



**House Education Committee
Informational Meeting on Adult Literacy Centers
September 16, 2024, at 2pm
140 MC**

- 2:00pm Call to Order
 Committee Member Introductions
 Opening Remarks
 Chairman Schweyer
- 2:10pm Panel 1- Adult Education Providers
- Ms. Rochelle Cooks, Senior Director of Workforce Solutions
 Beyond Literacy, Philadelphia Adult Continuing Education Provider and PAACE member
- Ms. Cheryl Hiester, Executive Director
 Literacy Council of Lancaster-Lebanon, Chair of PAACE Advocacy Committee
- Mr. Michael Lamb, Board Member
 Literacy Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Adult Continuing Education Provider and PAACE member
- Ms. Jen Doyle, CEO
 The Literacy Center
- 2:45pm Panel 2- Student Success
- Mr. Angel Figueroa, Sr. VP & Executive Director
 Education Division I-LEAD
- Mr. Joel Pujols, ELL Student
- Mr. Andre Brown, Student
- 3:20pm Closing Remarks/Adjournment

All times are approximate and include time for questions.

Live streamed at www.pahouse.com/live



Beyond Literacy

LEARNING FOR
WORK & LIFE

9/16/2024 Literacy Testimony
by Rochelle Cooks,
Director of Workforce Solutions,
Beyond Literacy (BeLit)
Philadelphia, PA

About Beyond Literacy (BeLit)

In a city where 50% of adults are challenged by their lack of work-ready skills, BeLit provides educational access and increases economic opportunity creating a more equitable and productive Philadelphia. Serving 2000+ working-age adults, BeLit delivers high-quality classroom instruction and workforce training that breaks down barriers and equips under-represented workers. Our core programs include:

- ✓ Adult Basic Education
- ✓ High School Equivalency
- ✓ English Language Proficiency
- ✓ Integrated Training and Pre-apprenticeship
- ✓ Family Literacy
- ✓ Digital Literacy



THE NEED

In 2020, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released the results of a 5-year study* showing that over 50% of adults ages 18-64 in Philadelphia read and comprehend at the equivalent of a 5th grade level or below, requiring further education in order to enter or advance in the workforce. That means half the adults in our city struggle to complete a job application.

Literacy is vital to human and economic development. Research links low literacy levels to poverty, poor health outcomes, and the likelihood of incarceration. It's not a coincidence that Philadelphia is the most impoverished of America's largest cities *and* has one of our nation's lowest functional literacy rates. That's the Philadelphia story. Meanwhile, across the Commonwealth:

- 396,637 (18%) of adults between ages 18 and 64 have literacy and numeracy skills at or below the 8th grade level.*
- 646,612 working adults between ages 18 and 64 lack a high school credential.*
- 387,549 do not speak English well or at all.
- In the last 5 years, over 68,000 students dropped out of high school.*
- In the last 12-15 months, we have received unprecedented surging demand for services from both American and foreign-born adult learners resulting in crowded programs and growing wait lists.

Data demonstrates the generational impact of this silent crisis:

- The leading predictive indicator of a child's academic success is the reading level of that child's parent or primary caregiver, outweighing other factors, such as neighborhood and family income. (1)
- Children of adults who did not complete high school are 4 times more likely to drop out of high school themselves. (2)

* Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap/>



THE IMPACT

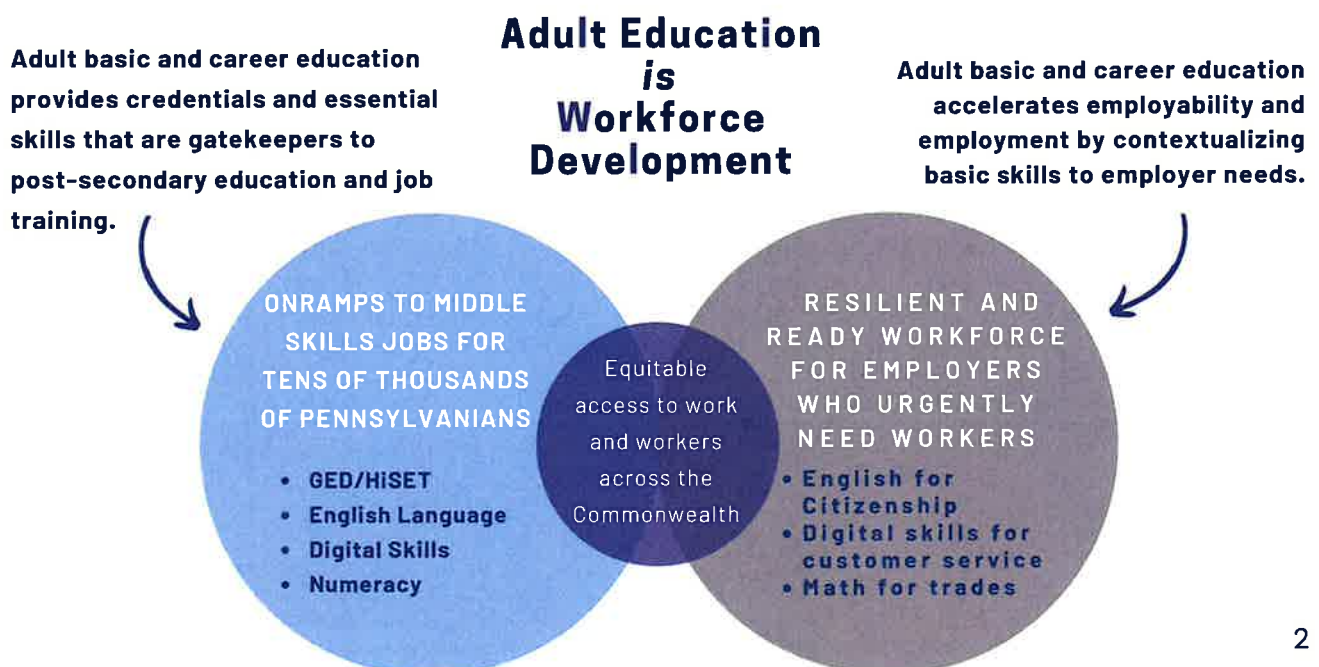
Adults who lack education and skills face significantly higher rates of under-employment in low-wage, low-mobility jobs. Our free literacy and workforce readiness programs prepare adult learners with upskilling instruction, career coaching, and portable, nationally recognized credentials that help future-proof our city's workforce. By reaching into our city's marginalized communities – including returning citizens, immigrants, and the housing insecure – we equip all adults with the 21st Century skills needed to earn employment in family-sustaining jobs and inclusively revitalize the economy for all.

Our programs, services, and pre-apprenticeships directly address:

- Educational inequalities related to access, class, and race
- Unemployment, skills gaps, and economic instability
- Digital equity (connectivity, access to devices, and digital literacy skills training)
- Out-of-school youth, low literate caregivers, and intergenerational illiteracy
- Immigrant integration and citizenship
- Risk of incarceration and recidivism

Our typical students are working age adults with significant skills gaps who are raising families. Participation is at their own pace and often includes breaks of months or years as they balance educational needs with life's demands. The majority (66%) of students who continuously attend for at least 60 hours make educational gains equivalent to two K-12 school years – a remarkable accomplishment for them and a significant return on investment for Pennsylvania at an estimated cost of \$2,500 per student.

Adult education programs are not just a second chance at a basic education; for many adults in Pennsylvania, these programs are the last chance. Our programs connect the untapped labor force of under-skilled adults to employers in need of workers.





THE OPPORTUNITY

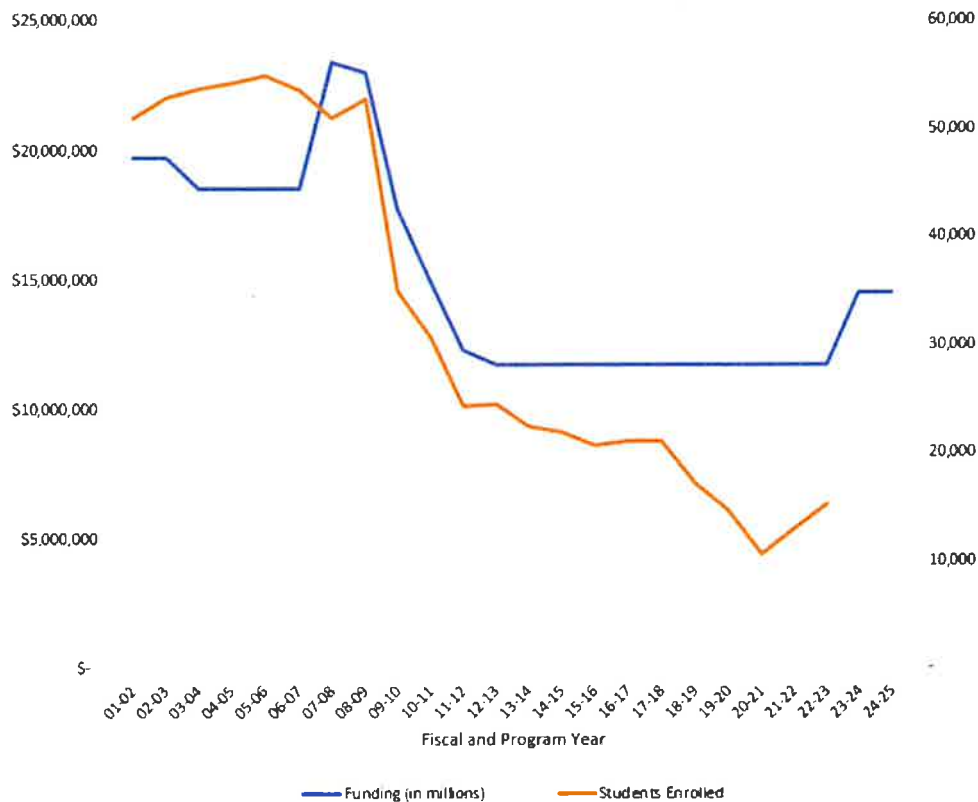
Research shows an investment in adult literacy is an investment in the health, wealth, safety, and welfare of *all* Pennsylvanians, creating changes that matter:

