

***Investing in English Skills:
the Limited English Proficient Workforce
in U.S. Metropolitan Areas***

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English skills in the working-age population

More than one in five working age adults (16-64) in the U.S.—some 45 million people—speak a language other than English at home.

More than half of them (58 percent) also speak English very well.

19.2 million are considered limited English proficient (LEP), comprising 9.3 percent of the working age population.

The American Community Survey collects data annually on household language and English ability.

14

a. Does this person speak a language other than English at home?

☐

Yes

☐

No → SKIP to question 15a

} Not LEP

b. What is this language?

For example: Korean, Italian, Spanish, Vietnamese

c. How well does this person speak English?

☐

Very well

} Not LEP

☐

Well

☐

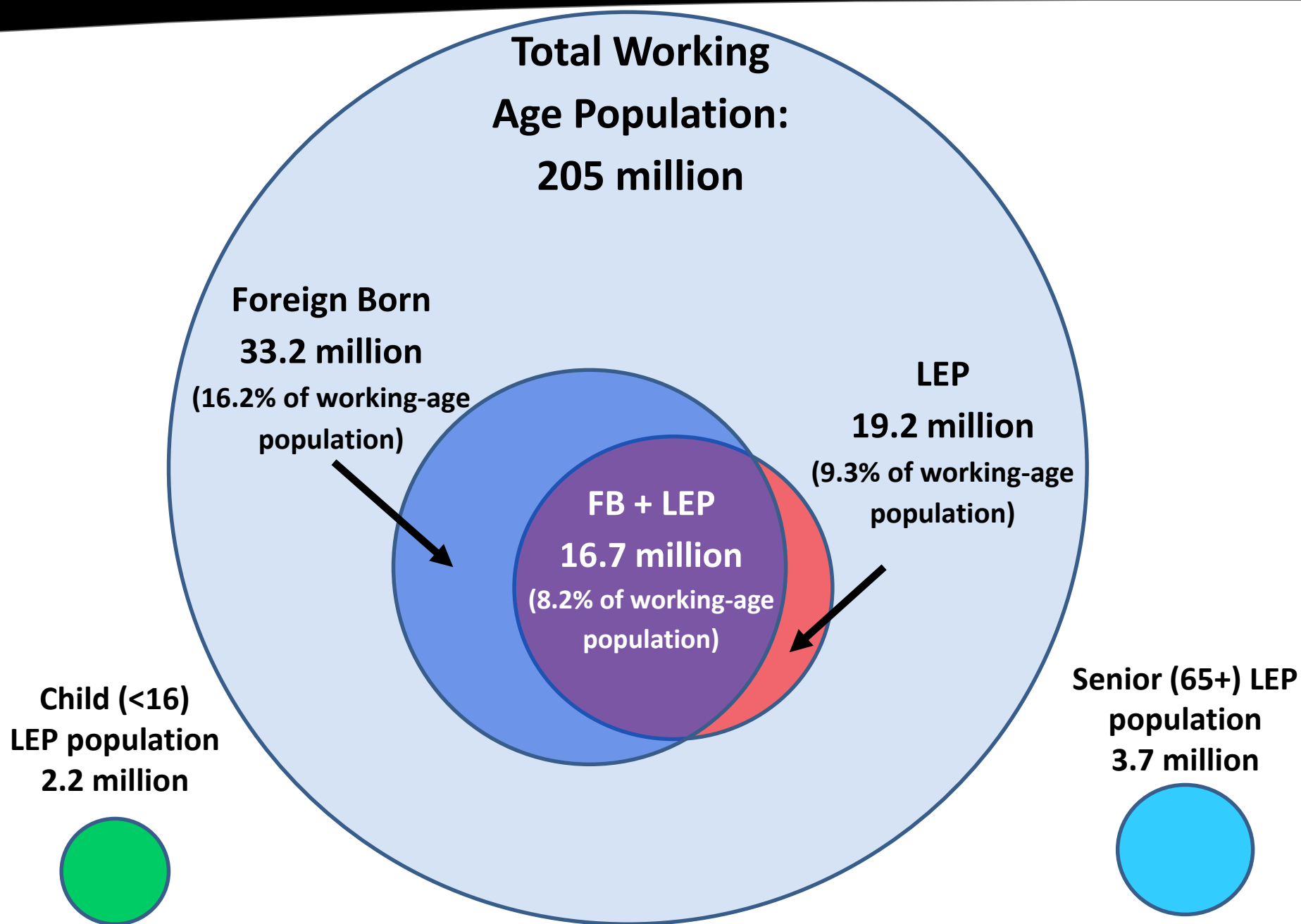
Not well

☐

Not at all

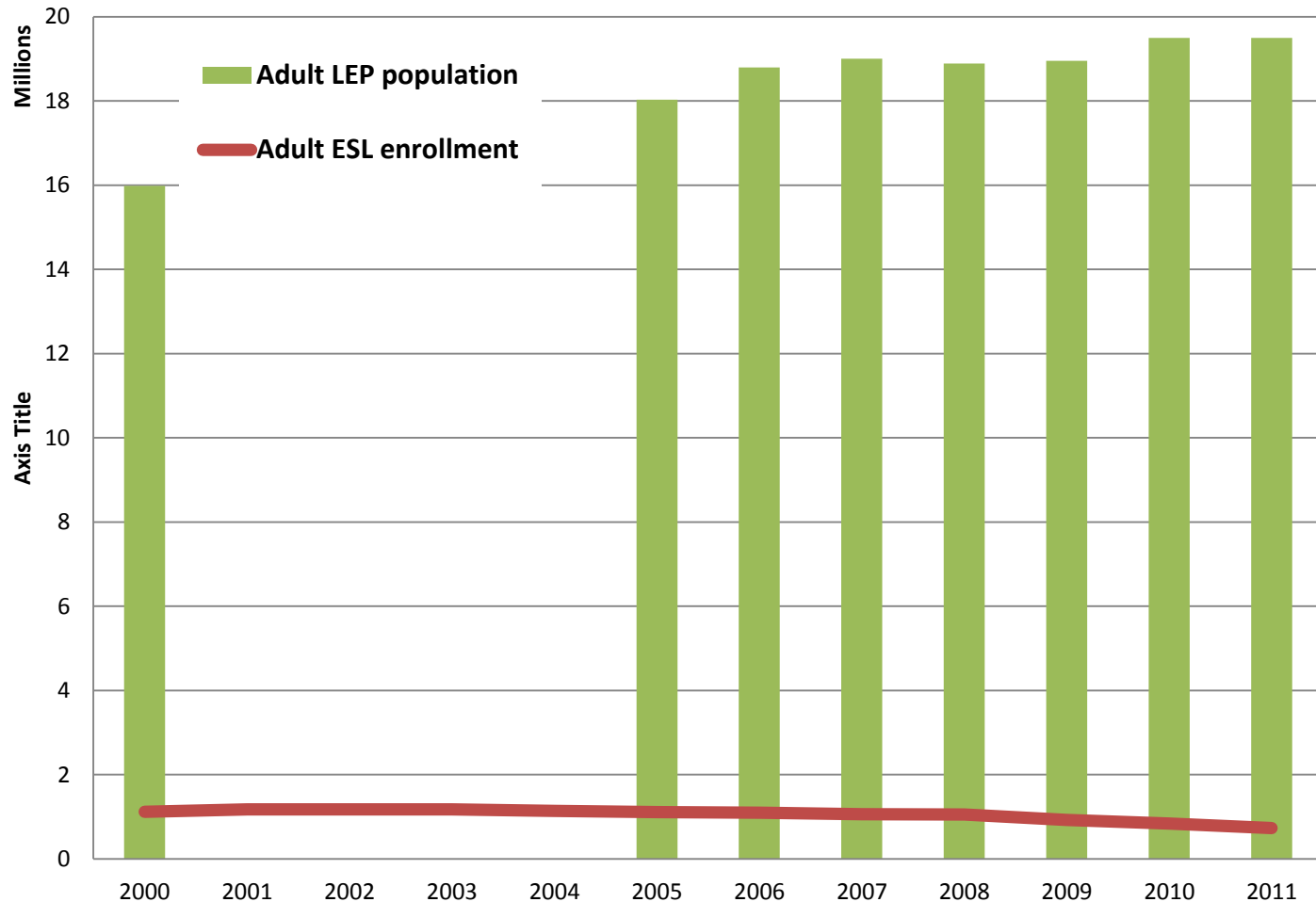
} LEP

Not all immigrants are LEP and not all LEP individuals are immigrants.



