

Virginia Adult Education and Literacy
Virginia Association of Adult and Continuing Education
February 2008

*I was an equipment operator. When I graduated, I moved to supervisor. From there up to Transportation Operations Manager. **The GED was the best thing that ever happened to me.***

Eugene Rush, GED graduate,
Esmont, VA

What is Adult Education and Literacy?

Adult Education and Literacy provides education for adults who lack basic skills, a high school diploma, or proficiency in English. The primary funding source is Title II of the Workforce Investment Act. In 2005, Virginia received \$12,948,119 in Federal funds. The average amount spent per participant was \$614. This is nearly \$200 less than the national average (USDOE,OVAE).

Who benefits from Adult Education and Literacy?

Everyone benefits. A GED graduate earns an average of \$23,300, 62% (\$8,900) more than someone with no high school diploma. Consequently, they pay more taxes. The average tax payment for a Virginia GED graduate was \$9,867 in 2004-05. They also require less from society in the form of welfare benefits, unemployment compensation, medical costs, and institutionalization. These cumulative costs for a Virginian with no high school diploma average \$5,358. With a diploma, they drop to \$2,339, a decrease of 56% (The Fiscal Consequences of Adult Education Attainment). As expected, these costs continue to decline as educational levels increase but this is the most dramatic decrease.

Adult Education and Literacy is the principal provider of English language classes. These classes not only help immigrants learn English to become better workers, but they teach the American culture, history, tradition, and customs enabling immigrants to be better supporters of their children's education and more active in the larger community. *Because of English class, I know more words and can do a better job at work. I try to say English words to my babies (ESL student).*

Where does Adult Education and Literacy belong?

Adult Education and Literacy is often labeled a workforce training program and lumped together with 27 other programs with the explicit pronouncement that it is duplicative and by implication wasteful. **Adult Education and Literacy is more than a Workforce Training Program** The work of adult education impacts K-12 education, welfare reform, public health, English Literacy, older Americans, incarceration rates, employment, and economic development. It is consumer oriented. Some adult learners want a better job. Others want to help children be successful in school. Still others need assistance with health issues. Adult Education and Literacy can meet these needs.

Currently, adult education funding is competitive. The best qualified candidate at the local level is awarded funding through competitive applications. Providers are primarily public school systems but do include several community colleges.

This flexibility allows for innovation, such as programs that target youth, focus on family literacy, health or financial literacy.. It would be a mistake to concentrate all funding and accountability on workforce training. Nationally, only 39% of adult learners listed the desire to get a job as the reason they were in class. It is essential for Adult Education and Literacy to maintain its unique identity providing targeted educational services to the most underserved adults in Virginia.

Other factors to consider when contemplating uprooting Adult Education and Literacy are the cost of relocation of services, loss of identity, loss of flexibility in class start-up and response time.

How can we improve Adult Education and Literacy services?

1. Increase funding so that more adults can be served. As the Race to GED funding has shown, increased funding leads to better results.. In 2005, 13,928 Virginians passed the GED test; in 2006, 15,073 passed, an 8% increase (VADOE). Middle College, a state community college initiative funds \$4,375 per student compared to Adult Education funding at \$304 per student (Federal WIA Title II funding).
2. Institute transition classes for adult learners interested in higher education. Although the majority of GED graduates say they plan to go on to higher education, only 12% complete 1 year in the community college.
3. Promote workplace programs by sharing the cost burden with employers and increasing incentives for employers who provide education and training for employees. Many adults can not attend classes due to work schedules and family demands. Incentives for businesses to implement onsite education and training programs would increase access to classes for a hard to reach population.
4. Prioritize Title I of Workforce Investment Act funding to serve unemployed citizens who lack a high school diploma through education and job training. The long-term savings in increased wage and tax revenue to Virginia coupled with decreased spending on services will give the highest return on investment.

Summary Adult Education and Literacy needs to maintain its unique identity providing targeted educational services to the most underserved adults in Virginia. It needs to continue its emphasis on a strong local delivery system anchored in a competitive application process. Adult Education and Literacy needs increased funding to enhance and increase existing services.

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