

## **Adult Education is Needed Now**



A startling fact is that 1,380,727 adults 25 and over in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential (9% of adults 25 and over). 358,442 have less than a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education. There are 187,708 people living in Pennsylvania who are limited English proficient. Pennsylvania needs skilled workers to stay competitive, and many Pennsylvanians need access to services that will get them skilled and ready to work. Strengthening workforce skills through adult education is one of the

primary vehicles for giving the people in our state a sense of hope and opportunity to transform their lives.

This is an important moment in time. As Pennsylvania looks to implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act, it is crucial that education service providers and workforce development programs come together and start thinking about investing in and engaging with these programs differently.

This is more than just calling for better access to and awareness of education and job resources. This is about the different pieces of the education and workforce development systems across Pennsylvania realizing that they have a role to play in a movement with a similar mission: ensuring economic opportunities for one of our most underserved populations.

### ***The Problem***



More than 1.6 million adults in Pennsylvania never learned to read, perform simple math, use a computer, or creatively solve problems. This skills gap is increasing inequality, and it is hurting individuals, families, communities, the economy, and our competitiveness.

Pennsylvania needs workforce-ready adults. Building our economy means working together with employers and workforce development partners to empower individuals, families, and communities, with the educational opportunities they need. Pennsylvania cannot afford to ignore the residents who never learned to read proficiently, perform simple math, use a computer, or creatively solve problems. These adults are in or want to be in our workforce. Many of them are parents.

## **Magnitude**

- It is hard to imagine that so many people in our Commonwealth struggle with the most basic skills. Dropping out of high school impacts skill levels. Between 2010 and 2015, an average of 13,550 students in Pennsylvania drop out of high school. In the last five years, 67,752 students dropped out of high school. Many of them dropped out because they were failing. If they don't have access to adult education, they will not be able to get their High School Equivalency Diploma.
- Adults who come from poorly educated families are 10 times more likely to have low skills.

## **Impact**

- Adults without a high school diploma are more than twice as likely to be living in poverty than high school graduates, and more than three times as likely to be unemployed than adults with college degrees.
- The costs of low literacy are estimated nationally to be around \$225 billion due to loss of tax revenue from unemployment, reduced workforce productivity, and crime.
- Low literacy skills are directly linked to inequality, higher rates of unemployment, lower income and poor health.
- Patients with low literacy skills have a 50 percent increased risk of hospitalization.

Adult and Family Literacy Education plays an essential role in helping low skilled adults get and keep life sustaining jobs. Labor market economists project that by 2020, nearly two-thirds of all jobs will require some postsecondary education and training beyond high school (Carnevale, A., Smith, N., & Strohl, J., 2013). Yet, 9% of adults in Pennsylvania don't even have a high school diploma. These adults lack the literacy, numeracy, and problem solving skills they need to get and keep good jobs or advance in a career. Pennsylvania employers need skilled and credentialed workers.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) places high value on the development of career pathways through partnerships among adult education, job training providers, higher education and employer with the goal of getting low skilled adults on a pathway to life sustaining jobs.

Adult education is a critical partner as these programs are able to extend the career ladder to millions of adults in the Commonwealth for whom job training is just out of reach.

## ***The Challenges***

From Program Year 2000-2001 through 2008-2009, total annual federal and state adult basic and family literacy funding combined ranged from \$42 to \$52 million. Since then, it has declined to under \$30 million with the majority of the decline coming from cuts in state funding. This decline in funding has impacted Pennsylvania's capacity to serve adults who need an education.

State funds reach only 21,000 of 1.6 million adults who need basic skills instruction in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania's average spending per adult learner is around \$1,450 annually. The average for public elementary and secondary education is around \$10,000 a year. Adult education is a great value for taxpayer dollars.

Postsecondary education systems often don't make effective use of adult learning providers who know how to provide developmental education for students most in need of support.

**Resources are needed to:**

- help people build work readiness skills;
- ensure that employers can meet their staffing needs;
- help families become self-sufficient;
- ensure that adults who were not able to complete school can get a diploma;
- provide English language instruction so that immigrants can integrate, work and become citizens.
- To enable students who want to be enrolled in services but cannot gain access due to capacity.

***Why It Matters***

Adult basic education is a path from low-income jobs and dead-end futures to the middle class and family sustainability. Adult basic education helps make Pennsylvania more competitive, builds stronger communities, and adds to our tax base while containing costs. We can put adults on sustainable paths out of poverty and open up new avenues to financial security and the middle class. And we can do it with a basic tool: education. Adult basic education lets Pennsylvanians turn things around for themselves with a hand up, not a hand out. Its impact can last for generations.

- Adult education gives those without basic reading and number skills a shot at finding a job, launching a career, educating their own children and living healthier lives. They can become homeowners and taxpayers instead of being reliant on social service programs.
- Those who enroll in adult basic education services are often working multiple jobs and have multiple responsibilities and commitments that they are juggling. They make the time to attend classes because they understand that education is what they need to better their life and the lives of their families. In many respects, they are the unsung heroes who have been stigmatized and misunderstood by the general public for far too long.
- Education levels have more effect over lifetime earnings than any other demographic factor including gender and race.
- A mother's education level is the surest determinant of her children's future academic success, outweighing other factors like neighborhood and family income. Mothers and fathers who learn to read, even late in life, are far better equipped to help their kids grow than parents who lack basic literacy skills.
- Inmates who are educated while incarcerated are 43 percent less likely to return to prison.

## *Return on Investment*

- Funding adult education pays for itself: for every dollar invested in these services, a community gets \$60 back in decreased welfare costs, tax revenue, and economic activity.
- 100 hours or more of adult education attendance equates to \$9,621 in extra earnings per year.



## *References*

This paper was based on the COABE Report, Adult Education is Needed Now

<http://www.coabe.org/adult-education-is-needed-now/>

Other references:

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy

<https://nces.ed.gov/naal/estimates/StateEstimates.aspx>

Pennsylvania Department of Education Statistics

<http://www.education.pa.gov/Data-and-Statistics/Pages/default.aspx#tab-1>

American Community Survey (ACS)

<http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data.html>

## *What You Can Do*

### **Advocate for Adult Education!**

- Talk to your federal and state representatives and invite them to key events.
- Have staff from local offices visit your programs and talk to students.
- Explain how adult education support workforce development.
- Promote the increase in employment outcomes over the past 16 years – 42% in 2000-2001 with limited numbers in the cohort to 47% in 2015-2016.
- Promote the great value for taxpayer dollars.

For more information about what you can do, please visit the PAACE website at

<http://paacesite.org>