The size of the adult LEP population dwarfs the number served by federally funded instruction.

**Enrollment in Dept of Ed-funded Adult ESL vs.
Adult LEP population, 2000-2011**



Why does it matter?

Immigrants and their children will account for most of the country's labor force growth in the coming decades.

Immigrants who are proficient in English earn more than those who are not, holding educational attainment constant.

LEP immigrants have higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and under-employment.

Higher proficiency in English among immigrants is associated with the greater academic and economic success of their children.

English proficiency contributes to greater social and civic integration, including citizenship.

Research aims

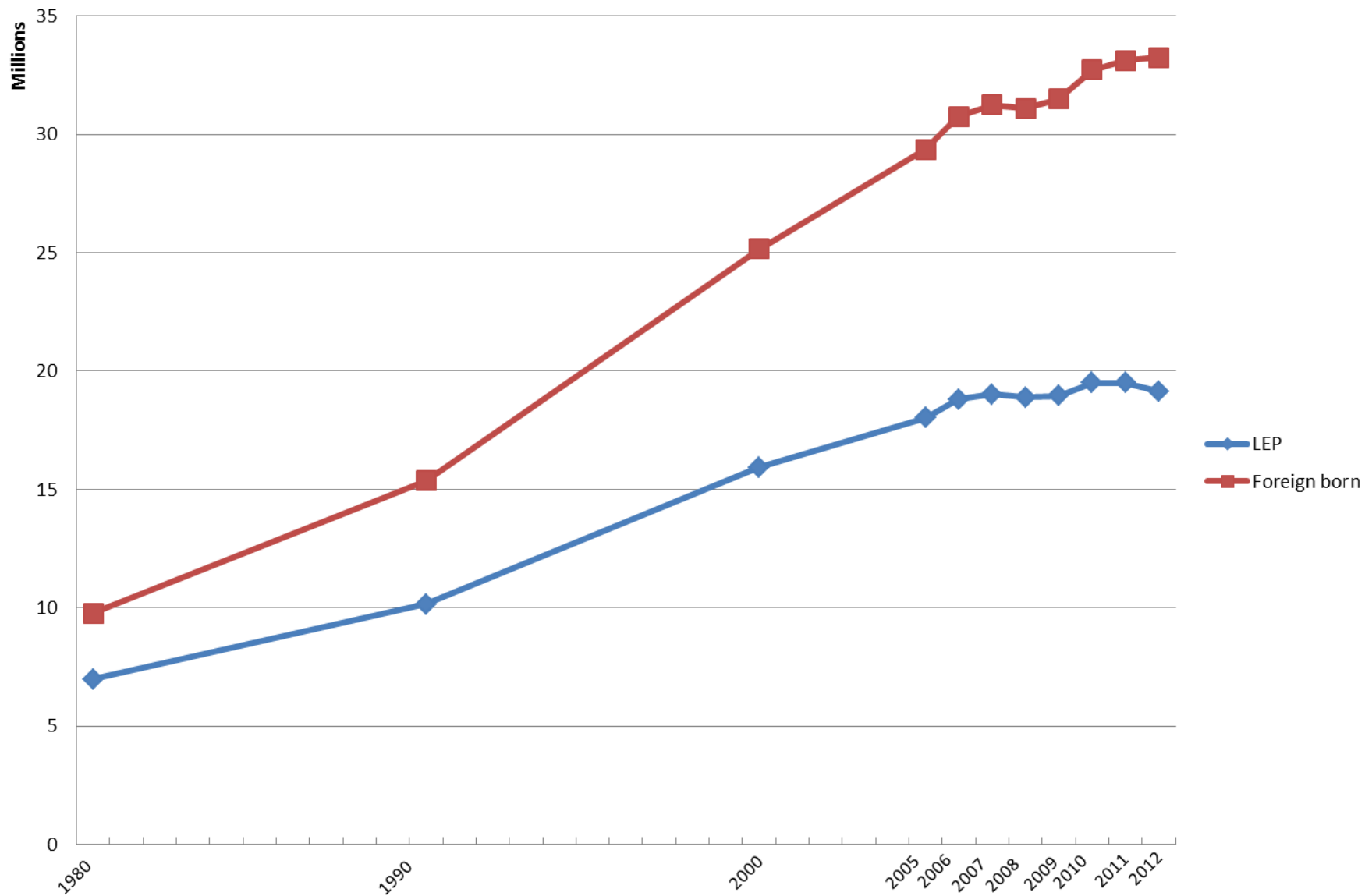
To call attention to the size, scope, and geographical variation in the need for English instruction.

To offer evidence for the benefits of investing in English skills.

To provide regional and national leaders with characteristics of the working-age LEP population in order to help them tailor interventions to improve labor force outcomes.