- **Improving adult literacy has enormous economic benefits.** Bringing all adults to a 6th grade reading level would generate an additional \$2.2 trillion, 10% of our GDP. (3)
- **Income is strongly related to literacy:** Average annual income of adults who read at a 6th grade level is \$63,000 -- significantly higher than adults who read at 3rd to 5th grade levels, who earn \$48,000, and *much higher* than those at the lowest levels of literacy, who earn just \$34,000 on average. (4)
- **Economic gains would be highest in large cities:** Philadelphia stands to gain at or just above 10% of GDP by bringing all adults to a 6th grade reading level. (5)
- **Adult education alleviates crime and violence:** Returning citizens who participate in correctional education programs recidivate 43% less than inmates who do not. (6)
- **Adult literacy program graduates acquire gainful life skills that increase access to better living conditions, healthier foods, and health care services.** (7)



THE PROBLEM

The Adult and Family Literacy line item was flat funded for 12 years until a \$3.8 million increase in the FY24 budget. The Governor's subsequent proposed \$1 million increase did *not* make it into FY25 final budget. 12+ years of decreased or flat funding have starved adult basic education of resources. As a result, many rural programs are too small to influence the workforce system, and urban programs like BeLit have long, growing waiting lists. **There remains urgent, unmet need.**





THE SOLUTION

With long wait lists of un- and under-employed adults seeking our free services, we need to restore the Commonwealth’s adult literacy line item funding to its previous level of \$23 million to allow Pennsylvania’s adult education agencies to hire additional teachers and staff at competitive wages so that we may open new classes to meet today’s urgent demand. With your support, we can adapt scale high-performing programs and expand access for more adult learners.

On behalf of the more than **1.4 million Pennsylvanians** who require adult basic education to earn middle skills jobs, we urge your committees to make these vital investments:

1

Increase the Adult and Family Literacy line in the Department of Education budget to \$23 million for the FY 2025-2026 budget, with the goal of reaching \$30 million by 2026-2027. The 2023-2024 increase moved us closer and yet it does not align with the need and the value of these programs. Increasing this investment will enable thousands of additional adults to access services.

2

Mobilize unspent dollars to directly support high performing instructional programs through incentive funds. For nonprofits like ours, access to incentive funds can mean the difference between scaling up a successful program and being forced to limit its scope. By strategically deploying unspent dollars to programs that demonstrate high performance and measurable outcomes, the government ensures greater transparency and accountability in the allocation of public funds.

RESOURCES & IMPACT

A line item infusion of \$15 million will move more adults into middle-skills work and help employers fill openings.

IMMEDIATE IMPACT

\$15 million will expand access to high quality robust adult basic and career education for 9,000+ adults across PA.



FUTURE-PROOF

\$15 million will catalyze creation of innovative programs that meet urgent employer needs.

Bridging the literacy divide is possible. By restoring Adult Basic and Career Education funding and loosening outdated restrictions on Title II funds, our programs can be more accessible, effective, and efficient -- an investment that improves generational outcomes *beyond* education. Together, with your support, we will ensure Pennsylvanians of all ages and stages have the education, skills, and future they deserve.

END NOTE

Being an adult student is a significant commitment that is not undertaken lightly. Approximately half the adults who seek out our services will step away at some point in the year due to the challenges of balancing work, family and their own education, including shift changes at work, overtime, new jobs, moves, family obligations, illness, and/or lack of transportation and childcare. Federal reporting includes all adults who have attended as few as 12 hours of classes, whether or not they have persisted, and thus can create a misperception that even PA's adult education students who do persist earn fewer academic gains. Thankfully, our adult education staff work with adults who need to temporarily stop out to ensure they will be welcomed back when they can accommodate the commitment.

