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MCAEL

Adult English Learning
for a Stronger Community



Annual Report

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ***Gerard Etienne***



This past year was a challenging one for Montgomery County's ESOL community. Adult English learning programs and the learners they serve have been thrust into a difficult and rapidly changing environment. Programs had to quickly adapt to shifting needs and circumstances – and so did MCAEL. We responded by leaning into what we do best: listening to our coalition, strengthening our partnerships, and pivoting our trainings and support to meet the current need.

This is also a year to celebrate. It's been twenty years since MCAEL was born as a coordinator and capacity builder for the County's many adult ESOL programs. We've grown over the years, expanding our coalition's ability to provide high-quality instruction and increasing access to learning through professional development, data and resources, Community Learning Groups, and by fostering a strong community.

It's this community of instructors, volunteers, program administrators, and learners who continue to show up, adapt, support each other, and find ways forward together. This is what it means to be a coalition.

We are beyond grateful to our extended community of supporters, funders, partners, and friends – it's thanks to you that we are still here, doing this important work.

After twenty years, what we do still matters – even more so in this current environment. Learning English changes lives for the better; it's an essential skill that tips the scales towards a better job, financial security for a family, access to healthcare and education, community belonging, and safety.

In this milestone year, we've crafted a new mission and vision to reflect who we are now and where we would like to be: ***"A Montgomery County where English is not a barrier."*** We look forward to getting there together.

Gerard

IT'S OUR BIRTHDAY!

It was twenty years ago that MCAEL emerged as a coalition of English language programs in Montgomery County. Based on a County Council taskforce's recommendations, MCAEL was established in 2006 to increase coordination and collaboration among adult English programs, and to strengthen their capacity to provide quality instruction.



Test your MCAEL knowledge with this quiz!
(turn over for answers)

1. *What was MCAEL's original name before it became incorporated as MCAEL in December 2006?*

2. *What organizations conducted the research for the County Council taskforce that led to the founding of MCAEL?*

3. *In what year did MCAEL begin giving grants?*

4. *How much grant funding did MCAEL give that first year and to how many programs?*

5. *How many Executive Directors were there before Gerard?*

Answers:

1. Montgomery Coalition for Adult Literacy and ESOL (M-CALESOL) | **2.** Montgomery College and the Center for Applied Linguistics | **3.** In 2008 the County Council designated MCAEL to administer all county-funded grants for adult English programs | **4.** $440,000 to fourteen programs | **5.** Two: Rachel Perić and Kathy Stevens

MISSION, VISION, & VALUES



As we celebrate twenty years, we are looking ahead, strengthening and refining our purpose and how we serve our community. With this in mind, we have crafted new mission, vision, and values statements that more fully align with who we are, what we do, and what we believe.

MISSION

We support and connect adult English language learners, instructors, and programs to advance individual and community success.

VISION

A Montgomery County where English is not a barrier.

VALUES

MCAEL's values reflect how we work, collaborate, and serve our community. By naming them, we communicate who we are and what we believe in.

Learner-Centeredness: We keep the learner at the center, ensuring our work supports their progress, confidence, and success.

Equity: We believe opportunity begins with equitable access to English language learning.

Collaboration: We strengthen our community by collaborating with organizations, educators, and residents to expand access to English language learning.

Integrity: We earn trust through consistency, honesty, and reliability.

Advocacy: We champion English language learning as essential and indispensable to individual success and a stronger Montgomery County.













VOICES OF MCAEL



“Like many immigrant families, we arrived in this country with many dreams, hopes, and goals for a better future. However, one of the first and most significant barriers I encountered was language.

I began volunteering at my son’s school, where I met other women who were facing the same challenges I was — difficulties communicating, limited job opportunities, and a deep fear of speaking with their children’s teachers. Many of us were also afraid to visit the doctor because we could not fully understand what was being said. We felt frustrated, isolated, and, at times, invisible.
These shared experiences inspired me to take action. I decided to create a safe space where Latina women could feel heard, supported, and empowered.”