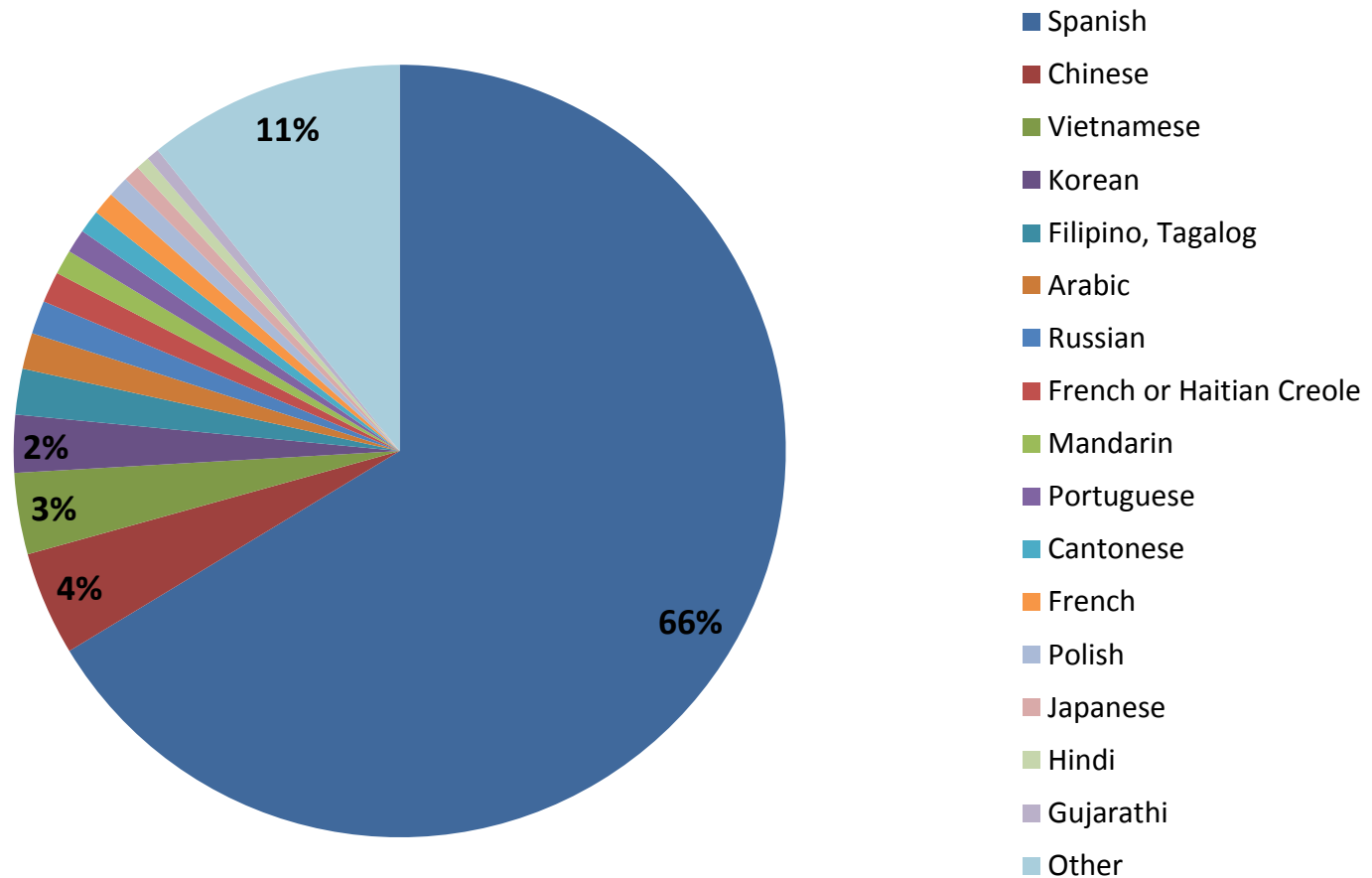
National Findings

**Fig. 1. Foreign-born versus limited English proficient population in the U.S.
age 16-64, 1980-2012**



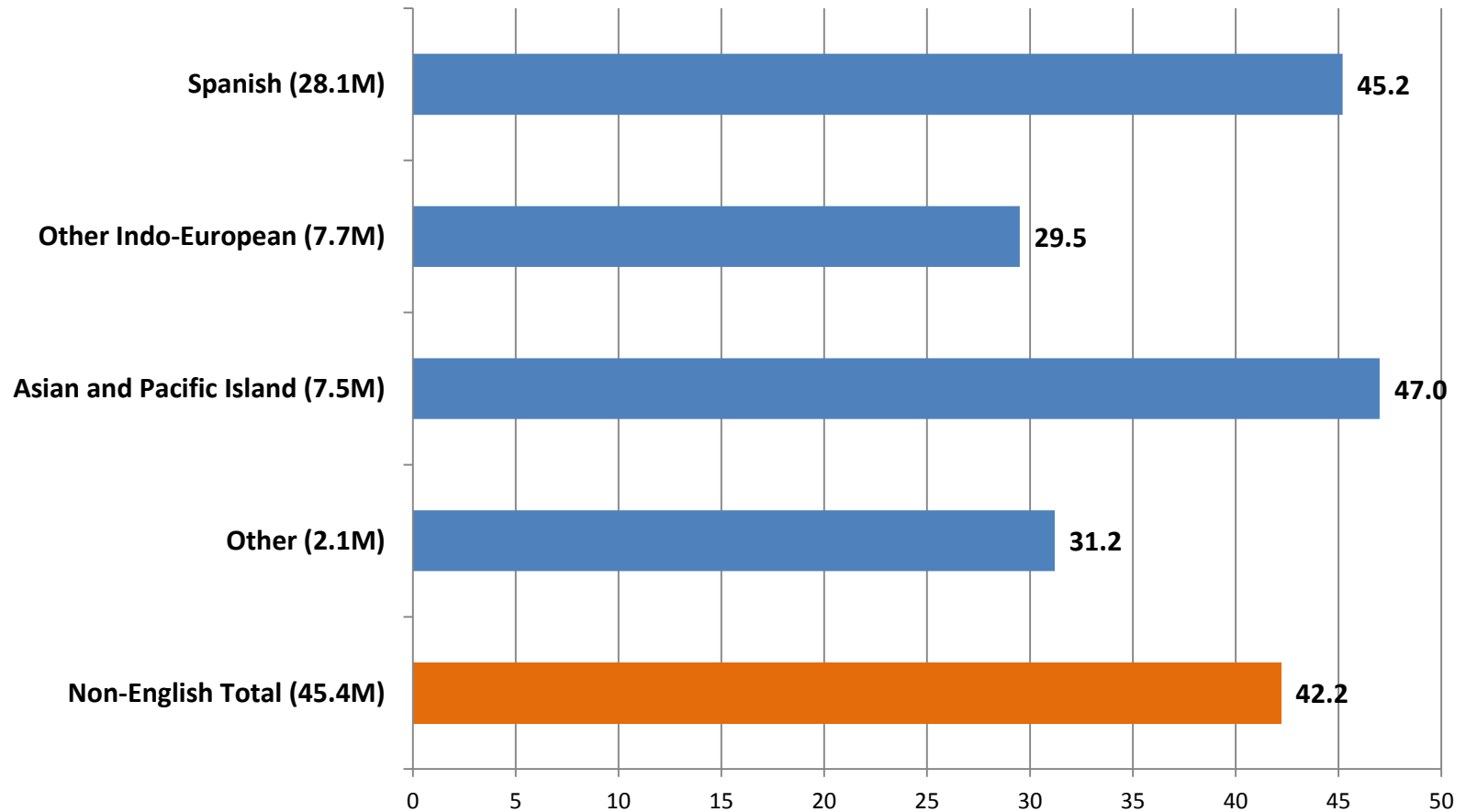
Spanish speakers make up two-thirds of working-age LEP adults. Sixteen languages have at least 100K speakers who are LEP.

Language spoken at home
among working-age (16-64) LEP population



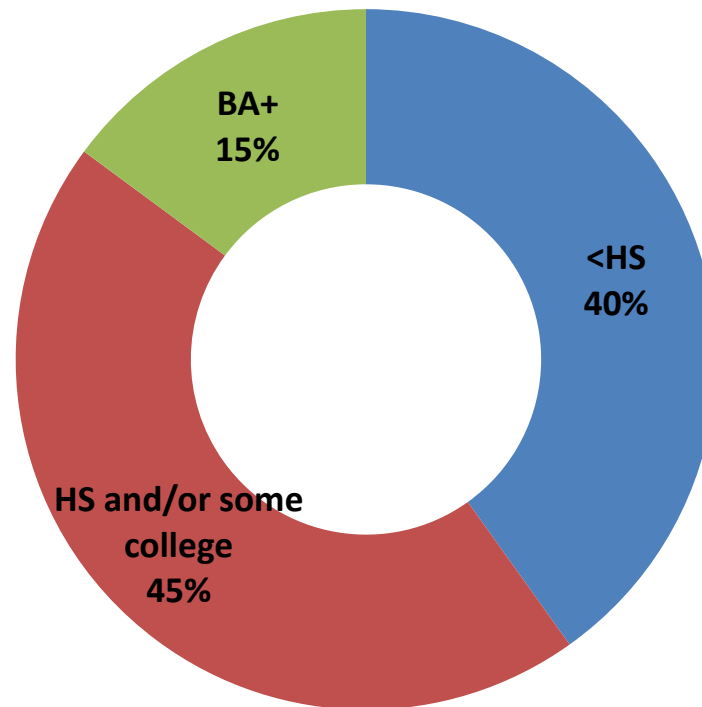
Those who speak Asian and Pacific Island languages are most likely to be limited English proficient, with Spanish speakers coming in second.

Percent LEP by Language Group, age 16-64



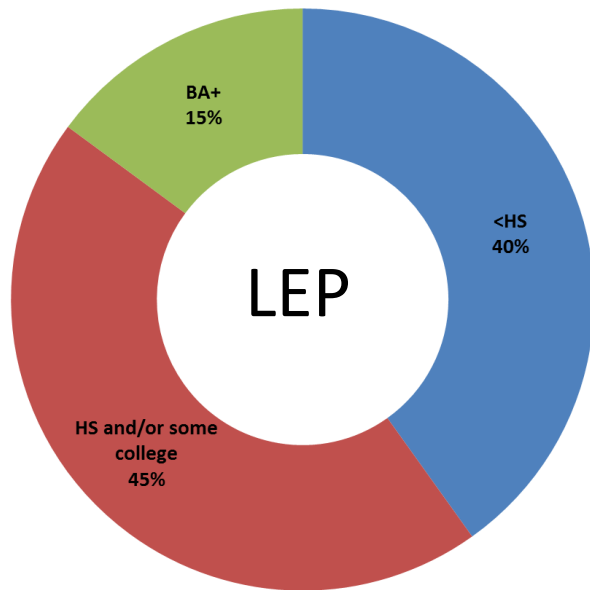
Most LEP adults (60%) have a high school diploma, and 15 percent have a college degree.