While we are not funded to offer social services, BeLit does provide student support counseling, hyflex classes at 3 community-based centers in Kensington, Chinatown, and West Philadelphia, as well as off-site instruction in collaboration with more than 12 community partners. We encourage you to consider funding other barrier-reducing measures such as:

- On-site childcare
- Public transportation passes or stipends
- Peer mentorship programming
- Digital device and broadband access

Questions or feedback? Please contact Rochelle Cooks, rcooks@beyondliteracy.org.

SOURCES

(1) U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. 2010, October 25. Improving mothers' literacy skills may be best way to boost children's achievement. National Institute of Health. <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/improving-mothers-literacy-skills-may-be-best-way-boostchildrens-achievement>.

(2) Jeynes, W. H. 2007. The relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary school student academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Urban Education*.

(3, 4, 5) 9/9/2020: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaeltmietzel/2020/09/09/low-literacy-levels-among-us-adults-could-be-costing-the-economy-22-trillion-a-year/?sh=4fdf93c04c90>; See also <https://www.barbarabush.org/new-economic-study/#:~:text=Improving%20adult%20literacy%20would%20have,annual%20income%20for%20the%20country>.

(6) Davis, L., Bozick, R., Steele, J., Saunders, J., & Miles, J. 2013. Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults. <https://doi.org/10.7249/rr266>.

(7) Freudenberg, N., & Ruglis, J. 2007. Reframing school dropout as a public health issue. *Preventing Chronic Disease*.

OUR STUDENTS GO FROM LEARNING TO EARNING



Christina Battle

GED Graduate

"It was important to graduate so my children can see that it's never too late. You're never too old to finish school."



Hannah Bui

English Language Learner

"I live in America, and because I'm from a different country, it is very good for me to learn to read, learn grammar, and to speak well."



Richard Whitt

Digital Literacy Credentialing

"Beyond Literacy is a wonderful tool to help me learn and grow and be able to take advantage of the opportunities available."

PLEASE HELP US MEET TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Beyond Literacy goes beyond increasing adult literacy and employment rates by positively affecting economic prosperity, crime, and other social issues in the Greater Philadelphia region. Your support allows BeLit to sustain, grow, and diversify our adult education programs that, in turn, address inter-generational poverty and make our community stronger.

WITH YOUR SUPPORT, WE CAN GROW THE IMPACT OF OUR SIGNATURE WORK-READY PROGRAMS, BY:

EXPANDING ACCESS

We will serve more un- and under-employed adults by expanding our class sizes, hiring more instructors, and offering more frequent programming. to reduce current long waiting periods.

MEETING COMPLEX NEEDS

We will tailor course offerings and expand wrap-around services to reduce barriers that inhibit trauma or justice-impacted, and intellectually disabled participants from advancing in the workforce.

ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

We will leverage corporate partnerships with in-demand energy and utilities leaders to expand our pre-apprenticeship pipelines into in-demand, middle-skills jobs that earn a family-sustaining wage.

INVESTING IN INNOVATION

We will replace our outdated database with a technological solution that optimally tracks and manages data, enhances decision-making, improves services, and accelerates progress toward benchmarked outcomes.



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Pennsylvania House Education Committee Hearing on Adult Education
September 16, 2024



Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education

Testimony from PAACE

Cheryl Hiester, Chair, Advocacy and Public Policy Committee

The Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education (PAACE) is the professional association for adult and family literacy educators in Pennsylvania. We have 1200 members from more than 60 organizations. Our members work in school districts, intermediate units, colleges and community-based organizations. PAACE inspires adult education partners through advocacy, networking and professional development so that adults succeed, and communities thrive.

This week is National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week, and we are grateful to Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Topper and the House Education Committee for giving us this opportunity to talk about the value and impact of Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania. Today, you will hear from a few of our members who will share inspiring stories about adult learners who were left behind by traditional education and stories about the newly arrived who came to the United States as refugees and immigrants.

This fiscal year, Pennsylvania is investing \$16,310,000 in the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item. \$1,050,000 is set aside for High School Equivalency testing fees and about \$800,000 is earmarked for an afterschool program, making the actual program funding level at about \$15,180,000. Between 2008 and 2011, state and federal funding was cut in half and remained level funded until FY 2024-2025 when Governor Shapiro proposed an increase to the line item and you all in the General Assembly passed it– the first increase in 12 years. Last year, the Governor proposed a \$1 million increase that disappointingly did not make it in to the final budget. We urge Governor Shapiro, the Pennsylvania House and Senate to invest in job seeking and working adults and restore funding for Adult and Family Literacy Education.

In honor of [International Literacy Day](#), the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) shared an update that was sent out on a national listserv by famed researcher, Tom Sticht. The findings were highlighted by a 2023 UNESCO report which confirmed his decades long research that adult education truly breaks barriers and creates pathways to prosperity.

