

Adult education has long been an integral part of our nation's prosperity. Yet over the last decade, declining state and federal funds have led to declining numbers of adult learners who can access services. Of the 36 million adults with low basic skills, adult education currently assists 1.8 million of them each year to earn a high school equivalency, increase basic and employability skills, or improve their English language proficiency (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act).

**COABE PRINCIPLE:** Increase investments in adult education to ensure that these 36 million Americans are able to access services, strengthen their basic skills, and advance through career pathways in high demand fields. Adult education is instrumental in closing social and economic disparities in our country, stimulating economic growth, global competitiveness, and prosperity.

### A Nation Falling Behind

In 2013, an international Survey of Adult Skills from 24 OECD countries found that the U.S. is lagging behind in literacy, numeracy, and using technology to solve problems. Additionally, the survey shows that:

- The U.S. has a larger population of low-skilled adults than most developed countries.
- American adults who come from poorly-educated families are 10 times more likely to have low skills.
- Younger generations, 18-24 year olds, are only slightly outpacing, or are doing worse than older adults — unlike in many industrialized countries (OECD, 2013).

### Funding and Enrollment

- Federal and state funding and enrollment have declined in the last 15 years. Federal funding and enrollment decreased from nearly 2.8 million learners and over \$700 million in federal funding in 2001 —to 1.8 million learners and \$569 million in federal funding in 2015. (CLASP, 2012).
- While the federal budget caps were raised for FY 2016-17, adult-education funding has not yet been restored to pre-sequester levels.

### Demand for Services

- The most recent survey of demand for adult-education services found that 50 of the 51 states and territories reported waiting lists (McLendon, 2010).
- Analyses of PIAAC data conducted by OECD found that at least 3 million U.S. adults are not enrolled in a program, but would like to be (OECD, 2013).

### Jobs and the Economy

- Labor market economists project that by 2020, nearly two-thirds of all jobs will require some postsecondary education and training beyond high school (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013).
- Individuals who participate in adult-education and literacy programs have higher future earnings as a result of participating, and their income premiums are larger with more intensive participation (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).
- Education levels have more of an effect on earnings over a 40-year span in the workforce than any other demographic factor (Julian, & Kominski, 2011).

### Children's Education

- Research shows that “better-educated parents raise better-educated, more successful children, who are less likely to end up in poverty or prison” (McLendon, Jones, & Rosin, 2012).
- Children whose parents are involved with them in family literacy activities score 10 points higher on standardized reading tests (Sénéchal, 2006).

- A single year of parental education has a greater positive impact on the likelihood of a son or daughter attending a postsecondary institution than does an extra \$50,000 in parental income (Finnie, Childs, & Wismer, 2011, p. 12).

## Health Literacy

- The cost of low health literacy to the U.S. economy is between \$106 billion to \$238 billion annually (Vernon, Trujillo, Rosenbaum, & DeBuono, 2007).
- When taking into account future costs of low health literacy, the real present day cost is estimated to range from \$1.6 trillion - \$3.6 trillion (Vernon, Trujillo, Rosenbaum, & DeBuono, 2007).
- PIAAC (2013) found that U.S. adults with higher literacy scores report better health; this suggests that they have a stronger set of skills to prevent disease and protect their health.

## Immigration

- Nearly 23 million of the country's foreign born have limited English proficiency (LEP).
- More than ten million LEP residents – roughly 32 percent of low-educated adults in the U.S. – lack a high school diploma or its equivalent (McHugh, & Moraski, 2015).
- WIOA requires adult-education programs to provide Integrated English Literacy (IEL) and Civics Education activities. These activities blend the traditional English-language and civics programs with Integrated Education and Training (IET). However, little funding is available to implement IEL activities.

## Poverty

- Almost half of all children and young adults live in low-income households that are below 200 percent of the poverty line (CLASP, 2015).
- "Students from low-income families are 2.4 times more likely to drop out than middle-income students, and over 10 times more likely than high-income peers" (Lynch, 2013).
- Each high school dropout costs taxpayers \$292,000 over the course of his or her life. Collectively, dropouts cost taxpayers more than \$8 billion annually in public assistance programs (Sum, Khatiwada, & McLaughlin, 2009).
- Adults who get a high school equivalency earn, on average, \$10,000 a year more, breaking cycles of poverty and illiteracy.

## Incarceration and Recidivism

- More than 700,000 incarcerated individuals from federal and state prisons reenter society each year. Forty percent of those will be reincarcerated within three years of release (Davis et al., 2014).
- Recidivism costs states more than \$50 billion each year and takes a traumatic toll on children and families of the incarcerated (OVAE, 2012).
- Inmates who participated in correctional education programs had a 43 percent lower chance of recidivating than those who did not — a reduction in the risk of recidivating by 13 percent (Davis et al., 2014).
- The odds of obtaining employment post-release among inmates who participated in correctional education were 13 percent higher than for those who did not (Davis et al., 2014).

## What Do We Need To Do?

Increase access to adult education programs by providing federal funding at least at authorized levels:

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|------------------------|------------------------|
| • 2017: \$ 635,198,000 | • 2019: \$ 664,552,000 |
| • 2018: \$ 649,287,000 | • 2020: \$ 678,640,000 |

Increasing access to adult education programs will also require increased state funding for adult education, and leveraging funding opportunities in the private and corporate sectors. Furthermore, we must create and utilize partnerships with adult education, vocational and trade schools, businesses, corrections institutions, and institutions of higher education.

For the reference list and corresponding issue paper, visit <http://www.coabe.org/public-policy-principles/>