Educational attainment of working-age LEP population, 2012



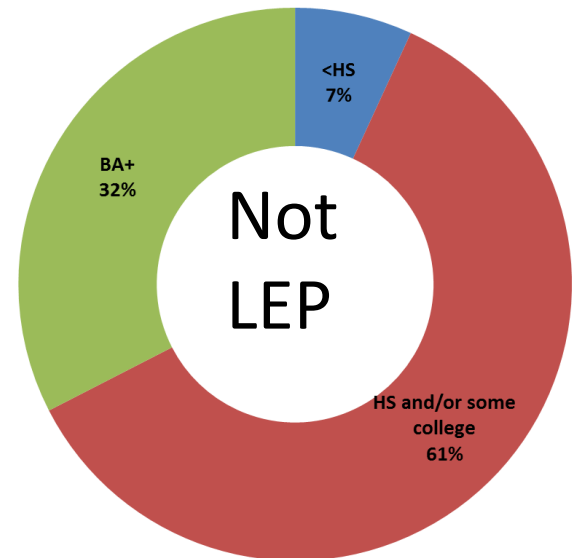
Still, LEP adults have much lower levels of educational attainment than English proficient adults.

Fig. 2a. Educational attainment of working-age LEP population, 2012



Source: Author's analysis of ACS 2012 PUMS

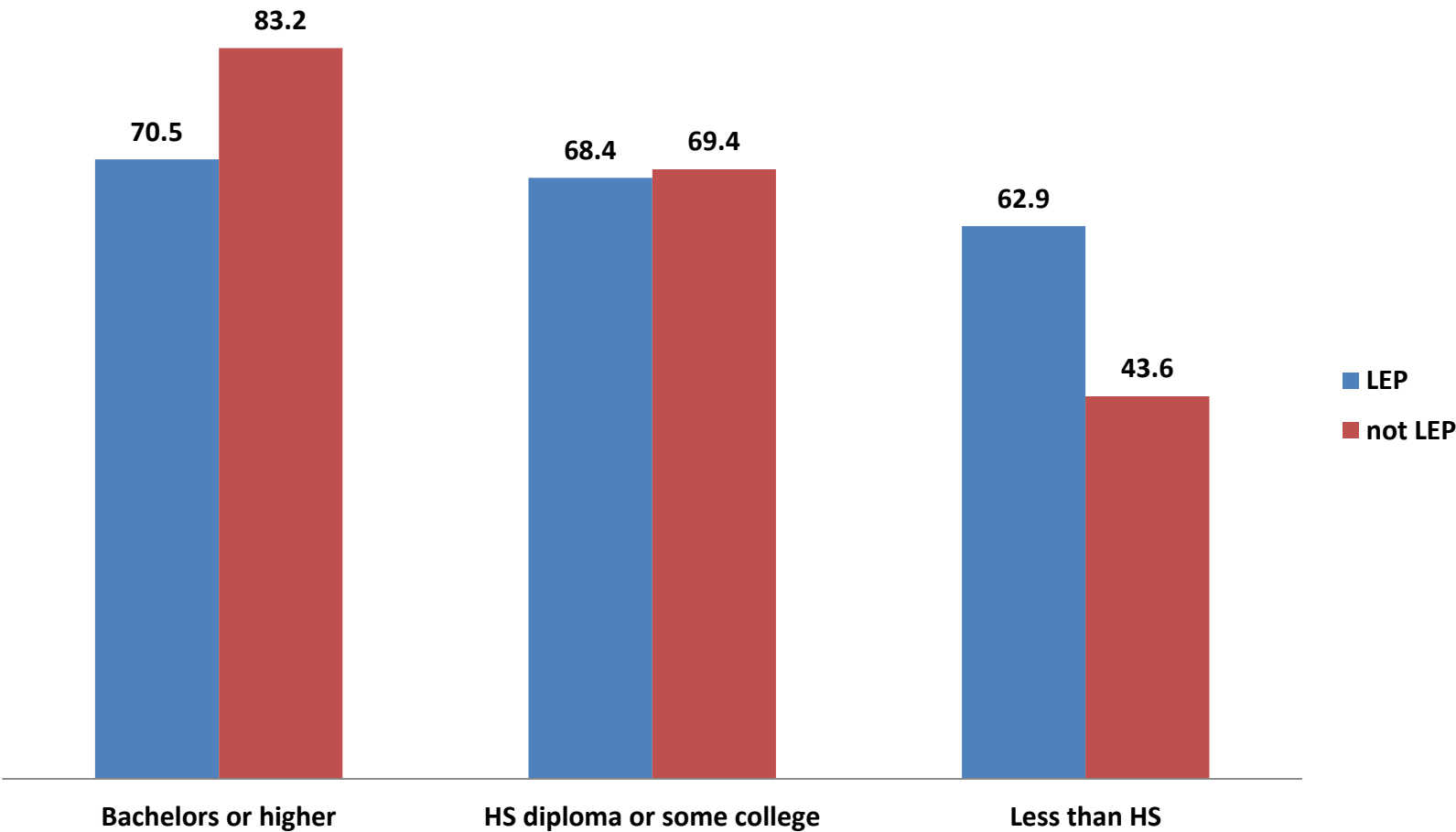
Fig. 2b. Educational attainment of working-age non-LEP population, 2012



Most LEP adults are working, but rates vary by educational attainment

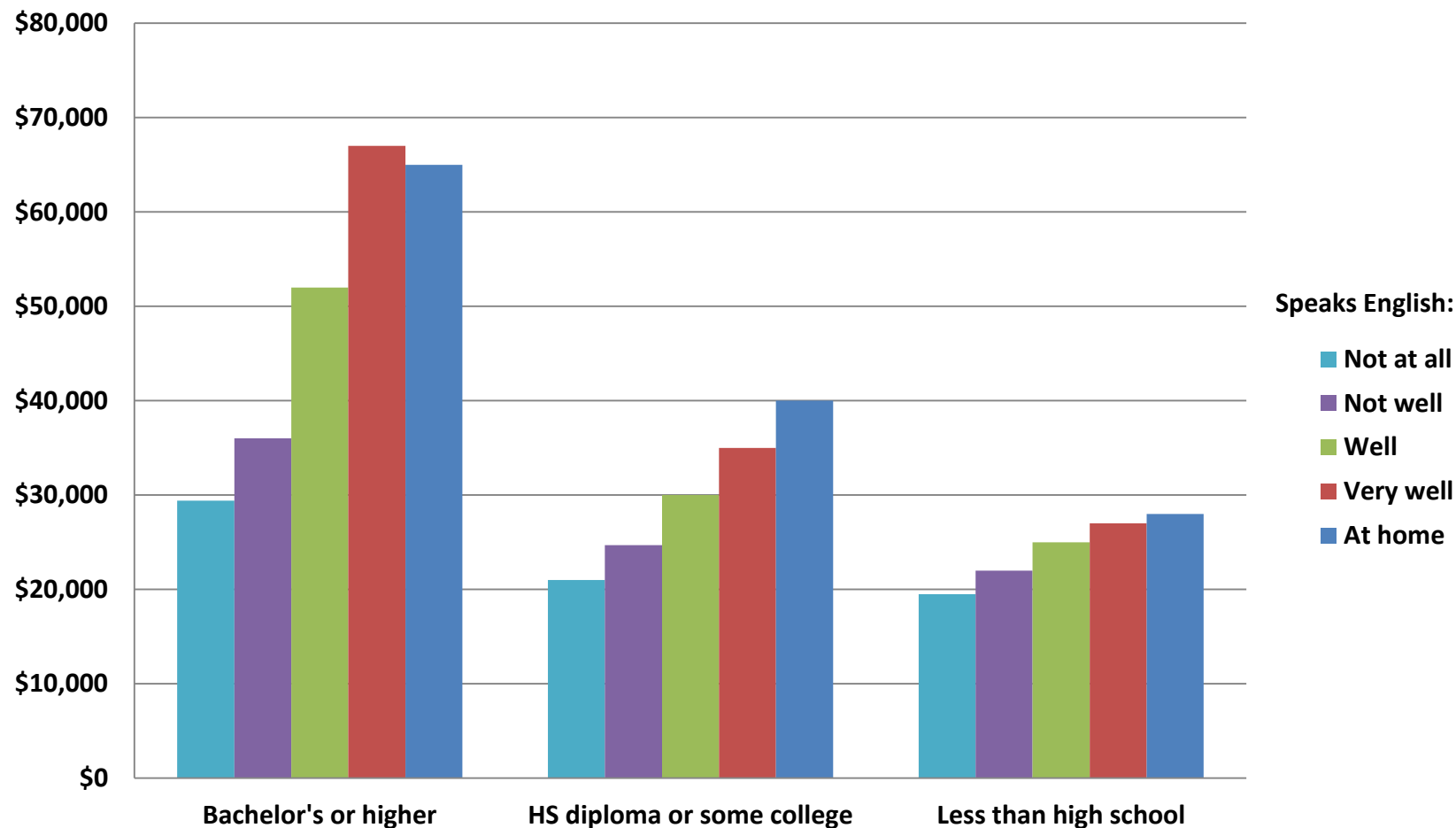
Fig. 3. Employment-to-population Ratio by Educational Attainment and English Proficiency, ages 25-64, 2012

Source: Author's analysis of ACS 2012 PUI



English proficiency is associated with higher earnings.