[UNESCO](#) reports that adult education continues to:

1. Improve productivity at work, at home, and in the community leading to higher tax bases for communities, decreased violence at home and in the community, and greater participation in citizenship activities by a larger segment of the adult population.

2. Improve self-confidence and other psychological and physiological health aspects of adults, including activities that will help the brain grow throughout adulthood which contributes to reduced medical costs for adults as they age.

3. Improve the health of participating adults' children resulting from parental learning in adult education programs leading to better prenatal and postnatal care, reductions in low birth rate infants, and better home medical care, thereby contributing to lowered medical costs for children and fewer learning problems in school.

4. Improve social justice by providing literacy education for marginalized populations to permit them to acquire skills and knowledge needed to take political action that allows them to achieve their civil rights and to overcome social exclusion and join in the mainstream of society.

5. Improve productivity in schools by providing adults with the knowledge they need to better prepare their children to enter school, help them achieve in school, encourage them to stay in school, and increase their opportunities to enroll in higher education, thus breaking intergenerational barriers.

Nearly 650,000 adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential. In the last five years, 62,459 students dropped out of high school. There are 387,579 adults in Pennsylvania who do not speak English well or at all. Many of them are highly skilled and eager to work and the only thing holding them back is English language fluency. Adult and family literacy programs provide free Adult Basic Education, High School Equivalency Preparation, and English for Speakers of Languages (ESOL) classes where adults can build their language skills for work, family and community life.

Today, we are here to tell you about the challenges and the successes of adult learners across the Commonwealth. There is no typical adult learner. They come from diverse backgrounds with diverse needs. We serve immigrants who never held a pencil in their hands to people with advanced degrees from their native countries. We serve adults who grew up in cities, towns and rural communities across Pennsylvania who were not able to complete high school because their lives became complicated. Like Nick, whose father was incarcerated when he was 16 years old, leaving his mother and younger siblings unable to go on as a family. Nick's mother told him he had to go away because she could no longer care for him. He was homeless for 2 years. At 17, he decided that his best option was entering the military, and he needed to get a high school equivalency diploma to do that. While in a homeless shelter in Elizabethtown, PA, he started attending a GED preparation class provided at the shelter by The Literacy Council of Lancaster-Lebanon. Nick is a smart and determined guy. He studied hard and passed the tests. He is now serving in the US Army and plans to make it a career.

Another challenge that we face as a field is the perception that the aggregate outcomes for adult and family literacy education do not demonstrate program efficacy. I strongly disagree and would like to clarify what those numbers mean.

The students we serve are working age adults with significant skills gaps who are working and raising families. Their participation is at their own pace and often includes breaks of months or years as they balance their educational needs with the demands of life. These factors influence reported outcomes in the field. Students who can continuously attend for at least 60 hours are making educational gains equivalent to 1 to 2 years of K-12 schooling – a remarkable accomplishment for them and a significant return on investment for Pennsylvania.

In fiscal year 2022-2023, programs welcomed 14,893 adult learners. This number includes anyone who completed an intake and received an initial assessment. Of the 14,893 adults who connected with our programs, 5,536 (37%) attended for less than 12 hours of instruction. These adults came to explore the program, find out if it was a good fit, and determine if the timing was right for them to begin. Most adults who separate early, quickly determine that they are not ready to take on the level of commitment required to benefit from the program. They work with student advisors who help them decide and ensure that the door is open to come back when they are ready.

Of the 14,893 reportable students, 6,879 (46%) did not achieve enough hours to be given a follow up assessment to determine learning gains (40 – 60 hours). Many of these students had limited time to attend classes because of shift changes at work, overtime, a new job, moving, family obligations, illness, and issues with transportation and childcare. Federal reporting guidelines require PDE to report outcomes for everyone with 12 or more hours of service. Valid reasons for stopping out are not considered.

In summary, 57% of the total number of adults who had enough hours to take a posttest had a documentable learning gain. Many more had learning gains that did not meet the criteria for an educational functioning level advancement. Measurable skills gain data does not consider that students who start late in the program year are counted even though they have not completed the instruction hours and will be continuing into the next program year.

I would like to emphasize that our students are demonstrating learning gains equivalent to 1 – 2 years of K-12 schooling in 50 – 60 hours of instruction with a cost per learner of about \$2,500 annually.

Adult education programs are not just a second chance at a basic education, for many adults in Pennsylvania, these programs are the last chance.



