

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF IMMIGRANTS

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► **Many immigrants speak English well or very well ...**

Immigrants in California often speak English quite well. Among immigrants who arrived in the last 10 years, 6% speak only English and an additional 47% report that they speak English very well or well. The most common language spoken among California immigrants is Spanish—53% report speaking Spanish at home, 20% of whom report speaking English “not at all.”

► **... but many immigrants live in households in linguistic isolation.**

In California, 29% of immigrants live in households where no one older than age 13 speaks English “very well.” Nationally, the percentage is similar (28%). Among California households in linguistic isolation, Spanish is the most common language spoken (64%), followed by Chinese (9%) and Vietnamese (5%).

► **Successive generations of immigrants do learn English ...**

Thirteen percent of Californian immigrant children ages 5 to 18 do not speak English well or at all. Second-generation children (with at least one parent born outside the U.S.) speak English at higher levels of fluency—only 4% do not speak English or do not speak it well. By the third generation (both parents born in the U.S.), all young people report that they speak English at least “well,” and the vast majority (96%) do not report speaking another language at home.

► **... and English language skills increase with time in the United States.**

Even Spanish speakers, the group most likely not to speak any English when they arrive in the U.S., gain English language skills after they have been in the U.S. for several years. For example, in 2000, 30% of immigrants who had arrived in the last 10 years and spoke Spanish at home reported that they did not speak English at all. Nine years later, only 20% of Spanish-speaking immigrants who had arrived 9 to 19 years earlier reported that they still did not speak English.

► **English language ability is correlated with educational attainment.**

Seventy-one percent of immigrants with college degrees speak English either exclusively or “very well.” Among immigrants with less than high school diplomas, only 12% speak English either exclusively or “very well,” and a high percentage (67%) speak English “not at all” (27%) or “not well” (40%).

► **The link between English proficiency and immigrant progress is widely recognized.**

Nearly all foreign-born Latinos (96%) say it is very important to teach English to the children of immigrant families. Yet a majority of Americans (62%) think recent immigrants do not learn English in a “reasonable” time frame. In California, public opinion surveys suggest that residents are willing to pay more to help immigrant children who are not proficient in English—73% favor providing extra assistance to improve the academic performance of English language learners.



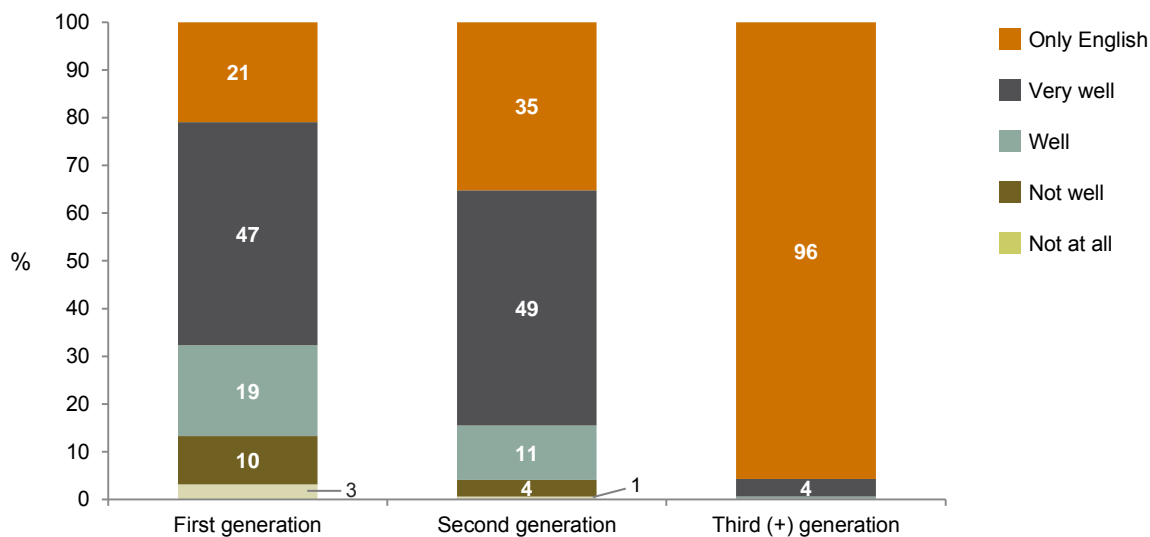
English proficiency among immigrants in California by language spoken, 2009

Language spoken at home	%	English proficiency (%)				
		Very well	Well	Not well	Not at all	Total
Spanish	53	26	23	30	20	100
English	9	–	–	–	–	–
Chinese	7	34	30	25	12	100
Filipino, Tagalog	7	64	27	8	1	100
Vietnamese	4	29	30	31	10	100
Korean	3	28	31	34	6	100
Persian, Iranian, Farsi	2	53	26	14	7	100
Armenian	2	42	27	20	11	100
Russian	1	42	31	18	9	100
Hindi	1	78	16	5	1	100
Other	12	57	25	14	4	100

Source: 2009 American Community Survey.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

English proficiency among California children (ages 5–18) by immigrant generation, 2004



Source: 2004 Current Population Survey.

Notes: First-generation children were born abroad. Second-generation children were born in the U.S. with at least one foreign-born parent. Third (+)-generation children have two native-born parents.

Sources: 2009 American Community Survey. 2004 Current Population Survey. 2000 Census, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, Pew Hispanic Center. PPIC Statewide Survey, April 2007. CBS News/New York Times Poll, May 2007.

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