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MCAEL

Adult English Learning
for a Stronger Community

Annual Report ✨



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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, Gerard Etienne

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING BENEFITS EVERYONE

I moved to this country when I was thirteen. I didn't speak any English so my first year in an American school was difficult to say the least. I know first-hand how it feels to navigate a new country and a new language. It was no doubt much easier for me as a kid than it is for adults, who must juggle jobs, family, and myriad other demands – as so many English language learners do.

Learning English opens doors – to jobs, education, healthcare, community – and has the potential to dramatically improve lives. But English language learning doesn't just benefit individuals. It benefits **everyone**. It uplifts our entire community. This is the thread that runs through all that we do at MCAEL. It is the WHY.

I feel honored to join this meaningful work as MCAEL's new Executive Director. As you will see in this report, MCAEL has continued to grow and innovate over the past year, as we respond to the needs of our network programs and the thousands of learners they serve.

MCAEL is a coalition, and by its very definition that means that we are not in this alone. We are beyond grateful to our wonderful programs, instructors, funders, partners, and friends. With you, we can continue to support and build high-impact English language learning opportunities that have the power to change lives. Not just for individuals, but for everyone.

Gerard

BY THE NUMBERS

July 2024 – June 2025



MCAEL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FEEDBACK

97% of instructors “learned something new from this workshop that I can use in the classroom”

100% of program administrators stated they “learned at least one new practice or resource”

TOP 10 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru
Afghanistan, China, United States, Colombia
Ethiopia, and Venezuela*



TOP 5 LANGUAGES OF LEARNERS SERVED

Spanish, French, Amharic,
Chinese, Vietnamese*

**Data from grant-funded programs*

Grant-Funded Programs

\$1,465,853

in grant funding to **24**
organizations for **29** programs



10,166

learners enrolled

5,656

unique learners served

721

classes

351
in-person

312
online

58
hybrid



A background image of a classroom. In the foreground, several students are seated at white desks, some looking at papers or devices. In the background, an instructor is standing and interacting with a group of students. The room has large windows and blue chairs.

STRENGTHENING OUR NETWORK

INNOVATING TO IMPROVE LEARNER ACCESS & OUTCOMES

As the hub of a robust network of about 60 programs, MCAEL supports and strengthens adult English language programs in Montgomery County. MCAEL provides grants, professional development, and coaching to programs that deliver life-changing language learning opportunities. Programs are implemented by a wide variety of educational institutions, social service agencies, and community and faith-based organizations.

In areas with limited access to learning, we've innovated to create new opportunities, partnering with local organizations to offer classes, while training new instructors to teach them. We use data to determine where access to English learning is needed most and to identify issues that are of the most concern to the coalition.

This past year, MCAEL's professional development offerings and resources continued to promote and support learner-centered instruction, which evidence shows increases engagement and retention, leading to greater learning gains.

MCAEL has always been a convener, strengthening connections among ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) instructors and program managers through networking events, workshops, and meetings. As of this past year, we are also building community among adult learners across programs, bringing people together as part of a new learner advisory group and for our first-ever Learner Celebration.

----- ENHANCING ESOL PROGRAM DELIVERY

MCAEL's professional development for instructors and program administrators includes training and peer sharing opportunities that provide tools and strategies to address the specific needs of adult English language learners.

In line with our strategic planning priorities, we continued to focus on culturally responsive, learner-centered instruction. Grant-funded programs reported that they sought and incorporated feedback from learners about the curriculum, then structured in-class activities to reflect learner interests and goals. As a result, many reported increased learner engagement and retention.

MCAEL worked to ensure that instructor workshops modeled strategies for learner-centered instruction and the use of adult learning principles. This past year, we introduced a new model that gave workshop participants the opportunity to have a coaching session with facilitators a few weeks after each workshop, helping participants to apply what they had learned.

“The program adapted to student feedback, incorporating materials that reflected learners' interests and challenges, such as workplace vocabulary, interview preparation, and community engagement topics. These adjustments empowered students to more confidently navigate diverse environments, particularly in professional and academic settings. As a result, students became more motivated, engaged, and communicative during class sessions.”

Tanya Sanchez, Senior Program Manager, Identity

English Language Learning Opens Doors

Learning English opens doors to employment, promotions, and the ability to navigate daily life; such as communicating with doctors and teachers, going to the store, or taking public transportation. Learning English creates a sense of belonging.

RESPONDING TO COALITION NEEDS -----

MCAEL's well-established feedback methods ensure that we are responding to the needs of learners, instructors, and programs. We regularly gather feedback through surveys, post-meeting "exit polls," and from the MCAEL Advisory Group and Learner Leadership Group. We prioritize workshop and meeting topics that are most in demand: this past year, our professional development included assessment strategies, technology for teaching, learner retention, and learner registration.

