



Senate Education and Labor & Industry Committees Joint Hearing

The Importance of Adult Education as part of the Workforce Development System

September 22, 2021

Good morning, Chairwoman Bartolotta, Chairman Martin, Chairwoman Tartaglione, and Chairwoman Williams, and members of the Senate Education and Labor & Industry Committees. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about this important topic, the role of adult education in workforce development. I am Tanya Garcia, Acting Deputy Secretary for Postsecondary and Higher Education at the PA Department of Education.

The Division of Adult Education administers federal funds under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and state funds under Pennsylvania's Adult and Family Literacy Education Act (Act 143 of 1986).

Funds are awarded to eligible providers through a competitive grant process. There are 30 grantees with 22 subgrantees providing adult education services with federal and state funds across the commonwealth; 12 grantees provide family literacy services with separate state-funded grants. There is at least one adult basic education provider in each local workforce area, and all adult education grantees are partners in the local PA CareerLink sites.

I would like to invite my colleague Amanda Harrison to speak about the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters as they pertain to adult education.

Good morning. My name is Amanda Harrison. I am the chief of the Division of Adult Education in PDE's Bureau of Postsecondary and Adult Education.

Over the last 18 months, adult education and family literacy programs funded by the Division of Adult Education have demonstrated flexibility and innovation to ensure continued services to their community. They have implemented a range of orientation, intake, and assessment procedures to allow students to participate either remotely or in person with health and safety measures in place. Programs are providing instruction and student support services using a range of technology-enhanced and in-person activities. Programs are investing local and grant funds in technology and implementing lending programs to support students' access. Program staff helped students in their programs who are also parents of school age children to navigate the challenges of remote learning.

The adults participating in these programs are essential to ensuring Pennsylvania's continued workforce development. 70% of the students enrolled in the programs are 25-54 years old. 88% are in the workforce. Half of those reported being employed at entry into the adult education program. The other half reporting being unemployed and looking for work.

In 2020-21, 61% of our students were in adult basic education or adult secondary education classes. The remaining 39% were ESL students.

When the public thinks about adult education, they generally think of two things: people who are learning how to read or people who are studying to pass a high school equivalency test, either the GED or HiSET. The truth is that the majority of our students are somewhere in between. Of the adults in adult basic or secondary education services last year, only 5% entered at the beginning literacy level. 14% entered with skills at the 9th-12th grade levels. The remaining 81% entered our programs with skills between the 4th and 8th grade equivalency. Many of these individuals have been working in the formal economy for much of their lives, but as the skills needed for jobs change, they find themselves unable to retain those jobs or to progress in their fields. Others are dislocated workers who need to return to school to brush up on the reading, writing, math, and digital literacy skills in order to take advantage of the training opportunities available to them.

Of the English language learners in our programs, many of them have some postsecondary education or a postsecondary or professional degree from their home countries. Last year, this represented 42% of these individuals. They come to our programs with the goal of improving their English language skills in order to work in their fields again here in Pennsylvania.

For all of these students, adult education services are key to their success in gaining employment with family sustaining wages and experiencing success in a career with a viable career pathway.

Given the important role that adult education plays in workforce development, in addressing the impact of the pandemic on Pennsylvania's economy, and in ensuring continued growth in the future, the Commonwealth must increase its investment in the programs and staff providing these valuable services.

The Adult and Family Literacy line item in the state budget has been level funded at \$11.675 million dollars since the budgetary freeze in January 2012. In the decade prior to that, funding ranged from a low of \$15 million in 2010-11, in the midst of a recession, to a high of \$23.4 million in 2007-08. Most years, funding was around \$19 million.

This funding situation has had a direct impact on the adult education workforce. In 2007-08, the last time there was a significant increase in funding, Pennsylvania's adult education programs had over 1,700 paid teachers. In 2020-21, there were 685 paid teachers. That is a drop of 61%. Even more devastating to the field, there was a 76% drop in the number of full-time teachers during the same time period.

The adult education workforce has always been predominantly part time. However, with the increase in funding in 2007-08, and its emphasis on improved services to students, in part through a commitment to increasing the number of full-time teachers, 38.2% of paid teachers were full time. By 2011-12, after funding cuts due to the recession, that dropped to 31.4%. And, after 10 years without any increase in funding, in 2020-21, only 23.6% of paid teachers were full time.

Why does that matter? Most part-time teachers work multiple jobs to make ends meet. As a result, they don't have time for the in-depth instructional planning that is necessary to incorporate employability and digital literacy skills development into instruction in an impactful way. They have limited opportunities to participate in professional development or network with colleagues in adult education and workforce development to expand their knowledge and skills.

There is also significant turnover among the part-time adult education workforce, limiting the system's ability to develop capacity and expertise.

An increase in the Adult and Family Literacy line item will allow Pennsylvania to transform the adult education workforce in our funded programs by increasing the number of full-time teachers. Pennsylvania will benefit from investments in professional learning. And adults in our programs will benefit from teachers who have chosen, and are able, to make adult education their careers.

Also related to funding, I would like to thank Senator Bartolotta and Representative Struzzi in the House for introducing the Adult Education and Workforce Recovery Fund. This program would provide funding for activities to complement the services provided with existing federal and state funds. Importantly, the program provides funding for activities that are not allowed with federal and state matching funds. Furthermore, this funding gives PDE and local programs the flexibility to be innovative and support adults to develop knowledge and skills that are not measurable under the traditional reporting system.

Thank you, and we look forward to answering your questions and continuing this important conversation.