

COABE

COALITION ON ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Inspiring educators so adults succeed and communities thrive.

January 20, 2017

White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

The Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) congratulates you on your inauguration as our nation's forty fifth president! As a national organization with more than 20,000 members who are committed to strengthening Adult Education we look forward to working with your administration to create the opportunities that will put Americans back to work!

We believe this goal is consistent with the vision you articulated during your campaign: "Ensure that the opportunity to attend a two or four-year college, or to pursue a trade or a skill set through vocational and technical education, will be easier to access, pay for, and finish."

Adult Education is a federal-state partnership as well as a public-private partnership. By way of example, Indiana Adult Education programs (WorkIndiana) provide math, reading, and writing instruction free of charge to help students acquire the skills they need to earn a high school equivalency diploma, go to college, or enroll in an entry-level occupational certification program.

Indiana invests about \$25 million in state funds to augment almost \$10 million in federal funds to offer more than 30 certifications in Advanced Manufacturing, Health Care, Information Technology, and Hospitality, among others.

But the goal of a good job at a good wage remains unachievable for the more than 36 million Americans who can't read or write at the most basic level as well as the more than 60 million who lack the basic math skills necessary to operate a cash register or understand a bus schedule.

We need a robust array of skill-building programs that can help all of these potential workers train for the jobs that you intend to bring back to the United States which will help them support their families and pursue their personal dreams. We want to work with you to win the global skills race by investing comprehensively in the nation's workforce.



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Adult Education is a path from low-income and dead-end jobs to a productive future. Adults without a high school diploma or functioning below a high school level cannot qualify for either community college programs or high demand occupations. High schools alone cannot provide business and industry the workers they need.

Most of America's future workers are already in the workforce. They are beyond the reach of the high schools and postsecondary education. Adult education is the best way to re-engage them.

By neglecting the adult population in need of education, we also harm the prospects of the next generation—57 percent of children whose parents don't have a college education live in low-income families, and are less likely themselves to get a good education qualify for family-sustaining jobs.

A robust Adult Education system is essential if we are to achieve our nation's economic goals. It will be impossible to create a workforce skilled enough to compete in the global 21st Century economy if we focus only on secondary schools and postsecondary institutions. Adult education must be supported.

Significant underinvestment in Adult Education and workforce skills development is eroding America's global competitiveness. Other nations are fast outstripping America in boosting the educational levels of their young and working age adults. They are showing consistent decade-to-decade progress in enhancing the education levels of their adult populations, while the U.S. is losing ground.

According to The Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) conducted under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and published in 2013, "the U.S. average on the literacy and numeracy scales is mediocre at best."

Investing in Adult Education makes sense. According to "The Return on Investment from Adult Education and Training, *Adult education also improves and expands the nation's available pool of human capital by helping motivated but undereducated people achieve gainful employment in today's increasingly high-tech and global job market, and at a far lower cost per learner when compared to either K-12 or higher education. As a result, adult education and career training is potentially one of the most cost-effective tools the nation has ...*"

Because low literacy correlates to inequality, higher unemployment, lower incomes, crime, poor health and increased hospitalizations, properly funding the adult education system would yield substantial fiscal and social benefits, adding to GDP growth, personal incomes, increased revenues, and savings on incarceration and health care.

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According to the National Center on Education and the Economy, “It is still the case, and is likely to continue to be the case, unless something changes, that American workers, once the best-educated in the world, are now among the least well-educated in the industrialized world.”

As you have reminded us, we live in an increasingly competitive world; one in which we cannot afford to waste the talents of even a single worker and while the free-market works, it is not perfect. We *must* invest adequately in our Adult Education system to remain economically competitive.

Sincerely,



Tom Nash
COABE President