Fig. 4. Median earnings by English proficiency and educational attainment, age 25-64*



**Source: Author's analysis of ACS 2012 PUMS; earnings are calculated for those who worked at least 35 hours per week and at least 50 weeks over the previous 12*

LEP workers are concentrated in low-paying occupations.

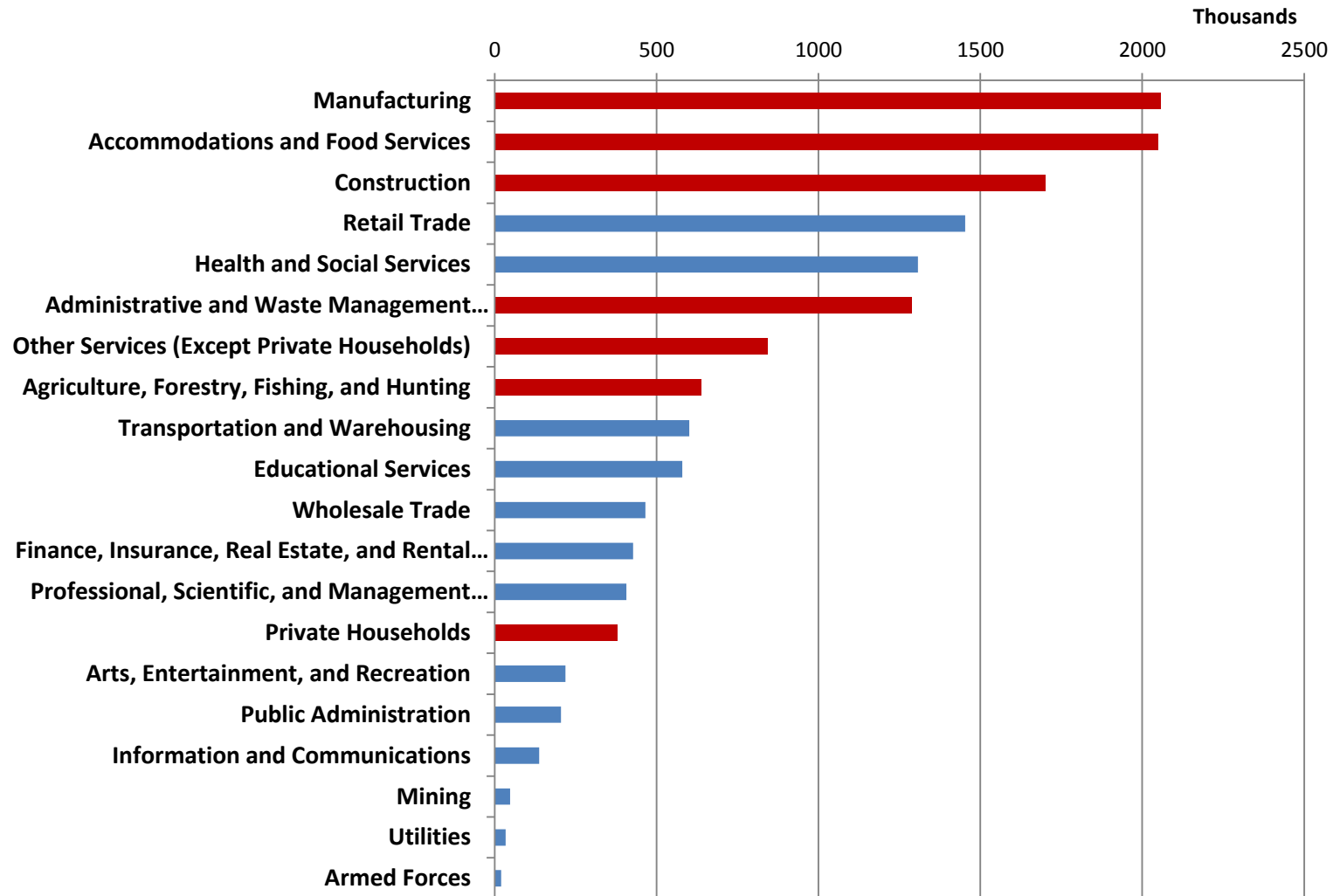
Table 2. Occupations with at Least 1 Million LEP Workers, 2012

Occupation Type	# LEP	% LEP	Share of LEP workers
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	1,936,079	26.1	12.8
Production	1,791,108	17.2	11.8
Construction and Extraction	1,598,962	17.6	10.5
Food Preparation and Serving	1,597,171	14.4	10.5
Transportation and Material Moving	1,368,872	12.6	9.0
Sales and Related	1,135,482	6.0	7.5
Office and Administrative Support	1,063,015	4.6	7.0

Source: Author's analysis of ACS 2012 PUMS data

Two-thirds of LEP workers are concentrated in six industries.

Fig. 5. LEP workers by Industry



Source: Author's analysis of ACS 2012 PUN

Metropolitan Findings

The LEP workforce is over-represented in large urban areas.

Table 3. Top Ten Metro Areas for LEP Population, Ages 16-64, 2012

	Metropolitan Area	# LEP	% LEP
1	New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA	2,330,496	18.3
2	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	2,264,513	25.7
3	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	865,905	23.2
4	Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL-IN-WI	820,012	13.0
5	Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX	721,872	17.8
6	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	640,695	14.7
7	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	557,878	18.4
8	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	498,001	17.8
9	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	456,972	11.9
10	San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA	350,998	16.3

Source: Author's analysis of ACS 2012 PUMS data

Metro areas in California and Texas dominate the list of places with high LEP concentrations.

