

Joint Senate Education and Labor and Industry Committee Hearing
Adult Education and Workforce Development
September 22, 2021
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Testimony

Who We Are

The United States is built on promises: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is also a country built by dreamers for dreamers. That American Dream is alive within Literacy Pittsburgh—for those left behind, for those who just arrived, for those who never give up.

We know that anyone can achieve a better life through learning because we are witness to the transformational power of education every day. Thousands of students enrolled at Literacy Pittsburgh make significant educational gains—often the equivalent of two grade levels after just 60 hours of instruction. This accomplishment, along with the self-confidence they develop, enables them to pursue their goals, whether those may be college, career, business ownership, citizenship, better parenting or other worthy pursuits. With each achievement, the cycle of poverty is disrupted, and the positive impact multiplied for the whole family for generations to come.

For 37 years, Literacy Pittsburgh has been building better lives through learning. As the largest adult education provider in Pennsylvania, we impact more than 5,500 individuals in our region each year

Our Outcomes

While all adults come to us with goals, adult education programs work at the pace of the learner. Because students are working and raising families they often come in and out of our programs several times before reaching their goals.

But make no mistake – adult education students meet their goals. Here is a summary:

- Generally, the majority of students (67%) who can continuously study for at least 60 hours are making educational gains equivalent to 2 years in K-12 schooling – a remarkable return for a very low investment of state dollars.
- 460 Literacy Pittsburgh students gained or retained employment last year. Again, this is below normal due to the global pandemic that resulted in significant job losses in the low wage workforce across PA and in our region.
- 57 students attained a high school credential during the pandemic, below normal, but still impressive given that testing was limited throughout the year.
- 137 students transitioned to post-secondary education or job training while studying with us.

Aligning for Better Career Outcomes

You can see that Literacy Pittsburgh is an important part of the region's workforce development system. We help thousands of adults each year improve their math, writing, reading, and English language skills, enabling them to attain high school graduation credentials, enroll in college or trade school and get a job that pays a family sustaining wage.

To better align our services with student goals and employer needs, Literacy Pittsburgh delivers basic skills education in stand-alone classes or tutoring, education at an employer site, and or within a job training program. Here are a few examples:

@Literacy Pittsburgh: Our paid teachers offer a variety of reading, writing, math, and GED and Citizenship preparation classes at our various sites across Allegheny and Beaver counties. In a normal year, 573 volunteer tutors work one on one or in small groups with students. Tutored students often work on specific career goals. One example is LiAra, a recent student, enrolled with us to prepare for the nursing school entrance exams. She worked with a tutor to prepare for and pass the test. She is on her way. Our paid instructors also run classes focused on specific career goals. For example, Literacy Pittsburgh runs a 4-week Math for the Trades class for anyone looking to brush up skills for apprenticeships or job training programs. Similarly, we offer an Immigrant Workforce Program focused on health care careers, where students learn English vocabulary for the industry while also exploring various career paths.

@ Job Training: As you will hear from Jeff Nobers and Dimero Dixon, Literacy Pittsburgh teaches Math for the Construction Trades as part of the Builder's Guild Introduction to the Construction Trades Pre Apprenticeship program. You'll also hear about our new Trade Up program. Likewise, we teach brush up and basic skills classes for A Phillip Randolph's Breaking the Chains of Poverty program which is preparing students for careers in healthcare and construction. You will also likely hear how we partner with Bidwell, where we teach brush up math and writing classes for students seeking to enter one of their job training programs. In fact, we have a staff member working from the Bidwell training center.

@ Work: Literacy Pittsburgh contracts directly with employers to provide basic skills training. This past year we taught English to UPMC environmental service workers that helped improve patient satisfaction scores. We also trained 211 call workers on the new vaccine scheduling system. Previous years we've taught English to Casino table game operators and kitchen staff, as well as English to hotel housekeepers and employees at light manufacturing facilities.

What We Need

With your help, Literacy Pittsburgh and our colleague organizations can do more to help fill the Commonwealth's shortage of skilled workers.

We need your support for these important asks:

Adult Education and Workforce Development Recovery Fund: this would help adult and family literacy/education programs provide additional services during the economic recovery – digital skills instruction, career services, development of innovative workforce partnerships, and providing support for tuition related expenses for those transitioning to post-secondary education and job training. A small, \$15 million fund would enable programs to seek competitive grants to grow this capacity over two years.

I would be remiss to not thank the Department of Labor and industry for its recent investments in digital skills for workforce development. Many adult education providers successfully applied for those grants which has enabled us to teach stand alone digital skills classes (not allowable with Title II funds). In order to keep providing those services, we will need continued investment from L&I and/or access to recovery fund dollars.

Increase the Adult and Family Literacy Line Item by \$10 million: A line-item increase is essential to meet the needs of adults seeking to upskill as part of the recovery and beyond. Increased state investment will cover more of programs increased costs so we can provide quality services, while also enabling us to serve more job seekers.

Thank You

Thank you for taking an interest in how adult basic education providers can help maximize the power of the Commonwealth's workforce system. We have an important role to play to get many discouraged workers back into the workforce and on their way to middle skills jobs.