

Who We Are

The Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) represents the system of 55,000 adult educators, administrators and mentors working to improve educational outcomes for adults in the U.S. We work with the 43 million U.S. adults who possess low literacy skillsⁱ. Across the nation, COABE members work tirelessly to help these underserved adults master the skills they need to compete and build careers – and better futures for themselves, their families and their communities.

We advocate for more services, more funding, and less waiting. We promote student resources and the elimination of waiting lists that discourage and delay success. In every State, we support adult education programs that foster essential skills, family literacy and workforce development.

Our Impact

Adult Education programs work. In 2017, 72 percent of adults participating in a federally-funded Adult Education program earned a high school diploma or recognized equivalent, up from 66 percent in 2015ⁱⁱ. With increased Adult Education funding and supports, even more adults can become educated and more quickly make progress in earning the skills needed to obtain jobs.

Adult Education programs are cost-effective, smart investments. COABE estimates that for every dollar invested in Adult Education, a community receives \$60 back in increased income, property taxes, and savings on welfare and legal system expenses.

Without Adult Education, low-skilled adults are more likely to be unemployed, in poverty, in poor health or incarcerated. Low-skilled adults are 2 times more likely to be unemployed; 3 times more likely to be in poverty; 4 times more likely to be in poor health and 8 times more likely to be incarceratedⁱⁱⁱ.

Current Funding Levels

In FY2019, Adult Basic and Literacy Education State Grants, under Title II of WIOA, were funded at \$641.9 million, and Adult Education National Leadership Activities were funded at \$13.7 million for a total of \$655.6 million in funding for Adult Education. Appropriators in the House of Representatives in the FY2020 bill allocated \$672 million for Adult Basic and Literacy Education State Grants, which increases funding for the State grant program by \$30 million. The House level-funded Adult Education National Leadership Activities at \$13.7 million, for an Adult Education funding total of \$685.7 million.

In the final FY2020 appropriations bill, we urge Congress to fund Adult Education at least at \$685.7 million.

The Need

Current Adult Education funding falls far short of meeting the need. Today, over 43 million people with low literacy levels could benefit from Adult Education and there are at least 3 million people on waiting lists for such servicesⁱ.

Too many adults do not have the job and literacy skills needed to participate in today's workforce. Over 43 million working age Americans lack the skills needed for many of the nation's fastest growing and highest paying jobs. Without increased funding for adult education, these Americans' will be left behind, while at the same time American businesses are struggling to fill over 7 million job openings^v.

References

ⁱNational Center for Education Statistics (2019). Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. (2014). The impact of ABS program participation on long-term economic outcomes, U.S. Department of Education.

ⁱⁱCongressional Justification (2019). Career, Technical, and Adult Education Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request. U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget20/justifications/m-ctae.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱU.S. Census Bureau (2016). American Community Survey.

^{iv}Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2013). *Time for the U.S. to Reskill?: What the Survey of Adult Skills says.* OECD Skills Studies. OECD Publishing.

^vBureau of Labor Statistics (2019). Economic news release: Job openings and labor turnover summary.