~ Milagro Flores, CEO, Founder, and Director of Mujer Fuerza y Coraje, and winner of the 2026 MCAEL People, Power, & Potential Award

“Some learners come because they want to be able to communicate with their children's teachers at school. They want to be able to communicate better with their families, with their children who are learning English more quickly than they are. They want to be able to get a better job. They want to be able to engage in the community in a different way, with their neighbors, and talk with the people around them more eloquently and in more depth and build connections. There's a lot of different reasons that people come to English classes, but they come and they keep showing up.”

~ Megan Blanchard, former ESOL Program Manager, Ana A. Brito Foundation

“Our connection with MCAEL began in 2022 through their Community Learning Groups. Later, we applied for a start-up grant and then an Access Small Grant. From the beginning, MCAEL treated our small program with respect and belief. That has meant a great deal to us.

Over the past several years, our program has welcomed more than 150 learners from countries including Afghanistan, Syria, Chad, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Sudan, and many others. Our instructors and volunteers also come from many places and many walks of life.

That diversity is one of our greatest strengths. People learn best when they feel seen, understood, and welcomed.”

~ Bibi Mohamed, former ESOL Program Director for ISWA and winner of the 2026 MCAEL People, Power & Potential Award

“MCAEL is a huge contributor to our program. Besides financially, they help with supporting me as a program administrator. I come [to workshops and convenings] and I learn so much. I take that knowledge back to my program. I hear what works for others, and I try to see if that would work for us — and most of the time it does.

MCAEL also offers trainings for my teachers. Better teachers mean better programs, better communication with our students, and everybody wins. The teachers are teachers, but they're also students; everybody's constantly learning and constantly improving.”

~ Cindy Newland, Program Manager, Learning English Together, JSSA



WATCH: Why is Adult English Language Learning so Important?

BY THE NUMBERS

July 2025 – June 2026

$1,505,853

in grant funding for 30 programs

Learner Enrollment

8094 Learners Enrolled
4523 Unique Learners

676
Classes

344	**276**	**56**
In-person	Online	Hybrid

25

Professional Development workshops, courses, & meetings

498

ESOL program administrator and instructor participants



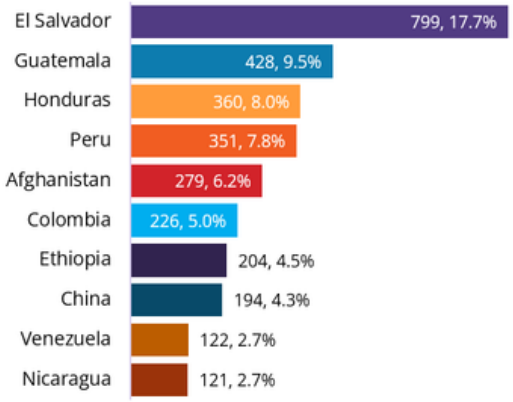
Want more data? Experience our interactive StoryMap.



Learners by Gender

74.8% women | **23.8%** men | **1.3%** other

Top 10 Countries of Origin



Top 5 Languages

Spanish

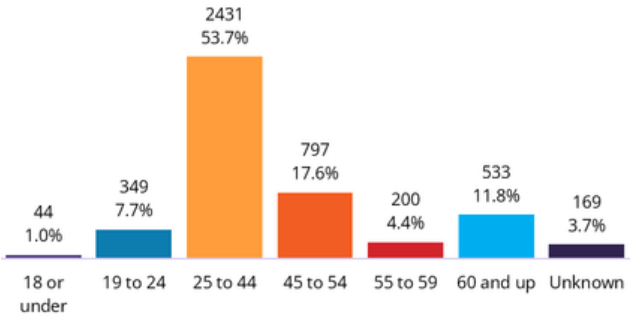
French

Amharic

Chinese

Pashto

Learners by Age



Data from grant-funded programs



HIGHLIGHTS: 2024-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

MCAEL's 2024–26 Strategic Plan prioritized learner-centered instruction and reducing barriers to learning to enhance learner gains and retention, and as equity and access to English learning. Over the past three years, we focused renewed attention on the way we respond to coalition needs and established a new standard of learner-centeredness in our workshops, meetings, and training courses.

