



Adult Education Improves Learners' Lives!
A Report on COABE's Adult Learner Alumni Study (March 2024)
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An issue common to adult education is the need for quality data to help measure adult education programs' effectiveness and overall impact on their learners. Such data is critical to inform decision-makers about the value of adult education programs. Additionally, such data is beneficial for informing programs to help guide programmatic, instructional, and curricular decisions, and such data can serve as a basis for advocacy efforts. In 2021, COABE's leadership determined that conducting an ongoing study of adult education alums would be an excellent way to help address these concerns. In 2021 and early 2022, COABE formed a team to begin exploring ways to gather adult education alumni data by formulating a research study and instrument. Feedback about the study's initial focus and instrumentation was gathered from attendees at the 2022 COABE national conference and teachers and administrators from programs across the United States. The study survey was finalized and categorized according to demographics, employment, further education and training, family and community relationships, and basic financial, civic, and community engagement.

Participant Demographics

With the assistance of local adult education programs, responses were collected from 364 adult education alums representing 33 states and the District of Columbia between May 2022 and November 2023. Seventy-six percent were female, 21% were male, 3% preferred not to respond, and 76% were between 15 and 45. The top three reported ethnicities were Caucasian (34%), Latino/Hispanic (33%), or African American (16%). Reported education levels before entering adult education: 70% had no high school diploma; 8% with a high school diploma; 8% with some college courses; and 15% with some college experience, primarily certificate or remedial level. Seventy-three percent shared that they attended adult education between one and 12 months, and 67% graduated within a year of completing the survey.

Education Goals and Achievement

When asked about their goals for entering adult education, 247 wanted to earn their GED® or high school equivalency credential, and 271 reported meeting that goal. Forty-four participants sought to improve their reading, writing, and math skills, and 102 reported achieving that goal. Other set and achieved goals included gaining skills and confidence for a better job, pursuing additional education, helping children with schoolwork, and improving English language skills.

Family, Finances, and Community Engagement

Education data frequently suggests that parents' education level, literacy level, and involvement in their children's schooling benefit both adults and children. Study participants were asked about their marital or relationship status; 59% indicated being married or in a long-term relationship, and 194 (53%) indicated having a child living in their household.

Children in the Household

Of the 194 study participants who indicated having a child in the household, 82% reported living with their children or stepchildren, 9% reported living with another relative, and 6% indicated living with a grandchild.

Questions related to the children's schooling indicate that 95% reported helping children with schoolwork "regularly" or "sometimes." Ninety-one percent communicate with children's teachers "regularly" or "sometimes," and 88% attend parent/teacher conferences "regularly" or "sometimes." Regarding volunteering at the children's school, 60% volunteer "regularly" or "sometimes." When asked how well the children are doing in school, 97% rated their children's performance as "very well" or "average."

Finances

Various financially related questions were part of the survey. Regarding housing, 25% indicated home ownership, including a mortgaged home. Eighty-seven percent have a bank account, checking, savings, or both, 38% have money set aside for an emergency, and 76% have paid off a loan while enrolled in or after graduating from adult education.

Civic/Community Engagement

Community engagement by its members is valued by many and is important in a democratic society. Study participants' responses were mixed when asked about being engaged in the community. Regarding attending public meetings such as school board or council meetings, 31% indicated "sometimes" attending meetings, and 7% noted attending "regularly." Regarding engaging politically, more alums indicated involvement in the electoral process, with 36% voting "regularly" in local, state, or national elections, and 19% indicated that they vote "sometimes," while a small number noted not being able to vote because they are not citizens.

Engaging in community volunteer activities was shown to be important to 168 (46%) of the survey participants. When asked about their volunteer activities outside the home, 300 individual answers were submitted. The top selected volunteer activities were helping out in a school that is not attended by one of their children (18%), caring for their own or a neighbor's children (15%), assisting in some way at a religious institution (14.4%), caring for an elderly community member (13.4%), participating in community activism (9.4%) or with a community assistance center or organization (7.4%). Interestingly, 14.4% noted volunteering in an adult education program.

Adult Education Improves the Lives of Its Alums!

Adults enter education programs with specific goals, and most often, these goals are related to their quality of life. The overwhelming majority of adult alumni study participants rated adult education's influence on improving their life as "Very High" (73%), "High" (18%), or "Moderate" (8%). Among the comments made by study participants, a few are representative:

"Without Adult Education, I would NOT be where I am today!"

"I was able to obtain my GED at the age of 35. Something I thought I'd never be able to accomplish."

"The director and teachers of the program were amazing to me, so supportive..."

"Returning to school and earning my GED changed every aspect of my life. It opened all the doors that I didn't even realize I wanted/needed to be opened."

"Changed my life."

In short, Adult Education changes students' lives!

To learn more about COABE's Alumni Study and how your program can partner in this research, visit:

<https://coabe.org/adult-education-alumni-study/>

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