



National Coalition For Literacy

Adult Education: A Good Investment in National Priorities

Links to sources online at: <http://www.ncladvocacy.org/ffadult.html>

What is Adult Education?

Adult education programs serve individuals, 16 years of age and older, who need to improve their basic skills with an emphasis on literacy, mathematics, and English language proficiency. Instructors work with each student to design an individual learning plan that aligns to their goals: to get, retain or advance in a job; get off public assistance and achieve a family-sustaining income; complete high school or obtain a GED certificate; transfer to a community college or training program; help their children be successful in school; manage their family's healthcare; or learn English, understand U.S. culture, and be an informed citizen.

What Is the Need for Adult Education?

Of the over 200 million adults (age 25+) in the United States in 2010: approximately 15% have NOT achieved a high school diploma or an equivalent ([American Community Survey](#)) and 93 million function below the high school level according to the [National Assessment of Adult Literacy](#). In 2008-2009, federally-funded adult education programs served nearly 2,400,000 students; more than 160,000 were placed on waiting lists for services in 2009-2010 ([NCSDAE](#)).

What Is the Current Budget Situation?

The largest source of federal investment in adult education and literacy is the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Title II. Funds in this title provide the foundation for our state and local public adult education systems, supporting teacher training, curriculum development, and accountability measurement. The current federal appropriation for adult education and family literacy under WIA Title II is \$628,000,000. Historically, the state and local investment has been almost three times the federal investment: around \$1,500,000,000 annually. However, state and local budget cuts over the last several years have reduced funding for adult education services across the country. Even before those reductions, combined federal, state, and local funding served only a fraction of the estimated 93 million who could benefit from adult education.

How Effective Are Adult Education Programs? Very!

In 2006, the OMB rated adult education programs as "Effective", their highest rating, saying, "The program recruits, retains, and assists more people from its target population at a lower cost than other [federally funded] job training programs" (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/expectmore/summary/10000180.2006.html>). In 2009-2010, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Adult and Vocational Education invested \$628 million in the education of nearly 2.4 million students, a mere **\$261 per student**.

How Does Adult Education Support National Priorities?

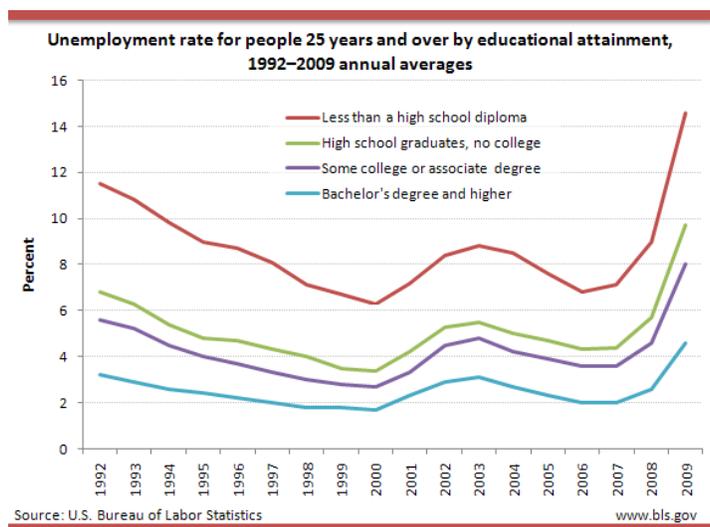
Getting people the basic skills and training they need to advance in education and work is a benefit to them, their families, and the nation. Adult education supports national priorities:

Workforce Preparation: A recent labor analysis reports that by 2018, 63% of all U.S. jobs will require at least some postsecondary education (<http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018/>). Other analysts warn that by 2025 there will be a **shortage of 23 million college-educated adults** in the U.S. workforce at current rates of production of college graduates ([the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and Jobs for the Future](#)).

High School Diploma or Equivalent: The [Center for Labor Market Studies](#) estimates that a diploma's contribution—including the payment of payroll, federal, and state income taxes—could amount to **more than \$250,000 per graduated student**. In 2008-2009, 165,637 students were able to successfully achieve a GED certificate through adult education programs.

Postsecondary Completion: In order to meet the President's goal to once again lead the world in post-secondary completion rates by 2020, we must enlist adults who have not completed college. Many adults must refresh their skills in order to get back in the education and training pipeline. In 2008-2009, 48,889 adult education students entered postsecondary education or training (National Reporting System, Table 5).

Job Retention: Educational attainment pays off in higher rates of employment as shown in the graph from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). In 2008-2009, 181,766 adult education students entered or retained employment in the midst of a national recession (National Reporting System, Table 5).



Children's Education: Adult education prepares parents to be their child's first and most important teacher. Studies continue to demonstrate the tight correlation between parents' literacy, especially mothers', and children's success with literacy and school. A recent report concluded that programs to boost the academic achievement of children from low income neighborhoods would be more successful if they simultaneously provided education to parents (<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/news/releases/102510-reading-family-income.cfm>).

Public Health: Higher levels of health literacy are associated with more informed decision making, more preventative and maintenance health behaviors, improved self-care and advocacy, and improved communications between health care providers and patients. Those with limited health literacy make greater use of services designed to *treat* complications of disease—such as hospitals and emergency room services—and less use of services designed to *prevent* complications, incurring higher health care costs ([U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)).

Corrections: Federal and state corrections facilities held over 1.6 million prisoners at the end of 2009, 2 out of 5 of whom lacked a high school diploma or its equivalent and 95% of whom will be released back to the community at some point (<http://nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/facts>). Participation in correctional education reduces re-arrest, re-convictions, and recidivism, preparing inmates for a more productive life in the community. In 2008-2009, over 55% of the 42,204 corrections students achieved their goal of attaining a GED credential (National Reporting System, Table 10).

Immigrant Integration: English is the language of opportunity and community integration. For the 38 million foreign-born immigrants and refugees (<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/sectoralbrief-Sept2010.pdf>), gaining proficiency in English is critical. In 2008-2009, 1,051,730 people improved their English proficiency in adult education programs (National Reporting System, Table 4).

Poverty Reduction: The rate of poverty increased in America during the recent recession ([Joint Economic Committee report](#)). Poverty hits those with low educational attainment and their families the hardest. In 2009, 24% of adults aged 25+ without a high school diploma experienced poverty, 12% of those with a high school degree or equivalent did so, and the rates continue to drop with educational attainment ([American Community Survey](#)).

What Should Congress Do?

It is critical to protect adult education and literacy funding and find ways to increase that investment in the future to serve 5 million people in 2012, 7.5 million in 2013, 10 million in 2014, and 12.5 million in 2015.

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NCL (www.national-coalition-literacy.org) is a national adult education leadership organization comprised of over 20 member organizations and adult education professionals, committed to promoting adult education and literacy, family literacy, and English language development in the United States. NCL seeks to advance adult education, language, and literacy by fostering collaboration and advocacy at the national level among public and private organizations.

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