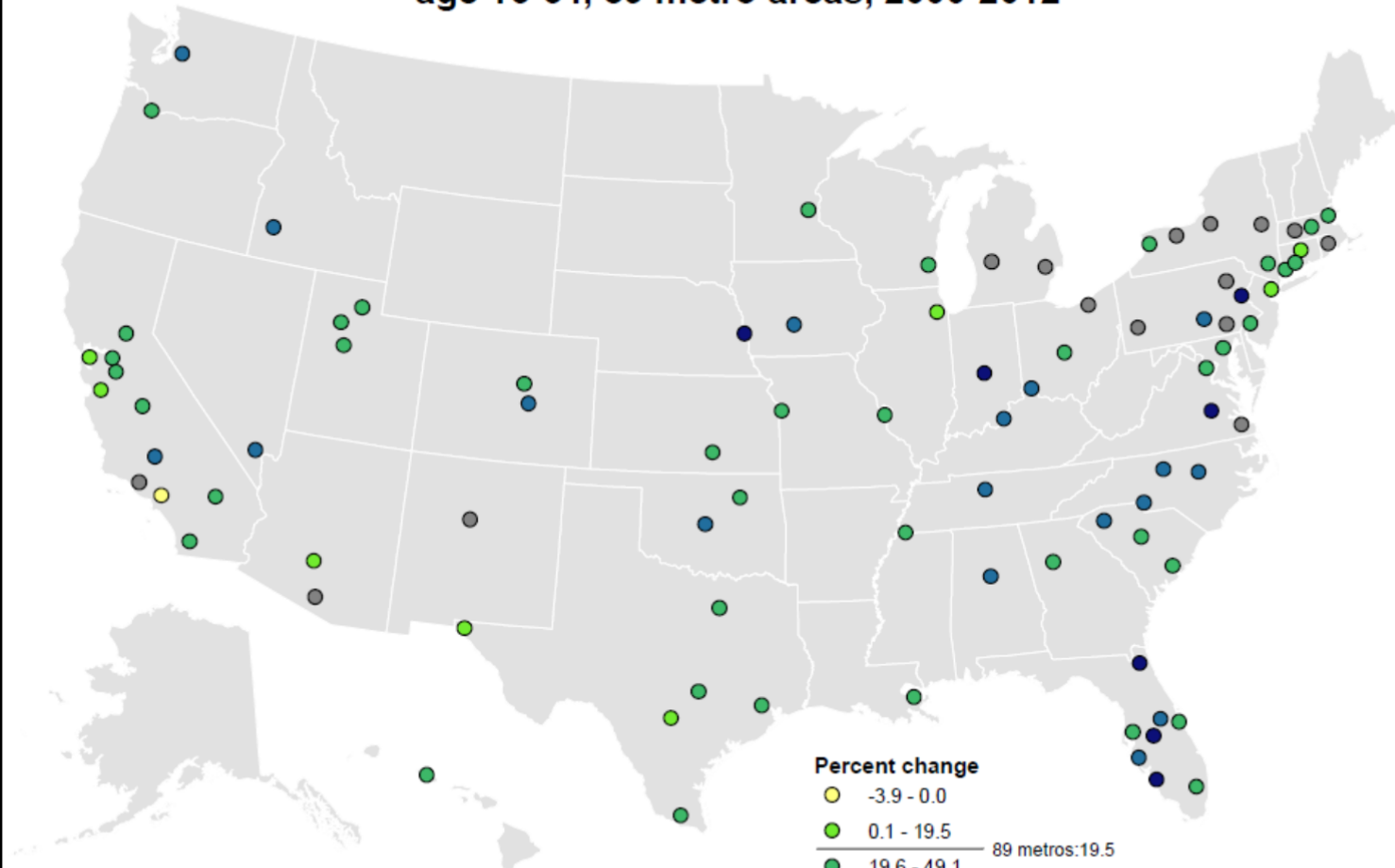
Table 4. Top and Bottom 10 Metro Areas for LEP Percent of Working-Age Population, 2012

	Metropolitan Area	% LEP
1	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX	32.0
2	El Paso, TX	29.8
3	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	25.7
4	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	23.2
5	Fresno, CA	22.8
6	San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	22.6
7	Bakersfield-Delano, CA	20.4
8	Stockton, CA	19.3
9	Modesto, CA	18.6
10	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	18.4
	Metropolitan Area	% LEP
80	Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN	3.2
81	Charleston-North Charleston-Summerville, SC	2.9
82	Albany-Schenectady-Troy, NY	2.9
83	Columbia, SC	2.9
84	Birmingham-Hoover, AL	2.9
85	Syracuse, NY	2.8
86	St. Louis, MO-IL	2.7
87	Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC	2.5
88	Cincinnati-Middletown, OH-KY-IN	2.5
89	Pittsburgh, PA	1.6

Source: Author's analysis of ACS 2012 PUMS data

Smaller metro areas experienced fast growth in their LEP population; Los Angeles's decreased.

Map 1. Change in the LEP population, age 16-64, 89 metro areas, 2000-2012



Source: Brookings analysis of ACS 2012 PUMS data

*at the 90 percent confidence level

Metro areas in the Southwest and West have the highest shares of LEP adults who speak Spanish.

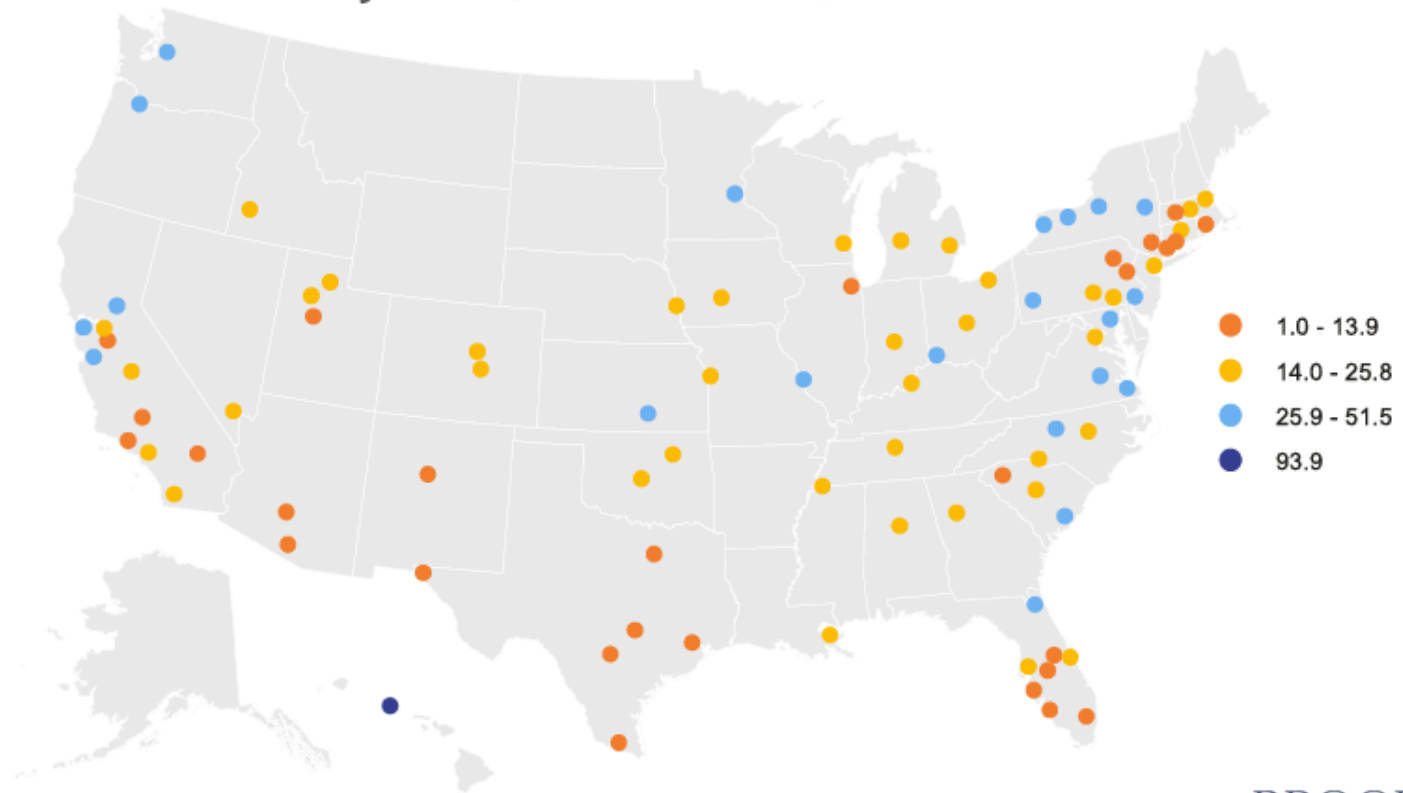


Source: Author's analysis of ACS 2012 PUMS

BROOKINGS

In seven metro areas speakers of Asian and Pacific Island languages make up a plurality of LEP adults.

