



**2007  
English Speakers of Other  
Languages (ESL)**

**Community  
Needs Assessment**

**in**

**Richmond, Virginia**

**The Bridge Community Development Corporation  
PO Box 7793  
Richmond, Virginia 23231  
(804) 651-4888**

# **Greater Richmond's ESL Community Needs Assessment**

## **Executive Summary**

*The Bridge CDC*

### **Needs Assessment Terms and Definitions:**

Over the past year, The Bridge CDC conducted a needs assessment on the English as a Second Language (ESL) Community of Greater Richmond. The Bridge CDC defines the ESL Community as ESL service providers and potential and current ESL students. For the purpose of this study, Greater Richmond was defined as the City of Richmond, the County of Henrico, and the County of Chesterfield. ESL service provider is a generic term The Bridge CDC created to label any college, university, church, non-profit organization or local government entity that offers ESL instruction. Potential and current ESL students were defined as native Spanish speaking adults or foreign born Hispanic adults. The study focused only on foreign born Hispanic adults to narrow the scope of the research. Hispanic adults were chosen over every other foreign born ethnic group, because Hispanics make up the majority of non-native English speakers in Greater Richmond and make up the majority of current ESL students.

### **Needs Assessment Framework:**

The Bridge CDC's Needs Assessment of Greater Richmond's ESL Community was conducted in four phases.

Phase I was the study of potential and current students needs and wants from ESL service providers. Volunteers of The Bridge CDC participated in four community festivals and collected surveys from 72 native Spanish-speaking adults.

Phase II was the study of the challenges, desired resources, and services offered by ESL service providers. The executive staff of The Bridge CDC consulted research professionals, ESL specialists, ESL professionals, and community leaders to compose a list of 21 known ESL service providers, and compose a 30+ question survey for the 21 identified ESL service providers. A task force of volunteers mailed the questionnaire to ESL service providers and placed follow-up calls to ensure the questionnaire was completed. Eleven, over 50%, of the ESL service providers completed the survey.

Phase III is a follow-up to Phase II. The 11 providers that completed Phase II's questionnaire were contacted and asked to provide the enrollment total, retention rate, and progression rate for all their ESL classes in 2006. Seven, 1/3 of the total known ESL service providers, answered the 7 question survey.

Phase IV was the study of potential and current ESL students participation in ESL classes in 2006. The executive staff of The Bridge CDC consulted research professionals, ESL specialists, ESL professionals, and community leaders to identify organizations and neighborhoods with a dense Hispanic population, and compose a 13 question survey for native Spanish speaking adults. A task force of volunteers surveyed 65 native Spanish

speaking adults at 2 churches with a large Hispanic congregation and 4 apartment complexes with a dense Hispanic population.

### **Findings:**

The findings of the four phases of the needs assessment were combined to provide a well-rounded description of Greater Richmond's ESL Community.

Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2000 Decennial Census and 2005 American Community Survey, The Bridge CDC estimates that there are 15, 211 Hispanic residents that could benefit from ESL services. The U.S. Census Bureau also generated maps of Richmond, Henrico, and Chesterfield which illustrate that non-native English speaking Hispanics are concentrated in South Richmond, West Henrico, and North Chesterfield.

At four community festivals, volunteers of The Bridge CDC asked Hispanic adults about their proficiency in English. 45% of the respondents reported that they do not speak English; 16% reported that they do not speak English well; 18% reported that they speak English well, and 3% reported that they speak English very well.

The terms "do not speak English," "do not speak English well," "speak English well" and "speak English very well" were used by the U.S. Census Bureau to ask foreign born U.S. residents about their proficiency in English. As stated in the preceding paragraph, The Bridge CDC used these terms to ask Hispanic adults of Greater Richmond about their proficiency in English.

These terms were also used in Phase IV of the ESL needs assessment. Coincidentally, 45% of those respondents reported that they do not speak English, 48% reported that they do not speak English well, 9% reported that they speak English well, and 2% reported that they speak English very well. The response rate of this survey totals 104%, because 10 of the survey respondents marked both "do not speak English" and "do not speak English well."

In response to this need, colleges, universities, churches, non-profits, and local government entities offer ESL instruction. ESL service providers are located throughout the Greater Richmond area, with the majority of them located in South Richmond, North Chesterfield, and West Henrico.

The Bridge CDC estimates that in 2006 the 21 ESL service providers of Greater Richmond served an average of 425 non-native English-speaking adults; which totals 8,929 students. When colleges and universities are excluded, the estimated number served falls to an average of 232 per provider for a total of 3,949 students.

The estimated 8,929 non-native English speakers that were served in 2006 are substantially lower than the estimated 15, 211 native Spanish-speakers that could benefit from ESL instruction. The number of native Spanish-speakers that are not benefiting from ESL instruction could substantially grow once the number of undocumented

residents is considered. The number of non-native English speakers who are not benefiting from ESL instruction also grows once other foreign born residents are included.

