information.

The Toolkit is divided into the following sections:

- Part I Background Information
- Part II Activity Packets
- Part III Parent Education in Family Literacy Programs
- Part IV Issues in Adult ESL Education and Family Literacy
- Part V Resources

Part I presents information for program staff about the population of adult English language learners in the United States. This section also describes types of programs that offer adult ESL instruction, the challenges that programs face, and some characteristics of effective programs.

Part II offers activity packets. These are descriptions of specific activities that can be carried out in programs and classes; and forms, surveys, and questionnaires that can be photocopied and used. They include a checklist for use with learners that are new to a program; samples of learner needs assessments; specific lessons and guidance for planning lessons for use with learners at different proficiency levels; and instructional strategies for promoting interaction, communication, and reading development in classes.

Part III presents information about parent education in family literacy programs. The goals and structure of parent education are explained, strategies for implementing parent education are given, and activities that parents can carry out with their children at home and in their communities are provided.

Part IV provides in-depth information about current issues in adult ESL education. The first article describes the research on second language acquisition and learning to read in a second language. Other articles address the assessment of adult English language learners and provide annotated charts of published assessments that are used in the field to assess the English language and Spanish language proficiency of adults learning English. Additional background articles describe research-based strategies for working with adult learners with learning disabilities and other special needs, helping learners make transitions beyond adult ESL classes, and helping learners prepare for permanent residency and citizenship.

Part V offers resources with additional information about working in adult ESL and family literacy programs.

It is our hope that this *Toolkit* will give adult education practitioners the information and tools they need to work effectively with this large and growing population.

### References

- Capps, R., Fix, M. E., & Passel, J. S. (2002, November). *The dispersal of immigrants in the 1990s*. Immigrant Families and Workers: Facts and Perspectives Series, Brief No. 2. Retrieved May 14, 2004, from [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410589\\_DispersalofImmigrants.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410589_DispersalofImmigrants.pdf)
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