

Proof That Adult Education is Transformative

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There is much discussion around the importance of a high-quality early education, and how crucial the formative years of K-12 are to a student's future success in the workforce. In the media lately, the investments that this country makes in postsecondary education is getting quite a bit of air time as well. As the U.S. economy struggles to break out of economic stagnation, these investments in the different phases of education are indeed crucial, however greater attention should be paid to the role adult education programs play in sustaining and growing American commerce.

According to [American Action Forum data](#), the U.S. will be short of 7.5 million private sector jobs by 2020 if current conditions persist. As an example, Northern Utah is one region suffering from a shortage of skilled workers, as reported by the [New York Times](#) this summer. As Todd Bingham, the president of the Utah Manufacturers Association, told the [Times](#), "Our companies are saying, 'We could grow faster, we could produce more product, if we had the workers.' Is it holding the economy back? I think it definitely is."

While 63% of all U.S. jobs demand education beyond high school, roughly 88 million Americans only have a high school education, according to [Georgetown Center for Education and Workforce](#). Further, 60 million lack simple math skills; and 36 million have limited reading and English skills. Though they may have an admirable work ethic, this segment of the workforce is not well positioned to fill emerging roles in the U.S. economy, such as data scientists, healthcare technicians, and sales engineers.

We must all accept the responsibility of training and preparing our current workforce for the in-demand jobs of today and tomorrow. [As we recently wrote](#), Educate & Elevate, a national campaign driven by a group of 55,000 education leaders focused on increasing opportunities to adult education and thus bolster the expertise of under-skilled workers, is working hard to safeguard adult education programs and ensure they receive the funding they have been promised, as stated in the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#).

Through this campaign they tell the stories of success that result from public and private investment in America's future through adult education opportunities.

Take the example of Rachel De Vaughan and her experience at McDonald's.

For the past two years, [McDonald's has offered tuition assistance for eligible employees](#) as part of a larger bid to help them secure high school diplomas and college degrees. The fast food giant has considered the task to be a key strategic priority, as it has awarded college tuition assistance to 3,346 restaurant employees so far, as well as high school tuition support for 819 staff members. For its efforts, McDonald's can take credit for helping 872 employees graduate from its [English Under the Arches program](#), while completing 308 advising sessions with staff members.

For Educate & Elevate advocate, Rachel De Vaughan, Ph.D., the power of adult education in reshaping one's career path is well known. Indeed, without support from educators at Mississippi Gulf Community College, she may have never made the transition from a respected McDonald's franchise manager, with no high school diploma, to a state education director with a higher-education-focused Ph.D from William Carey University.

De Vaughan recalls how bleak her future looked in her teenage years as family financial hardships made it difficult to focus on her academic studies.

"At a very young age I was burdened with heavy responsibilities in caring for my younger siblings. I struggled in school because I was so tired I just wanted to sleep." De Vaughan says.

"So when my mom, gave me a choice of quitting school to work full-time; I chose to quit. I started working for McDonalds for \$3.35/hr. and took advantage of every education and workforce program they offered while never looking back," she adds.

With this momentum, she obtained her high school diploma and put herself on an educational path that resulted in an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, a Ph.D, and a successful and ongoing career in public education.

We must continue to share success stories like De Vaughan's. Only by making these success stories more public and well known can we better position adult education advocates to make their case and secure financial resources for these vital adult education programs.

For more information about how you can help speak up for adult education, go to www.EducateandElevate.org.