Listening to Our Coalition

To understand current trends and challenges, MCAEL continued to convene the MCAEL Advisory Group, and to conduct post-workshop evaluations and biennial surveys of program managers and instructors. We launched the Centering Learner Voices initiative to ensure that adult English learners also have a voice in decision making, programming, and advocacy. Under this initiative, we:

- **Created the Learner Leadership Group (LLG):** This advisory group meets quarterly to provide input on MCAEL programming and participate in leadership training; the LLG is currently made up of eight learners representing four languages (French, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Urdu).
- **Conducted Learner Surveys and Focus Groups:** To gain a broader understanding of learner experience, we instituted a biennial coalition-wide learner survey and facilitated four learner focus groups – one in English, two in Spanish, and one in Amharic.
- **Developed a Model Learner Satisfaction Survey:** MCAEL created a customizable template to support programs that do not already have a mechanism for administering learner surveys to gauge learner outcomes and satisfaction with a class.

From Feedback to Action

Feedback from instructors, program managers, and learners led directly to these MCAEL initiatives to support programs in the coalition:

- **Conversation Skills Instruction:** Based on research and observations of existing conversation classes, MCAEL developed the "Building Conversation Skills through Teaching and Facilitation" course, which was piloted in 2025 and is now a regular part of MCAEL's professional development offerings. The two-day course covers adult learning theory and practical teaching and facilitation strategies.
- **Online and Hybrid Classes:** In response to program managers' concerns about lower enrollment and attendance of in-person English classes due to increased immigration enforcement and other barriers, in spring 2026 we refocused our professional development onto online and hybrid instruction. We designed and offered a practical training series on Zoom for instructors, hosted a discussion for program managers on implementing hybrid classes, and planned for an ongoing program to promote hybrid instruction.
- **Instructor Recruitment and Retention:** Hearing that programs were having some difficulty in finding ESOL instructors, we hired an experienced adult ESOL professional to analyze survey data, gather additional information, and make recommendations for how MCAEL can support programs with instructor recruitment and retention. A working group of program administrators and the MCAEL Advisory Group provided feedback on these recommendations; MCAEL will develop an action plan to be incorporated into our 2027–29 Strategic Plan.

Building Community Within the Coalition

We believe that building community is key for continuous learning and improvement, and have woven this into our work:

- **The Circle:** We launched this virtual hub for ESOL instructors and program administrators in February 2025 as an online gathering place to share experiences, advice, and resources. There are currently 225 members using the MCAEL Circle.
- **Peer sharing:** We have regularly scheduled sessions for both instructors and program managers to share their expertise and experiences. Early in 2026, MCAEL also began convening monthly meetings of adult ESOL program administrators to discuss increasing challenges, including increased immigration enforcement and economic difficulties.
- **Learner Celebration:** To help foster a sense of community among learners across programs, MCAEL hosted our first-ever Learner Celebration in spring of 2025. Over 150 people representing languages from around the world came out for performances, inspirational stories, international food, and practical resources.

Increasing Equity and Access in English Instruction

Over the last three years, MCAEL has focused on identifying the areas of greatest need and limited access to classes to guide funding support for programs and the establishment of MCAEL-implemented classes.

- **Equity Focus Areas:** MCAEL developed an interactive mapping tool that utilizes U.S. Census data on English proficiency among adults, household income, and race and ethnicity. This Equity Focus Area map is regularly updated and provides guidance to MCAEL and to ESOL organizations on where to support classes. The number of class sites in EFAs increased from 24 in 2022 to 42 in 2026.
- **Community Learning Groups (CLGs):** MCAEL's CLGs were created to increase access to English classes for people in areas with limited learning options by bringing classes directly to these communities. We do this by partnering with local organizations, including: Ruppert Landscaping; Greencastle, Watkins Mill, and Galway Elementary Schools; the Haitian Resettlement Working Group; and EduCare.
- **Training New Instructors:** The CLG program also trains new ESOL instructors, with a focus on recruiting those who were English language learners themselves or are children of English language learners.

Since the CLG program began...