The Literacy Council
of Lancaster-Lebanon
www.literacysuccess.org

Cheryl Hiester

cheryl@literacysuccess.org

The Problem

- 22% of Lancaster County's 380,144 (83,631) adults are functioning at or below Level 1 Literacy.
- 21% of Lebanon County's 97,867 adults (20,552) adults are functioning at or below Level 1 Literacy.
- 104,183 adults who struggle with basic literacy living and working in Lancaster and Lebanon Counties.

Source:

PIAAC is an international assessment of adult skills that compares adult competencies across 35 countries. Here is the link with more information about PIAAC

<https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/>

This link provides information about the proficiency levels and what they mean

<https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/litproficiencylevel.asp>

This link takes you to the interactive map of the United States:

https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmmap/?utm_campaign=Programs%20-%20General&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=86337630&hsenc=p2ANqtz--BXG5zzKif3hGd_V_V_pVdinms6sVntbalfmM8Gbgi7w3hDegPKpwQQBMh_yH4Gm2CnHw1-nMe_KeQ3_a5G9Ugva1HWQ&hsmi=86337630

The Solution

Adult and Family Literacy Education provides adults with a chance at a basic education.

Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 Community Education and The Literacy Council of Lancaster-Lebanon are partners in the Adult and Family Literacy Line-item funding that is invested in Lancaster and Lebanon Counties. Together, our organizations provide a full range of complimentary adult literacy and basic education services. These services include basic skills in reading, writing, and math, high school equivalency preparation, English for Speakers of Other Languages, Family Literacy, workplace education services, career pathways advising, integrated education and skills training, digital literacy, and an International Healthcare Professionals Program. All services are provided at no cost to the students.

Adult Basic and Literacy Education is Workforce Development

IU 13 and The Literacy Council are partners in the Lancaster and Lebanon CareerLinks. We partner with local businesses to provide education services to workers and job seekers that support job success. We partner with skills training programs, colleges and universities to support the successful transition and completion of a postsecondary education credential. Our students are diverse. Some grew up in our community. Others come from countries all over the

world. Some students never held a pencil in their hand or went to school. Others have advanced degrees in medicine, engineering and many other fields. What they all have in common is a desire to improve their lives through education.

Many foreign trained professionals who immigrate to the United States are working in low pay, entry level jobs because they have limited English fluency or have barriers related to the recognition of their credentials. Adult and Family Literacy Education can help these adults reclaim their careers.

For example, internationally trained physicians are working in entry level jobs. Many arrive with little to no English fluency. English language fluency is not the only barrier. Their credentials are not recognized in their new home, and they face significant barriers to recredentialing. Many must first learn English. They must pass the United States Medical Licensing exams which takes years and costs thousands of dollars. Then, they must be accepted into a residency which is no small feat. As the US faces physician and nurse shortages, we cannot afford this kind of brain waste.

I would like to share an example of how a Literacy Council, a university and an employer can partner to have a real impact. Lancaster County is home to more than 200 physicians from Cuba who came here through the Cuban Medical Professionals Parole Program. Under this program, doctors and other professionals in the health field who were sent by the government of Cuba to work or study in other countries could request parole into the United States. They made the decision to come here for a better life but had no idea about the challenges they would face in trying to reclaim their careers in their new home.

Adriana's Story

Adriana has been a scholar at The Literacy Council since 2016. She was one of our first foreign trained physicians to attend our program. Over the last 8 years, Adrianna has learned English, attained a medical assistant certification, gotten a job at a Federally Qualified Health Center, became a BSRN, started a program to become a Nurse Practitioner, and she is giving back to her community. Here is Adrianna's story in her own words.

My name is Adriana. I am 48 years old, a mother, an immigrant, a student, and a healthcare professional. I came to the United States 8 years ago to give my son a better future. I had been a doctor and practiced Family Medicine in Cuba for 17 years, treating and helping people of all ages with various diseases. My experiences in Cuba, Venezuela, and Brazil exposed me to different cultures, languages, and backgrounds, and I realized that, in many ways, we are all the same.

When I arrived in the United States, my main goal was to re-enter the healthcare profession, but I faced many challenges. I had to learn English from scratch and started English classes at the Literacy Council of Lancaster-Lebanon in Lancaster. There, I not only learned English, but also English medical terminology in the International Healthcare Professionals Program. I also learned about American culture, rules, and how American people are warm,

welcoming, and fabulous. Every experience was a valuable learning opportunity for me, no matter how small.

One of my most significant accomplishments was graduating as a Registered Nurse with a BSN in 2021 after enrolling in the Second Degree Accelerated Nursing Program at Penn State University. This was a significant professional achievement for me. I learned English to do that. I had excellent teachers and tutors at the Literacy Council, and I thought that one day, I would like to give them back what they dedicated to me. Recently, I became a volunteer for LCLL to help other newcomers start their journey as smoothly as possible.

