

COABE

COALITION ON ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Inspiring educators so adults succeed and communities thrive.

What Is Adult Education?

Adult education serves adults aged 16 and above who are not in school, who lack basic reading and math skills, and who do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. Federal funds support state and local efforts to assist adults in becoming literate and in obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency. Efforts are also made to assist adults who are parents in obtaining the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the education of their children.

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 demands 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. There are costs associated with this new alignment.

Adult education grants are currently funded at \$581.2 million, well below the \$635.2 million authorized in WIOA.

Why Should We Invest in Adult Education?

Adult education is a gateway to a job and a career. It is a hand up, not a hand out.

In an increasingly competitive world we must empower individuals, families, and communities with the educational opportunities they need. We cannot afford to waste the talents of millions of Americans who cannot read, perform basic math, use a computer, or solve problems creatively.

Its impact can last for generations. Properly funding the adult education system would yield substantial fiscal and social benefits, adding to economic growth, personal incomes, increased revenues, and savings on incarceration and health care.

Low literacy levels are directly linked to inequality, higher rates of unemployment, lower income, crime, poor health, and increased hospitalizations. Experts estimate that low literacy costs the U.S. more than \$225 billion in lost tax revenue, reduced productivity, crime, and poor health.

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By neglecting the adults who need services, we affect their kids, too. Almost 60 percent of children whose parents lack a college education live in low-income families and are less likely themselves to get a good education and secure family sustaining jobs. Mothers and fathers who learn basic skills are better equipped to help their children succeed.

100 hours or more of adult education attendance equates to \$9,620 in extra earnings per year.

Yet, the Problem is Large and Growing

More than 36 million Americans can't read or write at the most basic level and 60 million Americans lack the credentials and skills necessary to succeed in postsecondary education. More than 60 million Americans lack the basic math skills necessary to operate a cash register or understand a bus schedule.

Every year, one in three young adults drops out of high school.

3 million adults are not enrolled in services, but want to be.

The number of students served has fallen from more than 2.7 million to 1.5 million, a decline of 44 percent. Since 2001, funding, when adjusted for inflation, has fallen by 25.3 percent.

We Are Becoming Less Competitive

According to PIAAC (OECD's Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies), Americans lag behind the international average for basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving in technology-rich environments (defined as, "using digital technology, communication tools and networks to acquire and evaluate information, communicate with others, and perform practical tasks"). Other nations show consistent progress in enhancing the education levels of their adult populations, while the U.S. is losing ground.

According to Marc Tucker, president of 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."

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Our Ask

We believe that greater investment in adult education is warranted. We know that adult education funding must be increased if we are to make WIOA a success. WIOA authorized funding for adult education at \$649.3 million in the 2018 fiscal year. Congress should fund adult education at least at that level.

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