

Ability to Speak English “Less Than Very Well” in City of Houston



**PLANNING &
DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau;
2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
Date: January 2018

Introduction

Data on ‘Language spoken at home by Ability to Speak English’ were derived from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2012-2016 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates. The data includes only population 5 years and over who have the ability to speak a language. This data is collected in an effort to measure the current use of languages other than English. The ACS collects information from a large annual sample of approximately 3 million housing unit addresses and therefore provides more reliable statistics. The usefulness of the self-rated English-speaking ability question was established in the 1980s.

Respondents were instructed to print the name of the non-English language spoken at home. If the person spoke more than one language other than English, the person was to report the language spoken more often.

City of Houston

English-speaking ability varied widely among the speakers of the top ten languages spoken in the City of Houston. The top five languages spoken (except English) in Houston are: Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic and French.

The Census Bureau distinguishes the ability to speak English between “Very Well” and “Less Than Very Well”. In Houston, the “Less Than Very Well” category ranked numerically are, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, and French. Those who speak “Less Than Very Well” category varies between 417,653 persons (Spanish) being the highest and 4,225 persons (French) being the lowest. The higher proportion indicates that they have a huge difficulty in conveying information clearly in English from normal conversations to obtaining assistance from non-profit organizations, Government etc.

Recommended 5 Languages based on numerical rank are (Speak English “Less than Very Well”): Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic and French.

Language Spoken at Home (Other than English)

Top 5 Languages: City of Houston

	Total	Speak English "Very Well"	Speak English Less Than "Very Well"	Speak English Less Than "Very Well" Percentage
Spanish or Creole	828,500	410,847	417,653	50.4%
Vietnamese	43,941	20,667	23,274	53.0%
Chinese	30,038	13,366	16,672	55.5%
Arabic	12,553	8,022	4,531	36.1%
French (incl Cajun)	15,768	11,543	4,225	26.8%