

# Legislative Talking Points

## English language learners are important to the job market

English language learners are important to the job market. **Of the 2 million immigrants that enter the U.S. every year, about half have limited access to jobs, job training and other post-secondary education because of their low English literacy skills**[i]. The number of working-age immigrants is projected to increase to 38.5 million by 2035[ii]. We must train and educate these adults by increasing their English language proficiency, improving their basic skills and helping them achieve a high school diploma or equivalent, so that they are prepared to join and contribute to the future workforce.

[i] National Commission on Adult Literacy. (2008). *Reach higher, America: Overcoming crisis in the U.S. workforce. Report of the National Commission on Adult Literacy*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED506605.pdf>

[ii] Pew Research Center (2017). Immigration projected to drive growth in U.S. working age population through at least 2033. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/08/immigration-projected-to-drive-growth-in-u-s-working-age-population-through-at-least-2035/>

## By 2024, 48 percent of job openings will be middle-skill and 32 percent will be high-skill

By 2024, 48 percent of job openings will be middle-skill and 32 percent will be high-skill. This means that, five years from now, nearly **80 percent of all job openings will require more than a high school degree**[iii]. We already have a problem filling labor market needs, and the situation is only projected to worsen. **Adult education provides a significant opportunity to bridge the workforce supply-and-demand gap.**

[iii] National Skills Coalition analysis of long-term occupational projections from State labor/employment agency

## Studies show that when we invest in adult education, outcomes improve

We know that when we invest in adult education, outcomes improve. In 2017, **72 percent of adults participating in a federally funded adult education program earned a high school diploma or recognized equivalent**, up from 66 percent in 2015[i]. A longitudinal study of adult education participants found that participation in at least 100 hours of adult education was correlated with a \$9,000 increase in annual earnings[ii]. With increased investments and attention placed on the adult education pipeline, even more adults can become educated and more quickly make progress in earning the skills needed to obtain better jobs.

[i] Congressional Justification [CJ]. (2019). Career, Technical, and Adult Education Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget20/justifications/m-ctae.pdf>

[ii] The Impact of ABS Program Participation on Long-Term Economic Outcomes (Portland State University, 2014.) Viewable at: [http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/ABS\\_EconomicOutcomes.pdf](http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/ABS_EconomicOutcomes.pdf)

## Federally funded adult education programs operating across the US are achieving a 72% success rate

More than 2,000 federally funded adult education programs operating across the US are achieving a 72% success rate, marking significant outcomes even though their teachers are paid 20 percent less than elementary and secondary educators and their programs are allocated only \$200-\$800 in spending per student annually, compared to \$10,000 for elementary and secondary education[i].

[i] [https://www.worlded.org/Managed/docs/Adult%20Ed%20Facts\\_Mar2014.pdf](https://www.worlded.org/Managed/docs/Adult%20Ed%20Facts_Mar2014.pdf); USCensus Bureau. (2011). Back to School 2010-2011. [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/cb10-ff14.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb10-ff14.html)

## Adult education focuses on a population that is extremely challenging to reach

Adult education focuses on a population that is extremely challenging to reach. More than 2,000 federally funded adult education programs provide services to **1.5 million** learners nationwide and experience a 72% success rate with this population.

Displaced Homemakers: **21,781**  
Homeless/Runaways: **18,189**  
Single Parents: **113,580**  
Migrant Farm Workers: **10,742**  
Long-Term Unemployed: **65,117**

English Language Learners: **943,061**  
Low-Income Adults: **321,426**  
Ex-Offenders: **92,877**  
Exhausting TANF: **6,098**  
Learning Disabilities: **63,845**

## We must direct more attention and resources to adult education, so workers are trained, and jobs are filled

**Given the rapidly changing economy, we must direct more attention and resources to adult education, so workers are trained, and jobs are filled. We recommend:**

- Significantly increase our investment in adult education in order to prepare more of our adult learners for a changing workplace.
- Ensure that the voice of adult learners is represented in decision-making at the Federal, State and local levels.
  - Advocate for adult educators to be included in the State and local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) planning processes.
  - Advocate for adult educators to be included in other policymaking efforts including hearings, legislative development, etc.
- Support certification policies for adult education educators that improve their career pathways and ensure effectiveness.
- Provide support for professional development for adult educators and technical assistance to adult education programs to build pathways to the future of work for all adult learners.
- Ensure that data collected on adult education program outcomes are reported in a timely fashion and disseminated in an accessible manner.

## Expanding your focus on adult education will fill more jobs

Some jobs will be filled by those currently on a post-secondary track or by those who can easily be retrained and provided with a new skill set. However, we must expand our focus to the often ignored, but essential, lower-skilled workers in order to meet future demand and ensure that all adults can participate in the economy and contribute to society. Without a major correction, tens of millions of Americans will be unprepared to fill the next wave of jobs, and we could face a dramatic increase in unemployment nationwide. Indeed, we must ensure that the 43 million working-age Americans who possess low literacy skills get the education they need to access the skills training that will help fuel our future economy.

