

Opening Doors to Apprenticeships for Adult English Language Learners

Governor Gavin Newsome's proposal to increase the number of active apprentices in California from 75,000 to 500,000 by 2029 has the potential to open doors for a more diverse workforce to achieve financial security through middle- and higher-skilled, high quality jobs. This should be good news for the many adult English language learners who remain in low-wage positions because of limited English and technical skills. *But are we doing enough to ensure apprenticeships are accessible to English language learners?*

California's adult education providers have the tools to make apprenticeships accessible to English learners. The Integrated Education and Training (IET) approach demonstrates how apprentices can improve their English while gaining workplace competencies. Whether through a preapprenticeship program that establishes foundational skills and links learners to apprenticeship, or through an inclusive apprenticeship training model that accommodates language-learning needs, adult educators can partner with Registered Apprenticeships (RA) in their communities to secure the vital connection between the classroom and career opportunity.

Apprenticeships need partnerships with adult education to grow the skills of the immigrant workforce. Increasing numbers of employers and labor organizations in California are adopting the apprenticeship model to provide lower-skilled workers and community members with technical education and paid on-the-job training (OJT), leading to wage increases and higher-skilled jobs. When apprenticeship includes English learners, employers benefit from an expanded pipeline of qualified employees and a more diverse workforce, and workers gain the qualifications and experience they need to realize their potential at work.

English as a second language (ESL) instruction can be the foundation of a pre-apprenticeship or an apprenticeship program. When adult educators connect with employers and unions to design a new apprenticeship – or to improve the accessibility of an existing RA – the resulting collaboration can hold the keys to employment, wage growth, and career advancement for English learners. Not only can ESL be integrated with technical instruction (as in an IET program), but apprentices can be exposed to the industry and occupation and supported to apply their English and technical skills during paid OJT, preparing them for success on the job in ways that are hard to achieve in the classroom alone.

Adult education leadership is needed to open doors to RAs for English learners. Multiple sources of funding in California can support apprenticeships for English learners, including California Adult Education Program (CAEP), WIOA Title II, Perkins, apportionment, Employment Training Panel (ETP), and others. Apprentices can attain measurable skills gains, college credit, industry-recognized credentials, and sustainable employment with wage increases as a result of their participation. Adult educators can provide the leadership that is needed to ensure California's equitable expansion of apprenticeships does not leave English learners behind.

Apprenticeship for English Language Learners

