

Legislator Key Facts:
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The Business Case for Adult Education

Adult Education Has a Broad Focus

Adult Education serves adults, 16 years of age and older, who are no longer enrolled in school or required by State law to be enrolled and who are functioning below the high school completion level. While services include teaching foundation skills in the disciplines of reading, math, and English, Adult Education prepares learners with college and career readiness skills that lead to employment or the transition to post-secondary education. Adult Educators also help parents obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the education of their children.

Outcomes include improving the literacy and numeracy skills of their students as measured by regularly-administered standardized assessments, transitioning students to postsecondary education, employment or job training, the attainment of a high diploma or its equivalent, and earnings outcomes.

Public schools, community colleges, libraries, and community-based organizations are all part of the network of 55,000 adult educators who offer these programs.

Adult Education and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

Adult education is Title II of WIOA, which was enacted in 2014 by overwhelming bipartisan margins (415–6 in the House and 93–5 in the Senate).

WIOA recognizes the crucial role Adult Education plays in teaching English and civics and preparing adults to enter the workforce or improve their employment status. WIOA recognizes the crucial role Adult Education plays in teaching English and civics and preparing adults to enter the workforce or improve their employment status. WIOA established Adult Education as one of four key partners in a system of education and training that emphasizes greater integration of Adult Education and the workforce system and greater emphasis on college and career readiness. Adult education is now a key element in a comprehensive system of education and training.

WIOA cannot succeed unless Congress supports it adequately. Adult education grants are currently funded at \$582 million, well below the \$649.3 million authorized for FY 2018 in WIOA.

The Business Case for Adult Education

Some adults enrolled in Adult Education are seeking their high school diploma or equivalent, but a large number of American adults who have earned a high school diploma still struggle with basic skills. The problem is large and growing:

America Has a Skills Gap

In a recent survey, 92% of business leaders thought that U.S. workers were lacking the necessary skills.

By 2018, 63% of all U.S. jobs will require education beyond high school. Yet, nearly half of the U.S. workforce—about 88 million of 188 million adults aged 18 to 64—has only a high school education or less, and/or low English proficiency.

Both urban and rural areas need trained employees. As of 2016, there were 476 counties in the US in which 20 percent or more of the working age population lacked a high school diploma or equivalent. Eighty percent are located in non-metro areas.

Adult Education is a Key On-Ramp for Workers to Reach Middle-Skill Jobs

More than half of all jobs (54%) in the U.S. today are middle-skill jobs that require more than a high school diploma, but not a four year degree. Yet only 44% of workers are trained to the middle-skill level.

Educating motivated students with the skills that companies need can provide qualified candidates for hard to fill positions.

We can't wait for today's K-12 Students to fill that gap

In 2017, 36 million adults in the U.S. have limited English or reading skills and more than 60 million can't perform simple math.

We cannot depend on a robust economy to solve this problem. A stronger economy will bring people back into the workforce but it won't train them. According to Alan Daley's "Overcoming the Skills Shortage," "More than 75 percent of manufacturers report moderate to severe skill shortages and up to 11 percent revenue losses from increased production cost and sales losses due to those shortages. Service industries are hardest hit. Thirty-three percent of all small businesses say they cannot identify candidates qualified for job openings. And 43 percent of small business owners say unfilled jobs are impeding their growth or expansion."

With Adult Education we can train these students to fill the jobs industry needs today.

Adult Education is Good for Business

By 2020, the American Action Forum projects that the U.S. will be short an estimated 7.5 million private sector workers across all skill levels.

Companies miss out on growth opportunities, product development suffers, and profits stagnate without a skilled national workforce. America needs an “all hands on deck” approach to bring every available worker to the labor pool.

Adult Education brings businesses options by preparing existing workers with competing life and family responsibilities with the skills that companies need through flexible classrooms and curriculum.

Supporting Adult Education supports the economy

Adult Education is a smart investment. We need all available workers ready to help our country compete.

Unfortunately, since 2001, funding for Adult Education, when adjusted for inflation, has fallen by 25.3%. Proposed additional cuts to education funding in 2018 will have a substantial impact on adult education.

1.5 million students are enrolled in Adult Education programs, down 44% percent due to funding cuts.

The U.S. Lags Compared to Our Competitors as They Educate & Elevate Their Workforces

The U.S. is increasingly losing the skills race to many of its economic competitors. According to PIAAC (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 's (OECD) Program of International Assessment of Adult Competencies), Americans lag behind the international average for basic skills in literacy and numeracy and “problem-solving in technology-rich environments.” While other nations show consistent progress in enhancing the education levels of their adult populations the competency levels of U.S. adults have not made similar progress. The international Survey of Adult Skills (OECD, 2013) found that our average performance in literacy and numeracy was significantly lower than the international average. Proportionately, the U.S. has more working-age adults with low literacy skills than seven other industrialized nations.

Increased Participation in Adult Education Reduces Spending and Increases Revenues

A person with a high school diploma or equivalent earns an average of \$9,620 more per year than a non-graduate.

Adults with a high school degree were more likely to work full time and average 20% higher earnings (\$30,000) well above the poverty line for a family of four.

Safer and Stronger Communities

Low-skilled adults are:

- 2x more likely to be unemployed;
- 3x more likely to be in poverty;
- 4x more likely to be in poor health; and
- 8x more likely to be incarcerated.

Educating adults creates stronger communities. Higher education levels are correlated with lower rates of chronic diseases like diabetes and asthma, and a mother's education level is the highest determinate of a child's academic success. Better-educated parents raise better-educated, more successful, children, who are less likely to end up in poverty or prison.

Inmate participation in adult education reduces recidivism by 29%.

Invest in Adult Education

Unfortunately, since 2001, funding for Adult Education, when adjusted for inflation, has fallen by 25.3%. Proposed additional cuts to education funding in 2018 will have a substantial impact on adult education.

Federally funded Adult Education programs serve only a small fraction of adults in the United States with limited English, math, or reading skills. Federal funding and enrollment have declined from over \$700 million and 2.8 million students in 2001, to 1.5 million learners and \$582 million in 2016.

Adult Education State Grants have been essentially flat-funded since FY 2002; a reduction of more than 25 percent in real terms while enrollment has declined by 44 percent, most sharply among those who most need Adult Education and workforce skills services. Demand for services across the country far exceeds supply.

We urge you to support funding Adult Education at the \$649 million level as called for in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act which was enacted in 2014. Help us build a strong economy. For more information, go to EducateandElevate.org.