

Addressing Critical Needs: Language and Civics Education

Written by Mike Honda
Thursday, 09 July 2009 19:00

I recently re-introduced the [Strengthen and Unite Communities through Civics Education and English Skills Act of 2009](#) to address the serious need to provide immigrant families and English Language Learners (ELL) access to critical language assistance and civics education. H.R. 3249 will [help those with limited English proficiency](#) become a more integral part of the American fabric and maximize their social and economic contributions.

With the growing limited English proficient (LEP) population, we must invest in the necessary resources to teach English language acquisition. According to the Census Bureau, over 19% of the population (54.8 million) speaks a language other than English at home. Between 11 and 21 million individuals are estimated to be LEP. The native-born LEP population nearly doubled between 2000 and 2005 and is increasing at a higher rate than the immigrant population.

Over the past 15 years, ELL student enrollment has nearly doubled and experts predict that one quarter of the total U.S. public school population will be made up of ELLs by 2025. There are currently 5.5 million ELLs in our school system. Despite common assumptions to the contrary, native-born U.S. citizens predominate in the K-12 ELL population: 76% of elementary school and 56% of secondary school ELLs are citizens and over one-half of the ELLs in public secondary schools are second- or third-generation children. H.R. 3249 aims to invest resources in the education of English language learners of all ages and empowers communities to focus on language acquisition and successful integration into their new homes.

Specifically, this legislation:

- Provides incentives to employers and the private industry who offer adult education and ESL programs to employees;
- Provides vital technical assistance and support to state and local communities seeking strong and productive strategies to respond to newcomers;

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- Requires the Office of Citizenship and Immigrant Integration in the Department of Homeland Security to further the integration of immigrants into their communities; and

- Contextualizes English literacy instruction in lessons on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization proceedings, civic participation and U.S. history and government.

For more information, please visit the [Integration page on my website](#) .