



Adult Education Facts 2018

WHAT IS THE ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM?

The adult education system refers to programs across the U.S. 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 U.S., over 40 million adults have low literacy, including 20% of adults with a high school diploma.ⁱ The U.S. ranked 21st in numeracy and 16th in literacy out of 24 countries in a 2013 assessment of adults' skills.ⁱⁱ 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 around 2 million young and older adults per year.ⁱⁱⁱ Waiting lists for classes in all 50 states are common.^{iv} Current levels of federal and state funding combined do not come close to meeting 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: The majority of states do not require adult-education specific credentials for entry into the field though all states though they may require a college degree or a K-12 teaching certificate.^v Federal funding for adult education requires states to offer professional development. This in-service training is critical to ensure high quality services.

Funding: The national, average annual expenditure per adult learner was \$1,021 in 2017.^{vi} By contrast, the, average annual per-pupil expenditure on public elementary and secondary education nationally is over \$13,814.^{vii}

WHO ARE THE ADULT LEARNERS?

Working Poor or Those Looking for Work: 64% of adults with low academic skills are employed. They earn low wages and lack the preparation to succeed in postsecondary education and most training.^{viii}

Youth: Every year, over 2 million students drop out of high school in the U.S.^{ix} They join the 5.5 million youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market.^x When they decide to complete their education, they enroll in adult education.

Immigrants: Immigrants make up for the decline in the U.S.-born workforce as baby boomers retire. By 2030, it is projected that nearly one in five US workers will be an immigrant.^{xi} However, nearly 20 million U.S. adults have limited English proficiency.^{xii} English instruction is critical.

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.

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 U.S. 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 credentials continues to surge. As well, basic digital skills—commonly taught in adult education programs—is the second fastest growing category of skills in demand by employers.^{xiii}

- 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, their median earnings are \$13,000 higher at \$35,000, which increases to \$40,000 for people with an Associate’s degree.^{xiv}
- Adults without a high school diploma are almost twice as likely to be unemployed^{xv} and more than three times as likely to live in poverty as adults with some college.^{xvi}
- By 2020, 65% of all U.S. jobs will require education or training beyond high school, yet, 38% of the U.S. workforce—59 million out of 166 million adults—has only a high school education or less.^{xvii}

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.^{xviii} 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.^{xix}
- 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.^{xx}

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.

- Adult education makes communities safer. Inmate participation in adult education reduced recidivism by 30% according to a study by RAND Corp.^{xxi} About 30% of all incarcerated adults in the U.S. have not completed high school, twice the percentage of the general population.^{xxii}
- Voting is strongly correlated to educational attainment. The voting rate for adults without a high school diploma was over three times lower than for those with a Bachelor’s degree or higher in 2014.^{xxiii}

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- 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.^{xxiv}
- 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.^{xxv}

ⁱ Inside IES Research. (2018, February 28). *Family, work and education: The balancing act of millions of U.S. adults* [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/blogs/research/post/family-work-and-education-the-balancing-act-of-millions-of-u-s-adults>

ⁱⁱ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2013). *Literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving in technology-rich environments among US adults: Results from Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies*. Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2014008>

ⁱⁱⁱ Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education. (2018, August 15). *National summary of the statewide performance report – WIOA Title II Adult Education Program PY 2016*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/wioa-reauthorization.html>

^{iv} McLendon, L., Jones, D. and M. Rosin. (2011). *The return on investment from adult education and training*. McGraw Hill Research Foundation.

^v Belzer, A. & Darkenwald- DeCola, J. (2014). *A national scan of entry qualifications and early and ongoing professional development requirements and offerings for Adult Basic Education practitioners*. National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium.

^{vi} National Reporting System. (2018, August 16). *Providers and subrecipients, WIOA and state funding, Program year 2016-17. All regions*. Retrieved from <https://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/CFAPPS/OVAE/NRS/login.cfm>

^{vii} U.S. Census Bureau. (2016). *2016 Public elementary-secondary education finance data*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2016/econ/school-finances/secondary-education-finance.html>

^{viii} Inside IES Research. (2018, February 28). *Family, work and education: The balancing act of millions of U.S. adults* [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/blogs/research/post/family-work-and-education-the-balancing-act-of-millions-of-u-s-adults>

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^{xi} Lowell, B., Julia Gelatt, J, Jeanne Batalova, J. (2006). *Immigrants and Labor Force Trends: The Future, Past and Present*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 4,6. http://www.migrationpolicy.org/ITFIAT/TF17_Lowell.pdf

^{xii} Wilson, J. (2014). *Investing in English skills: The limited English proficient workforce in U.S. metropolitan areas*. Washington, DC: Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings.

^{xiii} Bughin, J., Hazan, E., Lund, S., Dahlstrom, P., Wiesinger, A. & Subramaniam, A. (2018). *Skill shift. Automation and the future of the workforce*. Discussion Paper. McKinsey Global Institute.

^{xiv} Carnevale, A., Strohl, J. and N. Ridley. (2017). *Good jobs that pay without a BA*. Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University.

^{xv} U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018, July). *Employment status of the civilian population 25 years and over by educational attainment*. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t04.htm>

^{xvi} U.S. Census Bureau (2016). *American Community Survey*. Retrieved from https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_14_5YR_S1501&src=pt

^{xvii} Carnevale, A., Smith, N. and Strohl, J. (2013). *Recovery. Job growth and education requirements through 2020*. Retrieved from <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/recovery-job-growth-and-education-requirements-through-2020>

^{xviii} Children's Defense Fund. (2014). *Child poverty in America: 2014*. Retrieved from <https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/child-poverty-in-america-2014.pdf>

^{xix} National Institutes for Health. (2010). *Improving mothers' literacy skills may be best way to boost children's achievement*. <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/news/releases/pages/102510-reading-family-income.aspx>

^{xx} Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2013).

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^{xxv} McLendon, L., Jones, D. and M. Rosin. (2011). *The Return on Investment from Adult Education and Training*. McGraw Hill Research Foundation.