Percent of LEP Population that Speaks an Asian or Pacific Island Language
age 16-64, 89 Metro Areas, 2012

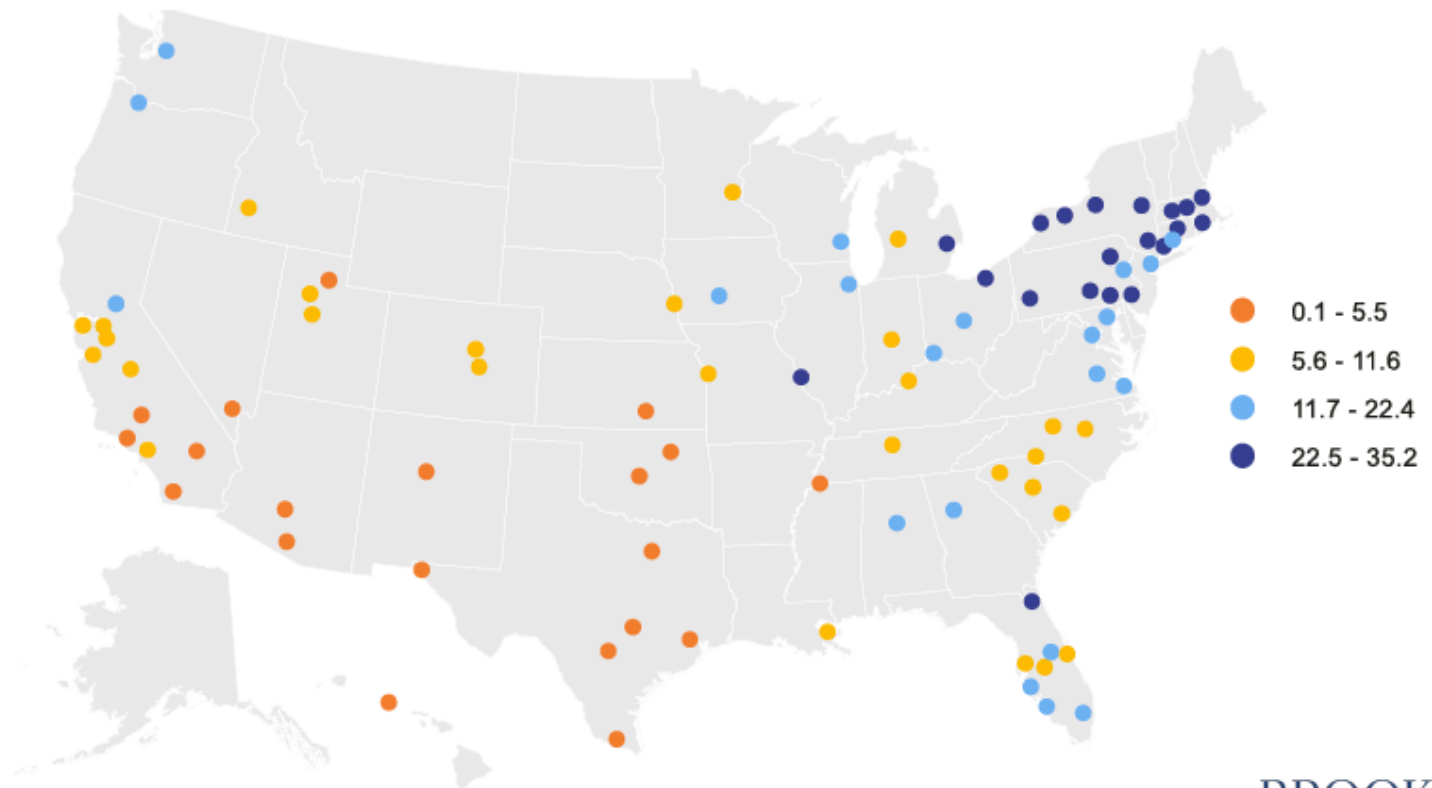


Source: Author's analysis of ACS 2012 PUMS

BROOKINGS

Metro areas with high shares of LEP adults who speak Indo-European languages are concentrated in PA and NY.

Percent of LEP Population that Speaks an Indo-European Language Other Than Spanish
age 16-64, 89 Metro Areas, 2012

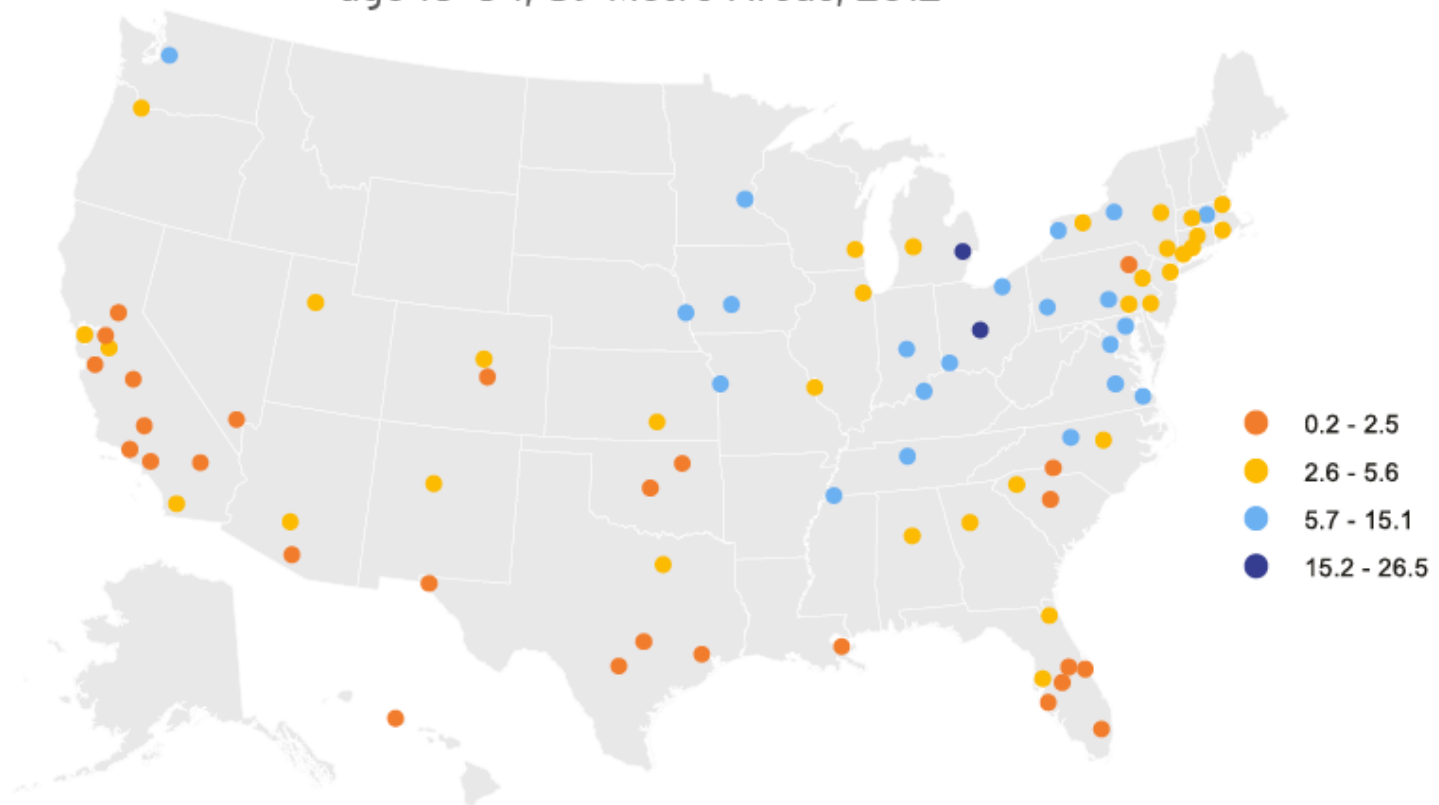


Source: Author's analysis of ACS 2012 PUMS

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In only six metro areas do speakers of “other” languages make up at least 10 percent of LEP adults.