When volunteers of The Bridge CDC asked native Spanish-speaking adults about their participation in ESL, 78% of survey respondents said that they did not enroll in an ESL class in 2006. 85% of those same respondents said that they did want to improve their English language skills and were willing to enroll in an ESL class to do so.

Volunteers of The Bridge CDC then asked why they did not enroll in an ESL class in 2006. 52% reported that they did not enroll in an ESL class, because they were not aware of any available. 22% say they did not enroll because the class time conflicted with their work schedule. Surprisingly, only 2% of respondents said they were unable to enroll in an ESL class, because they had to care for their children during class time. A majority of ESL professionals and specialists cited lack of childcare as a major barrier to ESL enrollment. 12% reported that lack of transportation prevented them from enrolling in an ESL class. 7% said that they did not want to enroll in an ESL class, and 5% said they did not need an ESL class.

Current and potential ESL students were also asked which days were most convenient for them to attend ESL classes – the weekend or weekdays. 76% of the survey respondents said that they prefer weekend ESL classes. Only 1 ESL service provider that we surveyed actually offers weekend ESL classes. Virtually all the ESL classes that we surveyed said they offer ESL classes at least 2 days a week, 2 hours per day. Current and potential ESL students were also asked if they would prefer an ESL class for 2 days a week/2 hours per day or 1 day a week/3 hours per week. 53% of the respondents said they would rather take ESL classes one day a week for 3 hours. Having ESL classes 1 day a week for 3 hours a day may not be a viable option. Many ESL specialist and professionals contest that 3 hours a week is probably not enough instruction hours to substantially further English proficiency. Many ESL practitioners say that their students ask for more ESL instruction time, not less.

The National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education, an outcome-based reporting system for the U.S. Department of Education, categorize ESL students into six Educational Functioning Levels. The Bridge CDC asked Greater Richmond's ESL service providers if they categorize their students by level. 71% of ESL programs said they separate their students according to their English proficiency level.

A student's English proficiency level is determined by a standardized Adult ESL assessment. The most prominent Adult ESL assessments used by Greater Richmond ESL service providers are CASAS, BEST Plus, and BEST Literacy. 36% of ESL Programs surveyed reported that they do not use a standardized assessment. Meaning that there are some ESL professionals that do not separate their students according to their English proficiency levels or their students are not accurately categorized and grouped. Inaccurate grouping can potentially create a barrier to timely English language acquisition.

ESL students are taught from a curriculum. There are six distinct curricula used by ESL service providers in Greater Richmond. The most prominent curricula are “Side by Side” and “Ready to Go.” 1 ESL program that we surveyed does not use a curriculum.

ESL service providers said that they teach their students English for basic needs, employment, civics, academics, and family literacy.

Current and potential ESL students reported that the three most important things that they needed English for were health related issues (71%), English for their current job (68%), and English to find new employment (55%).

ESL service providers listed the following as challenges to their organization’s growth and development: money, transient population (attrition), informing the community (advertising, trust, enrollment), insufficient training, furniture, classroom aides (volunteers), and media resources.

When ESL service providers were asked specifically about student attrition, they reported that only 41% of their student body was able to complete an ESL class in 2006.

When current and potential ESL students were asked about student attrition, 35% reported that they registered for an ESL, but was unable to attend any of the classes in 2006. 24% report they registered for an ESL class and were able to attend some classes, but were ultimately unable to complete a semester in 2006. Moreover when these two figures are combined, 59% of the Hispanic adults surveyed enrolled, but were unable to complete an ESL class in 2006.

Current and potential ESL students were then asked why they dropped out an ESL class. Of those who reported they dropped out, 43% said they could not complete a course because of their work schedule, 29% said they could not complete a course because of transportation, 7% said they could not complete their class because they had to care for their kids, and 12% said they lost interest.

According to the ESL providers surveyed an average of 34% of Greater Richmond’s ESL students advanced to a higher English proficiency level in 2006.

ESL service providers named the following as the resources they needed to become more effective: money (including funding for undocumented students), computers, staff (bus drivers, full-time faculty, more experienced teachers), transportation (buses), childcare, training, and improved immigration laws.

43% of ESL providers said they need more volunteers, 36% said they need more trained staff, 7% say they need assessment administrators (only 14% of providers report they have assessment administrators), and no one reported they needed outcome measurement staff.

Based on the findings of the ESL Needs Assessment, The Bridge CDC identified the following as key barriers that must be removed to make ESL service providers more effective: poor enrollment, high student attrition, poor student progression, lack of volunteers, insufficient training, and lack of resources. The Bridge CDC acknowledges that not all of these barriers affect all ESL service providers, and that the ESL service providers of Greater Richmond are doing a great job to cause positive change in the lives of their students. Each barrier affects each ESL service provider in a different way. However, The Bridge CDC is stating that all these barriers affect the entire ESL service community, and ESL service providers should collaborate to remove these barriers.