



## Do Immigrants Learn English?

- Immigrants are motivated to learn the language of their new culture, even when doing so is socially, financially, and linguistically difficult.<sup>1</sup>
- First generation immigrants usually maintain their first language and socialize with others who speak their language.<sup>2</sup>
  - Many first generation immigrants do not become fully fluent in English.
  - Most of the second generation immigrants value English over their parents' language.
  - The children of the second generation typically become monolingual Englishspeakers and do not know their grandparents' language.
- Immigrants who learn English make more money and have access to better health care. They are more likely to become citizens and participate in their children's schools and other community institutions.
- Children and adolescents in an English-speaking environment learn conversational English fairly well in two to three years, but they will need more advanced English to obtain good jobs.<sup>3</sup>
- A 20-year longitudinal study documents that children of immigrants, although they may live in a neighborhood where everyone speaks the native/heritage language, invariably become fluent in English even if they drop out of school.<sup>4</sup>
- Because the children of immigrants speak English to their children, and these children most often become monolingual speakers of English, society loses what is potentially a naturally developing, free, and valuable linguistic resource.



B R I E F

<sup>1</sup> Fix, M. (Ed.). (2007). *Securing the Future: U.S. Immigrant Integration Policy, A Reader*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2007. 192 pp.

<sup>2</sup> Thompson, R.M. (1988). Does the public use of Spanish reverse linguistic assimilation? A second look at Austin, Texas, *FOCAL*, working papers in linguistics, University of Florida, 72-80. Reprinted in ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 297 597.

<sup>3</sup> Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

<sup>4</sup> Alba, R., & Nee, V. (2003). *Remaking the American mainstream: Assimilation and contemporary immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

