



National Council of State Directors of Adult Education

ADULT EDUCATION FACT SHEET

What is Adult Education?

Adult Education serves adults, 16 years of age and older, who are no longer in school and who lack basic skills in literacy and math, and/or a high school diploma or a recognized equivalent. Adult Education programs assist these adults to become literate and proficient in speaking English, secure citizenship, and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and post-secondary education.

Adult Education and WIOA

In July 2014, the President signed into law the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which reauthorized the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) as Title II of WIOA and established Adult Education as one of the core partners in a job training and education system focused on job readiness and access to postsecondary education. The reauthorized AEFLA:

- Promises greater integration of Adult Education with occupational education and training and career pathways systems;
- Explicitly authorizes the use of program funds for integrated education and training and workforce preparation activities; and
- Codifies the Integrated English Literacy/Civics Education program, the primary source of federal funding for state and community efforts to provide limited English proficient adults access to English literacy and civics education programs, with an emphasis on integrated education and training models.

Under AEFLA's Adult Education State Grant Program, funds are received by states and distributed as grants to local Adult Education programs, including public schools, community colleges, and community-based organizations.

Adult Education Funding Under WIOA

The President's proposed budget of **\$606.67 million** for Adult Education for FY 2017 is \$28.53 million below AEFLA's authorized level of **\$635.20 million**. State grants for Adult Education programs would be frozen at the FY 2016 level of **\$581.96 million**. National Leadership Activities, however, would receive an \$11 million increase over the FY 2016 funding level, and \$12.71 million over the authorized amount for FY 2017 under AEFLA, which has a formula cap on National Leadership Activities of 2% of the overall appropriation, not to exceed \$15 million.

The Demand for Adult Education Services

- AEFLA-funded Adult Education programs serve only 1.5 million of the estimated 36 million adults in the United States with low literacy and numeracy skills—significantly fewer students than the system's highest enrollment year of 2002, when it served almost 2.8 million students.

- Forty-four percent (44%) of current Adult Education students enrolled in AEFLA programs are English language learners. Another 44% are enrolled in Adult Basic Education programs, which are focused on basic skills below the ninth grade level. Twelve percent (12%) are adult secondary students seeking their high school diploma or equivalent.
- Many adults who have earned a high school diploma have low basic skills. Twenty percent (20%) of adults with a high school diploma have less-than-basic literacy skills and 35% of adults with a high school degree have less-than-basic numeracy skills.
- According to a recent study conducted by OECD's Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), **at least 3 million low-skilled American adults would like to enroll in Adult Education services, but cannot access a program.**

Why Adult Education is a Critical Investment

- Underinvestment in Adult Education is eroding America's global competitiveness. According to the PIAAC study noted above, many OECD countries show consistent progress in enhancing the education levels of their adult populations, while the U.S. is losing ground. A new report, "Skills of U.S. Unemployed, Young, and Older Adults in Sharper Focus," issued by PIAAC in March 2016, concludes that U.S. adults have, on average, weaker numeracy and digital problem-solving skills relative to adults in 17 other developed countries, and their literacy skills are only average.

Marc Tucker, president and CEO of the National Center for Education and the Economy, told the *Wall Street Journal* that this new report shows that **"American workers, once the best educated in the world, are now among the least well-educated in the industrialized world."**

- According to "The Return on Investment from Adult Education and Training," a 2011 policy paper issued by the McGraw-Hill Research Foundation in conjunction with NCSDAE, "A preemptive focus on adult education **actually saves governments money** by reducing societal healthcare, public assistance, and incarceration costs. Adult education **also improves and expands the nation's available pool of human capital...** and at a far lower cost per learner when compared to either K-12 or higher education."
- In addition, according to a 2007 report by the National Commission on Adult Literacy:
 - The U.S. could **save up to \$1.4 billion per year** in reduced costs from crime if the high school completion rate increased by just 1% for all men aged 20 to 60;
 - Improving adult literacy could save up to **\$238 billion annually** in health care costs; and
 - Overall lifetime earnings would increase up to **\$191 billion** if all adults aged 25-64 without a high school diploma acquired a high school diploma or equivalent.

FY 2017 Funding Request

Taking inflation into account, Adult Education State Grants have been reduced by almost 25% since the systems' peak funding year of 2002. While other factors may impact enrollment rates, the enrollment declines over the same period suggest that funding reductions have been a significant factor.

The need for an even greater investment is clear, but at a minimum, the State Directors strongly support funding Title II of WIOA at the authorized level. We also recommend that the \$11 million increase that the President requests for National Leadership Programs instead be allocated to the State Grant program to help all states implement WIOA.

For additional information, please contact:

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