Percent of LEP Population that Speaks an “Other” Language
age 16-64, 89 Metro Areas, 2012



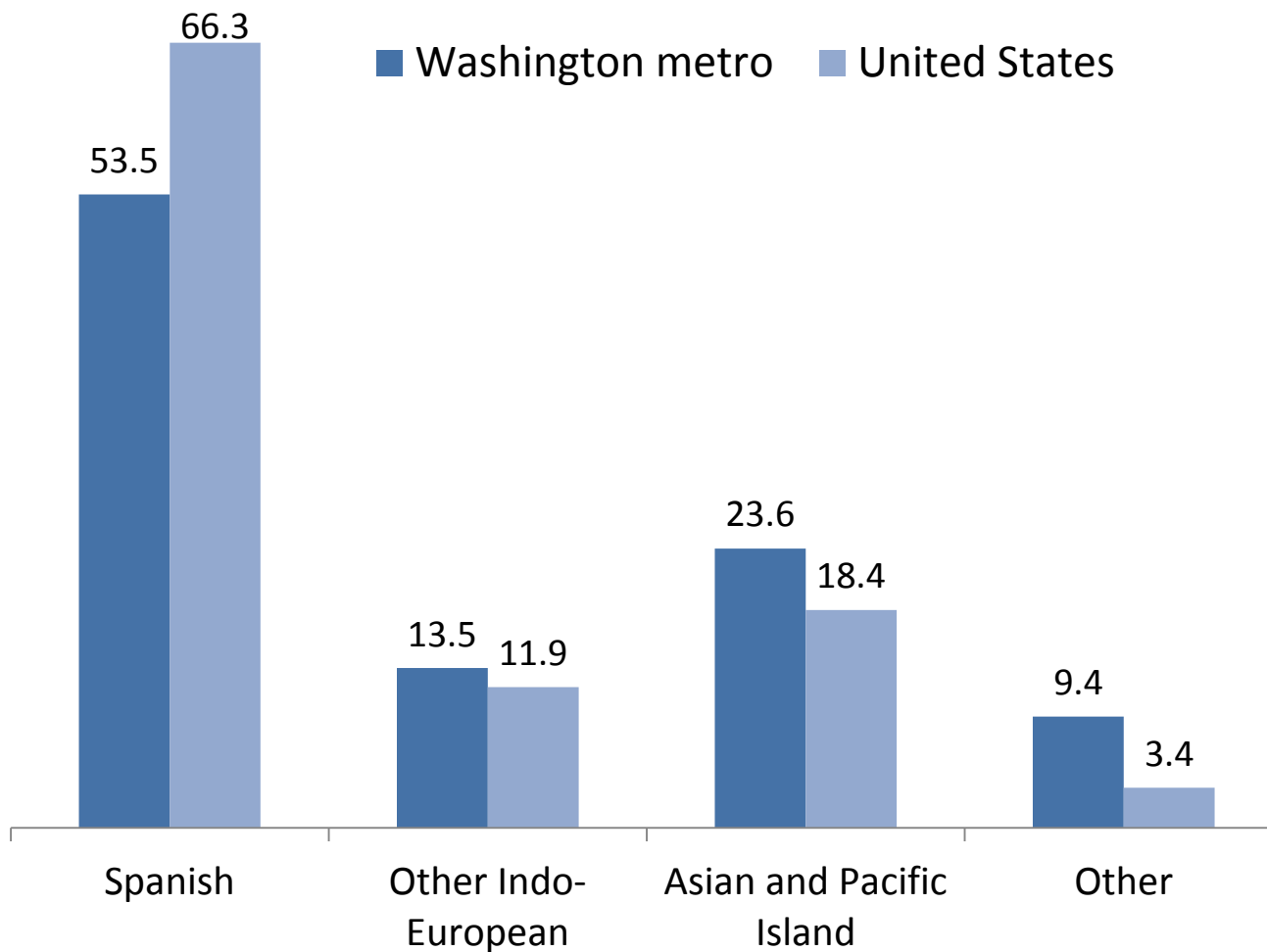
Source: Author's analysis of ACS 2012 PUMS

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Washington Metropolitan Area

Washington's LEP population speaks a diversity of languages.

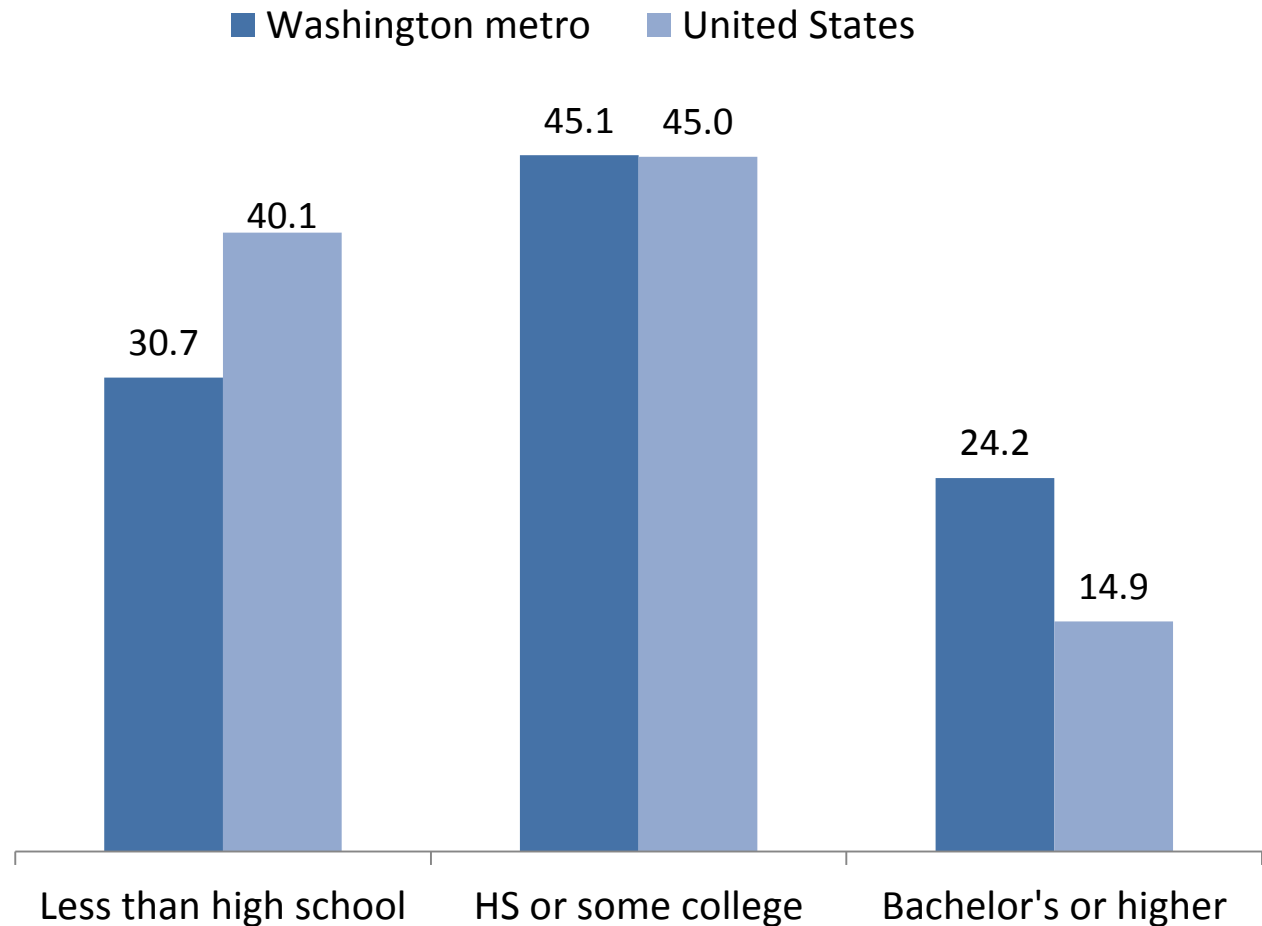
Languages Spoken by the Working-age LEP Population in the Washington metro area, 2012



Language	%
Spanish	53.5
Vietnamese	6.0
Korean	5.2
Chinese	5.1
Amharic	4.0
Arabic	2.5
French	2.1
Urdu	2.0
Tagalog	1.9
Farsi	1.8

Washington's LEP population is more highly educated than those in the U.S. overall.

Educational attainment of the LEP population, age 25-64,
Washington metro area, 2012



Five occupational groups account for more than half of Washington's working-age LEP population.

Occupation	%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	15.3
Construction and Extraction	14.4
Food Preparation and Serving	10.9
Personal Care and Service	7.6
Sales and Related	7.5

Policy Implications

Policy implications: Funding

Federal government

States and localities

Charter schools

Employers (and employees)

Philanthropy

Policy implications: Targeted Outreach

Population size, growth, and period of arrival

Languages spoken at home

Educational attainment and earnings

Industry and occupation

Policy implications: Instructional innovations

Worksite

Online

Mobile

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