20
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

24
INSTRUCTORS TRAINED

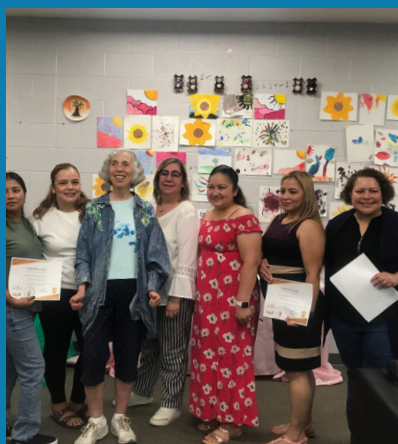
43
CLG CLASSES

346
LEARNER PARTICIPANTS



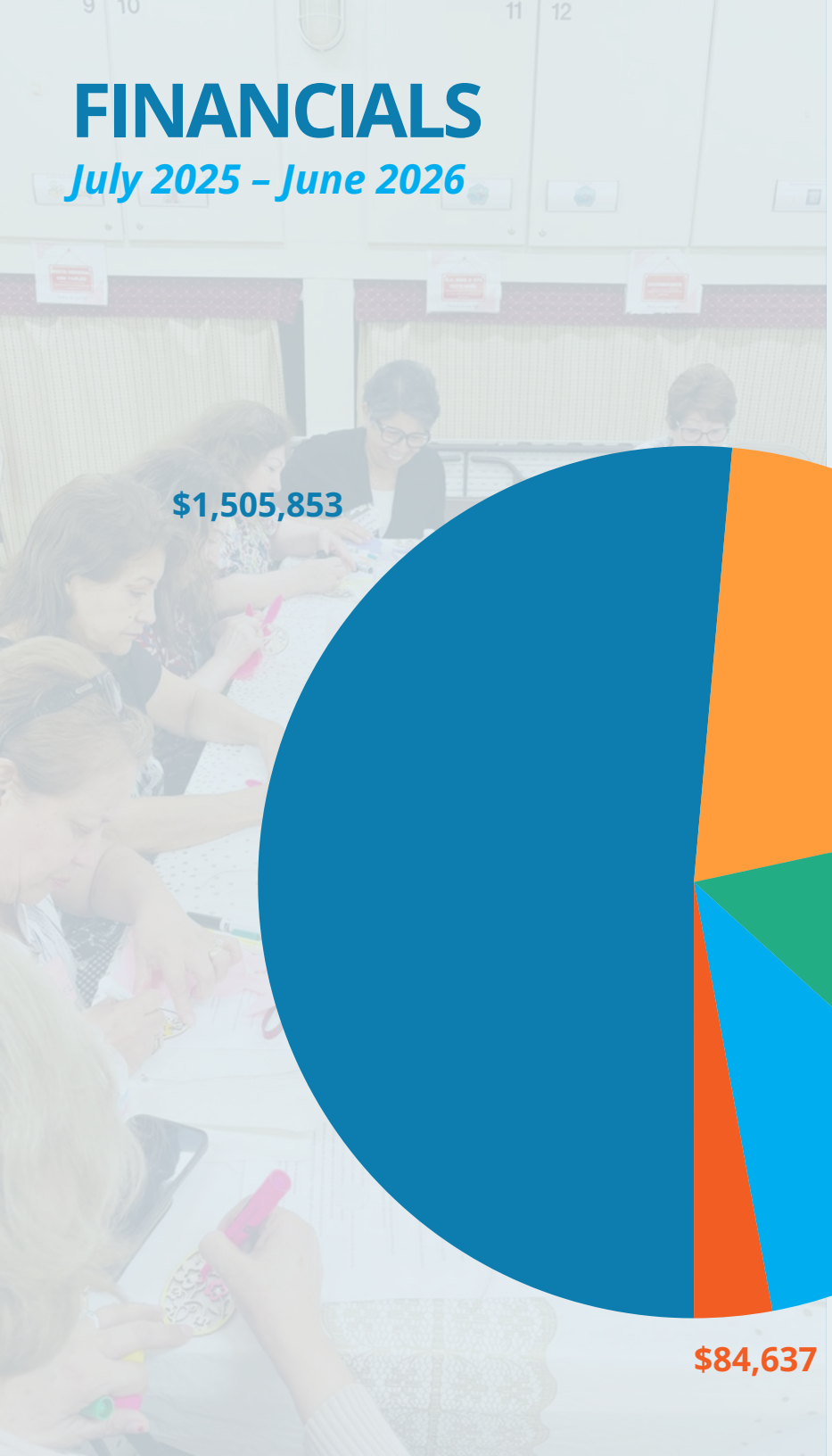






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July 2025 – June 2026



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