

NEWS

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ALA releases ground-breaking study on library service to new Americans

Libraries working to level playing field for non-English speakers

MINNEAPOLIS - About 21 million people in the United States speak limited or no English, 50 percent more than a decade ago. As our country's demographics continue to change, U.S. public libraries continue their efforts to meet the demand for service to non-English users. Today the American Library Association (ALA) released "Serving Non-English Speakers in U.S. Public Libraries," an unprecedented study on the range of specialized library services for non-English speakers. The announcement took place at the Hennepin County Library's New American Center during the Public Library Association's National Conference, March 25 – 29.

"Serving Non-English Speakers in U.S. Public Libraries," is the first national study to consider the range of library services and programs developed for non-English speakers, including effectiveness of services, barriers to library use, most frequently used services and most successful library programs by language served. The study also analyzed library service area populations and patron proximity to local libraries that offer specialized services. The most frequently used services by non-English speakers were special language collections (68.9 percent) and special programming (39.6 percent), including language-specific story hours and cultural programming.

Today's libraries provide a wide range of opportunities for people with diverse needs and interests. Libraries reported the most successful library programs and services developed for non-English speakers were: English as a Second Language (ESL), language-specific materials and collections, computer use and computer classes, story time and special programs.

"Libraries are part of the American Dream, places for education, self-help and lifelong learning," said ALA President Loriene Roy. "The findings presented in this study can provide a venue for developing

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better and more precise materials, services and programs for those linguistically isolated. It is our hope that libraries, library supporters, and the research community will find this study valuable as a planning tool to better serve non-English speaking users.”

The study found that Spanish is the most supported non-English language in public libraries. Seventy-eight percent of libraries reported Spanish as the priority #1 language, after English, to which they develop services and programs. Asian