Through our learner survey and focus groups in 2023, we heard that adult learners wanted more practice speaking; at the same time, responses to our instructor and program administrator surveys indicated an interest in more training on improving learners' conversation skills. These led to the development of a new instructor training course. *(See opposite page.)*

English Language Learning Strengthens Families

With improved English communication skills, learners can better support their children's education and healthcare, and obtain employment or get a better paying job, providing their families with greater financial stability.



----- TEACHING CONVERSATION SKILLS

This past May, we piloted a new training course for adult ESOL instructors on how to teach conversation skills. We commissioned a landscape analysis to better understand how existing conversation classes were run, which included interviews with program administrators and class observations. We then designed a pilot course based on findings from the research.

Fourteen participants took part in the eight-hour pilot held over two days, which included adult learning theory, balancing teaching conversation skills with facilitating conversation practice in the classroom, and specific teaching facilitation strategies and tips. Participants also had the opportunity to practice in front of their peers and gain feedback. Revised to incorporate valuable input from pilot participants, this course will now be offered on a regular basis in the coming year.



English Language Learning Improves the Local Economy

Learning English is key to gaining employment and better-paying jobs; as a result, learners spend their increased income locally on rent, groceries, transportation, and other services.

EXPANDING ACCESS FOR LEARNERS -----

Community Learning Groups

MCAEL launched Community Learning Groups (CLGs) in 2021 to bring classes directly to people in areas with limited learning opportunities. We partner with schools, community-based groups, religious organizations, and local businesses to establish “starter” programs that serve as entry points for learning. Groups we’ve partnered with include Greencastle Elementary School, the Haitian Resettlement Working Group, and Ruppert Landscape Company.

The CLG program also addresses another pressing need: a shortage of language instructors. As part of the program, we recruit and train new instructors who are from the same communities and often former language learners themselves. In 2025, three new CLG instructors completed a 20-hour training program.

In August 2025, an independent evaluation of the CLG program was completed, providing valuable insights to guide planning and implementation for the next three years.



English Language Learning Benefits Employers

Employees who improve their language skills are better able to communicate with customers and care recipients, thereby providing better service, and reducing turnover and training costs.

MCAEL’s CLG program numbers to date:



----- CENTERING LEARNER VOICES

Learner Leadership Group

MCAEL's new learner advisory group, designed as a complement to the MCAEL Advisory Group made up of ESOL professionals, elevates learner voices in decision-making, programming, and advocacy.

The first Learner Leadership Group (LLG) cohort played a key role in planning MCAEL's Learner Celebration, as well as advising on other network activities and programs. In addition, members participated in leadership training in communications and public speaking.

This year, LLG members represented four different languages: Spanish, Amharic, Chinese, and French. We look forward to continuing the LLG with an expanded group of learner members.

English Language Learning Builds Stronger Communities

With stronger communication comes stronger and more inclusive communities. Schools, libraries, and health clinics can serve residents more effectively, and people are more likely to get involved in civic activities.

Learner Celebration

On April 26, 2025, MCAEL held its first-ever Celebration of Adult English Learners. This was the culmination of an idea sparked by learner focus group participants to foster a larger sense of community among English learners. One hundred and sixty-five people representing languages and cultures from around the world came out for food, performances, resources, and inspiring stories from fellow learners.



“Today, I want to encourage you: keep going with your classes, even when it feels hard. Growth happens when we step outside of our comfort zone.”

Kanidiengue Kone, Learner Leadership Group member who moved to the U.S. from Côte d'Ivoire three years ago, addressing the Learner Celebration



HIGHLIGHTS -----

The Circle: Online ESOL Community

In February 2025, we launched the MCAEL Circle, a virtual hub for ESOL instructors and program administrators that provides a new platform for collaboration and community. MCAEL Circle members have since been using the hub to discuss professional development and grant opportunities, promote and find teaching positions, share community events, find classes for students, share helpful resources, and ask for advice from fellow educators and program leaders.



10th Annual Spelling Bee

For our 10th Annual Grown-Up Spelling Bee, we hosted a large and enthusiastic crowd for an evening of food, fun, community – and of course, competition! Our top sponsors were represented onstage with Spelling Bee teams: BGE, Bethesda Magazine, Montgomery College, National Cooperative Bank, and the Next Execs from the Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce.

Congratulations to the 2025 People, Power, and Potential Award winners – Robert Huffman, volunteer instructor at Covenant Life Church ESOL, and Laura Prado, Program Supervisor for ESOL at Catholic Charities – who have both made a lasting impact on the ESOL community.

