



WHAT IS THE ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM?

The adult education system refers to programs across the US that offer instruction ranging from basic literacy and numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to high school diploma equivalency, and college and career readiness.

Need: In the US, over 30 million adults do not have a high school diploma and 20% of US adults with a high school diploma have only beginning literacy skills. The US ranked 21st in numeracy and 16th in literacy out of 24 countries in a recent assessment of adults' skills.ⁱ Two-thirds of U.S. adults scored at the two lowest levels of proficiency in solving problems in technology-rich environments. Yet, the publicly funded adult education system is able to serve only slightly over 2 million young and older adults per year.ⁱⁱ There are waiting lists for classes in all 50 states.ⁱⁱⁱ Current funding cannot begin to meet the need.

Providers: Adult education programs operate as free-standing organizations or as part of school districts, community colleges, municipalities, multi-services centers, libraries, faith-based organizations, housing developments, workplaces, and unions. Instruction is delivered by mostly part-time teachers and volunteer tutors.

Teacher Preparation: Given that the majority of adult education teachers do not receive pre-service training beyond an orientation, in-service training is critical to ensure high quality services.

Funding: The national, average annual expenditure per adult learner is around \$800. By contrast, the national, average annual per-pupil expenditure on public elementary and secondary education nationally is over \$10,000. Adult education programs receive less than 10% of the amount of federal, state, and local funding that goes to K-12, and less than 5% of what is spent to support higher education.^{iv}

WHO ARE THE ADULT LEARNERS?

Working Poor or Those Looking for Work: In 2010-11, 41% of adults enrolled in adult basic education were unemployed and 31% were employed; the rest were not in the labor force^v. Enrollments in adult education have skyrocketed across the nation during the recession as adults are laid off and unable to find new jobs.

Youth: Every year, over three million youth drop out of school.^{vi} They join the 6.7 million youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market.^{vii} When they decide to complete their education, they enroll in adult education.

Immigrants: By 2030, nearly one in five US workers will be an immigrant.^{viii} English Language Learners are a rapidly growing population across the nation.

Parents: Most adult learners are parents and primary caregivers of school-age children. Many are motivated to return to school by wanting to serve as better role models for their children and help their children succeed in school.

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ADULT EDUCATION IS AN ECONOMIC IMPERATIVE FOR INDIVIDUALS AND THE NATION.

A robust adult education system is an economic imperative for the economic prosperity of individuals and the nation. The US is falling behind other countries and cannot compete economically without improving the skills of its workforce. High school graduates and dropouts will find themselves largely left behind in the coming decade as employer demand for workers with postsecondary degrees continues to surge.

- Full-time workers with a high school diploma earn almost \$10,000 more per year than those without a diploma. If they have some college, but no degree, they earn \$14,000 more on the average.^{ix} College graduates working full-time earn about \$17,500 more a year than high school graduates.
- Adults without a high school diploma are more than twice as likely to be living in poverty as high school graduates^x and over three times more likely to be unemployed than adults with college degrees.^{xi}
- By 2018, 63% of all US jobs will require education beyond high school.^{xii} Yet, nearly half of the US workforce—about 88 million of 188 million adults aged 18 to 64—has only a high school education or less, and/or low English proficiency.^{xiii}

ADULT EDUCATION HELPS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES THRIVE.

One in four working families in our country is low income, and one in every five children lives in poverty.^{xiv} Studies have concluded that programs designed to boost the academic achievement of children from low income neighborhoods would be more successful if they simultaneously provided education to parents.

- A mother's education level is the greatest determinant of her children's future academic success, outweighing other factors, such as neighborhood and family income.^{xv}
- Higher levels of education correlate to lower rates of chronic disease, such as asthma and diabetes, and fewer hospital visits for children and their caregivers.^{xvi}
- In the U.S., the odds of reporting poor health are four times greater for low-skilled adults than for those with the highest proficiency – double the average of the other 23 countries that participated in the assessment of adult skills.^{xvii}

ADULT EDUCATION STRENGTHENS COMMUNITIES AND DEMOCRACY.

People with more education earn higher incomes and pay more taxes, which helps communities to prosper. They are less likely to be incarcerated and more motivated and confident to vote and make their voices heard on questions of public policy.

- Federal, state and local governments stand to gain \$2.5 billion in tax revenue and reduced expenses for every 400,000 adults who earn a high school diploma.^{xviii}
- Adult education makes communities safer. Inmate participation in adult education reduced recidivism by 29% according to a study of three states.^{xix} Over 40% of all incarcerated adults in the US have not completed high school.^{xx}
- Voting is strongly correlated to educational attainment. The voting rate for adults without a high school diploma was less than half the rate for those with advanced degrees in 2008.^{xxi}
- In the U.S., more than in most other countries, 60% of those with lower academic skills feel that they have no influence on public decisions and the political process.^{xxii}

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