## Major correction needed to stave off dramatic unemployment issues

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## **The return on investment into adult education is undeniable**

The return on investment into adult education is undeniable. The adult ed graduate can typically earn close to \$10,000 more per year once they get their diploma! And the economy is impacted as well. For every 400,000 adults who earn a high school diploma, we gain 2.5 billion back in tax revenue and reduced expenses. That's \$6,250 per person! And on top of that, the estimated value to our economy in reduced costs for public support programs for low skilled, low literate adults is \$200 billion annually!

## **47% of GED recipients go on to higher ed and have a 90% persistence rate**

While adult education provides so much more than just the high school equivalency, it is certainly a milestone. Studies show that 47% of GED recipients go on to higher ed and have a 90% persistence rate. Adult ed learners have grit and determination. They are fighting for a better future for themselves and their families!

## **You can educate, you can medicate, or you can incarcerate**

Many of the programs in our federal budget fall under the following categories: health, education, and reform. When we think about low literate adults, you can educate, you can medicate, or you can incarcerate. With the 72% success rate that federal funded programs have, the clear choice is investing in adult education!

## **28 million adults in the US lack the basic digital skills that they need to use a computer**

28 million adults in the US lack the basic digital skills that they need to use a computer, yet most are using computers every day on the job. We must invest in digital literacy to ensure a competitive workforce. Most federally funded adult education programs provide digital literacy services while providing literacy, numeracy, citizenship, and workforce readiness skills!

## **Educating adults creates stronger communities**

Low-skilled adults are: • 2x more likely to be unemployed; • 3x more likely to be in poverty; • 4x more likely to be in poor health; and • 8x more likely to be incarcerated.

Educating adults creates stronger communities. Higher education levels are correlated with lower rates of chronic diseases like diabetes and asthma, and a mother's education level is the highest determinate of a child's academic success. Better-educated parents raise better educated, more successful, children, who are less likely to end up in poverty or prison.

Inmate participation in adult education reduces recidivism by 29%.

## **More than 30 million adults lack a high school diploma**

Nearly half of the U.S. 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.

Both urban and rural areas need trained employees. As of 2016, there were 476 counties in the US in which 20 percent or more of the working age population lacked a high school diploma or equivalent. Eighty percent are located in non-metro areas.

## **Adult Education is a Key On-Ramp for Workers to Reach Middle-Skill Jobs**

More than half of all jobs (54%) in the U.S. today are middle-skill jobs that require more than a high school diploma, but not a four year degree. Yet only 44% of workers are trained to the middle-skill level.

Educating motivated students with the skills that companies need can provide qualified candidates for hard to fill positions.

## **Adult Education can train students to fill the jobs industry needs today**

44 million adults are low skilled, 30 million lack a high school diploma, and 66 million adults in the U.S. have limited English or reading skills and more than 60 million can't perform simple math.

We cannot depend on a robust economy to solve this problem. A stronger economy will bring people back into the workforce, but it won't train them. According to Alan Daley's "Overcoming the Skills Shortage," "More than 75 percent of manufacturers report moderate to severe skill shortages and up to 11 percent revenue losses from increased production cost and sales losses due to those shortages. Service industries are hardest hit. Thirty-three percent of all small businesses say they cannot identify candidates qualified for job openings. And 43 percent of small business owners say unfilled jobs are impeding their growth or expansion."

With Adult Education we can train these students to fill the jobs industry needs today.

## **Adult education is good for business**

By 2020, the American Action Forum projects that the U.S. will be short an estimated 7.5 million private sector workers across all skill levels.

Companies miss out on growth opportunities, product development suffers, and profits stagnate without a skilled national workforce. America needs an "all hands on deck" approach to bring every available worker to the labor pool.

Adult Education brings businesses options by preparing existing workers with competing life and family responsibilities with the skills that companies need through flexible classrooms and curriculum.

**The Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) represents the system of 55,000 adult educators, administrators and mentors working to improve educational outcomes for adults in the U.S. We work with the 43 million U.S. adults who possess low literacy skills[iii]. Across the nation, COABE members work tirelessly to help these underserved adults master the skills they need to compete and build careers – and better futures for themselves, their families and their communities.**

**In every State, we support adult education programs that foster essential skills, family literacy and workforce development. We are especially focused on growing the pipeline from adult education to the workforce. We partner with business and industry leaders to ensure that our students are able to join the workforce and contribute to the economy both today and in the future.**

[iii] National Center for Education Statistics [NCES]. (2019). Data Point: Adult Literacy in the United States. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/>