Our Newest StoryMap

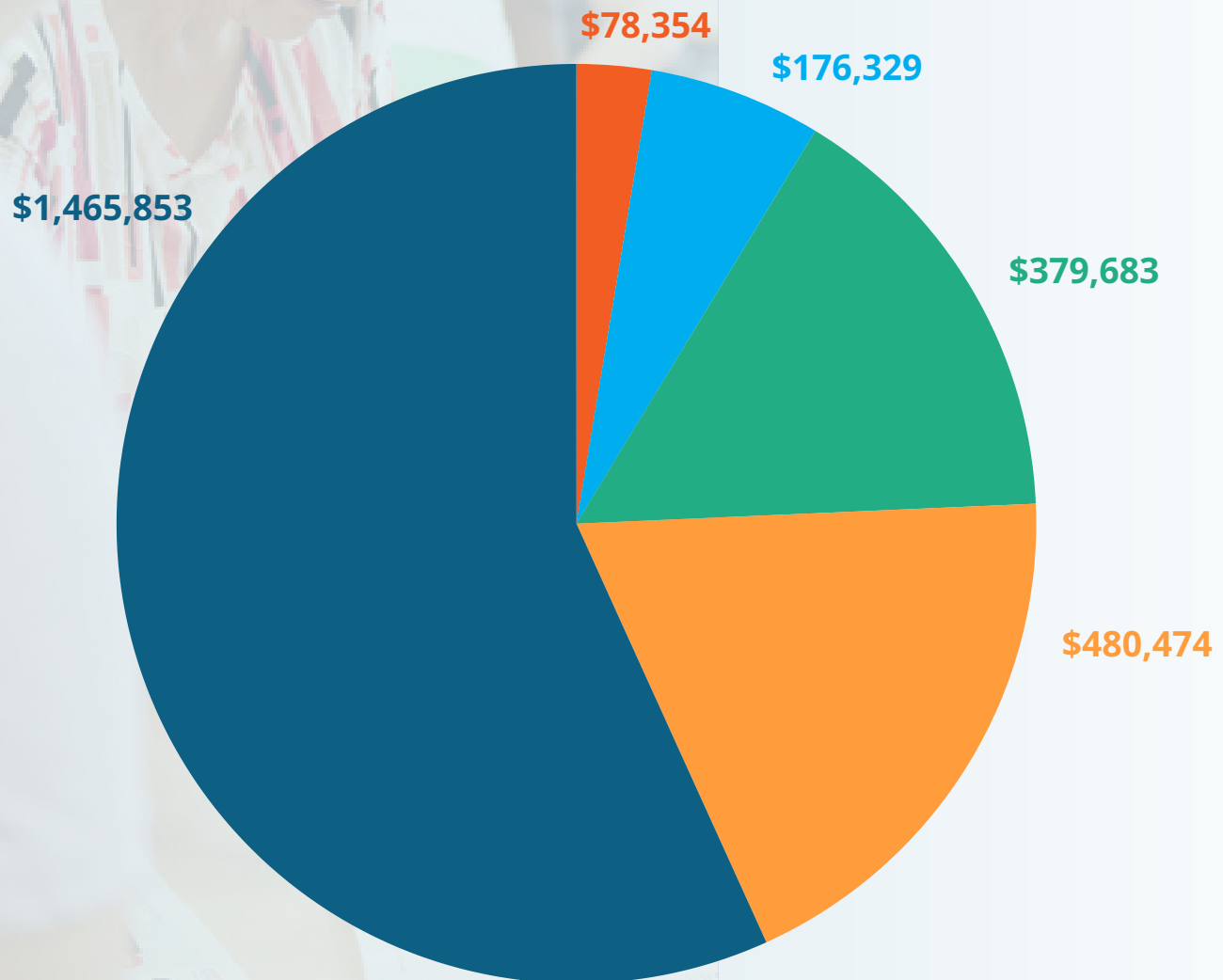
MCAEL's StoryMap is an interactive data presentation that analyzes learner and class information to provide a detailed snapshot of how well our network is meeting the needs of learners. This analysis helps us identify the areas and communities that need greater access to ESOL instruction. We offer this data in a comprehensive, accessible format as a community resource, available on our website.



FINANCIALS

July 2024 - June 2025

- Capacity Building Grants ●
- Public Engagement ●
- Management & General ●
- Capacity Building Programs ●
- Fundraising ●



CONTRIBUTORS

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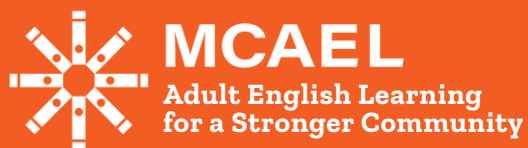
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**Active until June 30, 2025*



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Front Cover: MCAEL's Celebration of Adult English Learners

