



## ENGLISH-ONLY “FACT CHECK”

*“The English language is under attack.”*

**Fact Check:** Nearly every American speaks English. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 92% of Americans have “no difficulty speaking English.” In addition, second-language speakers also speak English. According to the U.S. Census, most people who speak a language other than English also speak English “very well.” The vast majority of Americans (215,423,557 out of 262,375,152 – 82%) *speaks only English* at home.

*“Immigrants today just don’t want to learn English or assimilate.”*

**Fact Check:** Immigrants want to learn English, but are often denied the opportunity. A recent study by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Education Fund (see Tucker, Dr. James T., *Waiting Times for Adult ESL Classes and the Impact on English Learners*) showed that 57.4% of the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) providers they surveyed had waiting lists of limited-English-proficient (LEP) persons seeking ESL services. Other providers were at capacity but did not keep waiting lists. There should be no question of the desire LEP persons have to learn English.

*“My grandparents learned English and assimilated; why can’t immigrants today?”*

**Fact Check:** Today’s immigrants learn English as quickly as previous groups. According to the 2000 Census, of the people who report speaking Spanish at home, 72% report speaking English “well” or “very well.” Research on the second and third generations consistently shows adherence to the three-generation pattern that immigrants have followed for more than a century. For example, a report on language assimilation by the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research at Albany (*Language Assimilation Today: Bilingualism Persists More Than in the Past, But English Still Dominates*, available online at <http://mumford.albany.edu/children/researchbriefs.htm>) found that the second generation is largely bilingual; 92% of the Hispanics speak English “well” as do 96% of the Asians, though most also speak another language at home. By the third generation, the pattern is English monolingualism. The study also finds that recent immigration levels have not changed the pattern.

*“The government is making it too easy for immigrants to refuse to learn English.”*

**Fact Check:** Government business is conducted almost exclusively in English. Studies of the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) have consistently shown that the overwhelming majority of U.S. government documents are printed in English only. In fact,

only about 200 – or less than 1% – of U.S. government documents are published in a language other than English (see U.S. General Accounting Office, *Letter to Honorable Richard Shelby, Honorable William F. Clinger, Jr., and Honorable Bill Emerson, September 20, 1995, GAO/GGD-95-243R, Federal Foreign Language Documents*; and U.S. General Accounting Office, *Letter to Honorable Richard Shelby, June 5, 1998, GAO/GGD-98-99 Federal Non-English-Language Documents 1995-1997*).

*“The government has already done too much to help immigrants learn English.”*

Fact Check: Immigrants’ English-language acquisition is remarkable given that there has been insufficient investment in English-language acquisition programs. Since fiscal year (FY) 2004, funding for adult education programs has decreased by more than \$10 million, funding for K-12 English-language acquisition programs has decreased by more than \$12 million, and the Even Start family literacy program has been decimated, with funding cuts of nearly \$148 million. It is fair to expect immigrants to integrate into American society, and English-language acquisition is a large part of that, but we should adopt policies that will make that happen. Congress has not done enough to aid English-language acquisition.