I have been working as a Registered Nurse in Lancaster City, where I am dedicated to giving back to my community. What I find most rewarding about life is the ability to help others. This has inspired me to further my education, and I am currently a Family Nurse Practitioner student at Millersville University.

So far, 8 foreign trained doctors have been admitted into a residency program (none in Pennsylvania). 18 have become BS RNs, working as bi-lingual nurses. 2 have become certified medical interpreters.

Avery's Story

Avery had to stop attending school in 10th grade in 2012. He started attending GED classes in 2015 and after 4 years, he had passed the reading, social studies and science tests. He struggled with math and decided to take a break. Two years later, a friend encouraged him to go back and try again. He connected with The Literacy Council and attended an online math class. It took him two years of attending classes and independent study. In the Spring of 2024, he passed the math test, attaining a Commonwealth of Pennsylvania High School Diploma. His next step is to take the SAT exam and apply for admittance to college.

There are nearly 70,000 working age adults in Lancaster and Lebanon Counties who do not have a high school credential. We want to significantly decrease that number and hear more stories like Avery's.

On behalf of PAACE and The Literacy Council of Lancaster-Lebanon, I urge you to support an increase to the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education budget, bringing the line to \$23 million in FY 24-25 with the goal of reaching \$30 million by 2026-2027.

Michael Lamb, Board Member at Literacy Pittsburgh
Testimony to Education Committee of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives
September 16, 2024

Good afternoon honorable members of the Pennsylvania House Education Committee, staff and colleagues.

My name is Michael Lamb, and I am here representing Literacy Pittsburgh. I recently joined the Literacy Pittsburgh board after a 40-year career in public service in Allegheny County.

I chose to join the board because literacy is the most significant step on the path from poverty to prosperity and Literacy Pittsburgh plays a crucial role in building the brainpower of our community.

I urge you to recognize and invest in this small, but mighty field of adult basic education that is standing in the gap between K-12 education, higher education and work.

Now more than ever, we need the gaps in our education and workforce system to be smaller. We must help more working-age adults get good jobs just as we help employers across the Commonwealth fill open positions. Employers in just about every sector are worried about their workforce pipeline as eligible workers continue to age out of the workforce.

This is the work that adult education programs across the State do.

Literacy Pittsburgh works with thousands of adults and their families to increase their basic reading, writing, math, digital literacy, and workplace skills—prerequisites for advancement into middle-skills employment.

Demand

In Allegheny County the only segment of the population that is growing is immigrants. And we need them.

The increase in this population has led to Literacy Pittsburgh **servicing twice as many students today as it did 4 years ago**. Last year we served 3,400 adults and still have **waiting lists that averaged 400 people per month for more than a year**.

Like most adult education providers, we're serving American-born students too - about 1/3 of our population.

Whether left behind or just arrived, these amazing adults find their way to Literacy Pittsburgh to build better lives.

Impact

Not only are we serving significantly more people, but we're also helping them transition to higher education, job training and work.

According to PDE's recent performance data, Literacy Pittsburgh is a leader in PA for enrollment and post-secondary transitions, high school equivalency attainment, and educational gains.

Behind these numbers are real people's lives:

- Consider Helene from Central African Republic, who was forced flee her home country due to war, leaving behind her career. She studied English with Literacy Pittsburgh where she got connected to the Marriott and is now a supervisor.
- And Matthew from Beaver County, who studied with us to achieve his GED, entered a culinary program and then went on to get a good job in food service at Robert Morris University.
- And Sara who passed her Bidwell Training Center entrance test with the assistance of Literacy Pittsburgh's math brush-up class. Sara is now studying medical billing and coding.
- And Jorge, who came to Pittsburgh from central America. He studies English with a Literacy Pittsburgh tutor and was recently accepted into the Carpenters Apprenticeship Program.

Closing

The demand for basic skills education exceeds the supply (remember the waiting lists) – working age adults want the training and employers need workers.

Our program is delivering great results both when you look at the numbers and when you hear about the lives that have changed.

Yet Pennsylvania's investment in adult education has barely moved in 12 years.

I know that you have made incredible, needed progress investing in K-12 and in higher education.

In fact, if those investments were sufficient, Literacy Pittsburgh wouldn't have 400 people on its waiting list.

The good news is that compared to those investments, it won't take much to expand the capacity of adult education in PA.

We're advocating for \$7 million in next year's budget. That's not even a rounding error in PDE's budget, much less Pennsylvania's.

With your support, we can make this modest investment and move more working age adults into meaningful work while helping employers fill job openings.

This makes good financial sense.

Thank you for your consideration.

