

# Legislative Talking Points

## English language learners are important to the job market

English language learners are important to the job market. Immigrants make up for the decline in the U.S.-born workforce as Baby Boomers retire. By 2030, it is estimated that nearly one in five U.S. workers will be an immigrant[i]. However, nearly 20 million adults have limited English proficiency. [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] 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/ITFIAF/TF17\\_Lowell.pdf](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/ITFIAF/TF17_Lowell.pdf)

[ii] Wilson, J. (2014). Investing in English skills: The limited English proficient workforce in U.S. metropolitan areas. Washington, DC: Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings.

## 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 in less than 3 years nearly **80 percent of all job openings will require more than a high school degree[i]**. 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.**

[i] 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

Research shows that when our nation invests 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. 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. With increased investments and attention placed on the adult education pipeline, even more adults can become educated and quickly make progress in earning the skills needed to obtain better jobs.

## 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 average annual spending was \$1,021 in 2017 [i] as compared to \$13,814 for elementary and secondary education [ii].

[i] 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>

[ii] 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.htm>

## 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. [i]

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**

[i] 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/>

## 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 policy making 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

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.

## **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! [i] 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. [ii] 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!

[i] Carnevale, A., Strohl, J. and N. Ridley. (2017). Good jobs that pay without a BA. Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University.

[ii] McLendon, L., Jones, D. and M. Rosin. (2011). The Return on Investment from Adult Education and Training. McGraw Hill Research Foundation.

## **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! [i]

[i] 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/>

## **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 federally funded programs have [i], the clear choice is investing in adult education!

[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)

## **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. [i] 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!

[i] 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/>

## **Adult education programs are in dire need of support**

Adult education programs are in dire need of support as they continue to provide distance teaching/learning, connect with learners through digital means, and upgrade their digital infrastructure to address other immediate concerns in response to COVID-19 social distancing practices.

## **Adult education provides essential services, especially during an economic downturn**

Adult education provides numeracy, literacy, English language skills, digital literacy, work readiness, soft skills, high school equivalency, and numerous wrap-around services to more than 1.5 million adult learners nationwide – all essential services, especially during an economic downturn.

## 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.

## 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. A mother's education level is the highest determinate of a child's academic success.

[i] 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 30%. [ii]

[i] 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>

[ii] National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. (2018, September 17). U.S. National Supplement: Prison Study 2014, PIAAC 2012. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/blogs/nces/2017/01/11/default>

## 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." [i]

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

[i] Daley, Alan. (2017) Overcoming the Skills Shortage.

[https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2017/03/03/overcoming\\_the\\_skills\\_shortage\\_110178.html](https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2017/03/03/overcoming_the_skills_shortage_110178.html)

## Adult education is good for business

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.

## Adult education programs are facing steep cost increases

Our programs are facing steep cost increases as we navigate the virtual learning environment, and our students are being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic as they are often the first out of the job market and the last back in during times of economic crisis. Many adult teachers and students do not have access to the technology needed to participate in distance learning. Nonetheless, dedicated funding for adult education has been left out of every COVID-19 relief package to date. To build up the adult education infrastructure and allow programs to continue to serve their students in a high-quality and safe manner, adult education needs additional funding.

## We need to build the capacity of the adult education system

In the coming years, adult education programs are expecting a significant surge in participation, following the precedents set during economic downturns. To prepare for the inevitable increase in new students, we need to build the capacity of the adult education system. This will allow programs to be equipped to serve more adult learners, while continuing work with current students.

## Funding for adult literacy education is inadequate

According to a recent report published by The Literacy Assistance Center (LAC) of New York City, “...funding for adult literacy education is so inadequate that fewer than 4% of adult New Yorkers in need can get into classes in any given year. [i] For fiscal year 2020, WIOA Title II spending per participant is less than \$750 per adult learner. [ii] However, unemployed residents with prior US work experience who enrolled in an employment-focused English course boosted their earnings by an average of more than \$7,100 annually two years after starting the program, compared with unemployed non-English speakers who weren’t in the program. Among all participants, including those who started out with jobs, the average annual increase during the second year was more than \$2,600. [iii]

[i] Literacy Assistance Center (2020) Literacy & Justice: A Call for Transformative Action.  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fW4scuzRYn8bUPrxhZ4tTBjtsCTAcvMM/view>

[ii] Comings, Reder, Rosen (2020). An Open Door Out of Poverty.  
[https://www.opendoorcollective.org/uploads/1/4/3/8/14381196/an\\_open\\_door\\_out\\_of\\_poverty\\_sep\\_12.pdf](https://www.opendoorcollective.org/uploads/1/4/3/8/14381196/an_open_door_out_of_poverty_sep_12.pdf)

[iii] Johnston, Katie. (2020). First-of-its-kind study finds ‘stunning’ earnings gains for immigrants who learn English. The Boston Globe.  
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/11/23/business/language-success/>

## Low-income students are 10 times more likely to drop out of school

Low-income students are 2.4 times more likely to drop out of school as middle-income students and 10 times more likely to drop out than students from high-income families, and 36% of students with learning disabilities drop out of school. Incarceration within the juvenile justice system decreases the likelihood of high school graduation by 13% and increases the likelihood of adult incarceration for violent crimes by 15%. Black and Hispanic individuals make up a larger proportion of those incarcerated in the US than other races. There is a 70% chance that an African American male without a high school diploma will be imprisoned before his mid-thirties. [i]

[i] Johnston, J. Howard, PhD. (2010) Dropout Prevention: An EPI Research Brief. Education Partnerships, Inc.  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED537949.pdf>

The Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) represents the system of 65,000 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/>