Carey Harris, CEO
Literacy Pittsburgh
Testimony to House Education Committee
September 16, 2024

Chairman Schweyer, Members of the Education Committee, thank you for hosting this hearing about adult basic education and for the opportunity to provide written testimony.

The fact that the Pennsylvania economy is currently constrained by a shortage of workers, especially skilled workers, is well established.

The General Assembly and the Shapiro Administration have made commendable investments in K-12 schools, higher education, early learning, and workforce programs to address the need.

Yet the important, essential, and expeditious role that adult basic educationⁱ plays has not been fully leveraged to meet the Commonwealth's economic challenges.

By the end of today's hearing, I hope you are convinced that a relatively small increased investment of \$7 million in the Adult and Family Literacy line item can and will have an outsized, positive impact on the Commonwealth's economic growth.

We urge the Governor and General Assembly to invest an additional \$7 million in the Adult and Family Literacy line item in the next budget cycle so that more workers, job seekers, families, and employers can benefit from what adult basic education has to offer.

As you have heard and will hear from my colleagues across the State, adult basic education is often the last and only chance for many Pennsylvanians to build careers that can sustain a family.

In Allegheny and Beaver counties, nearly 64,000 working-age adults do not have a high school credential. Additionally, 123,000 adults do not speak English well or at all, and tens of thousands more lack basic literacy and numeracy skillsⁱⁱ. As you know, educational status often correlates with other barriers, such as housing and food insecurity, low-wage work, and poor health outcomes.

Basic skills are essential prerequisites for a meaningful life and family-sustaining work, job training, apprenticeships, higher education, and being a fully functional adult in a world undergoing a rapid technological transformation.

At Literacy Pittsburgh, basic skills mean

- Learning the English language to find work, raise a family, become part of the community, and attain citizenship.
- Brushing up math and reading skills to enter apprenticeships or job training programs
- Attaining a GED credential to open the door to better jobs as well as postsecondary education, and job training.
- Building digital skills and attaining industry-recognized certifications to find work, build a career, support a child's education, manage health, conduct banking, protect one's identity, and much, much more.

Like our colleagues across the State, the impact of our work is measured by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). According to PDE's recently released performance data, Literacy Pittsburgh's program is a leader in enrollment—the largest enrollment in the State. We also lead our peers in postsecondary transitions, high school equivalency attainment, and educational gains.

In fact, Literacy Pittsburgh is serving twice as many students as we did in FY21, and we have increased student outcomes (employment, postsecondary transitions, and GED attainment combined) by 78% over this same period.

Demand for our program is outstripping the supply of our current resources. We have been carrying a waiting list averaging 400+ potential students per month for over a year.

We expect demand to stay strong well into the future, as more foreign-born students are coming into Pittsburgh legally, and our American-born student population is growing due to disruptions in K-12 education created by the pandemic.

More than half of the revenue needed to provide services comes from sources other than Literacy Pittsburgh's adult basic education contracts with the PDE. We are leveraging support from individual donors, foundations, corporations, local governments, and other government grants.

In short, we're a good bet.

Our community thinks so too. Attached to this testimony are letters of support from elected officials, workforce investment boards, employers, chambers of commerce, refugee resettlement agencies, and other community partners urging the General Assembly to increase its investment in adult basic education.

Our students know we are a good bet, too. Below is a sampling of student notes celebrating their achievements and thanking us for our work.

"Ms. Emily, I really appreciate all your help. **I'm now a student of West Penn Hospital School of Nursing getting my RN.** Schooling is already paid in full for this year and I start in one week. I'm so very excited for this journey, but I always have to take the time to send my thanks to the people who helped me get here. I could not have done it without you! I hope you are doing well, and class is going well. I'm sure it is tough with a teacher like you! Keep changing people's lives!"



After searching for a job since the start of the year, Brenda decided to pursue a Patient Services Representative position with UPMC. She interviewed virtually, and then in person, and was offered the position.

"The instructors at Literacy Pittsburgh were all professional, polite, respectful, approachable, kind, and generous in sharing their knowledge, anticipating questions I didn't even know to ask. The classes were very convenient and I really appreciated the opportunity to earn a laptop," Brenda says.

"I am an Iraqi visual artist who fled my country during the sectarian war. My family and I moved to a neighboring country, where I stayed for 10 years waiting for my refugee status. During that time, I couldn't resume my artwork or participate in any art exhibitions.

I finally arrived in Pittsburgh, USA, and joined Literacy Pittsburgh. The support I found from my Literacy Pittsburgh teachers, helped me restore my life balance. With their assistance, I applied for the Adolf Foundation, and the Esther Gottlieb scholarships.

I am very happy to have overcome many difficulties with Literacy Pittsburgh's staff help. In fact, I have started to complete my first sculptural work here in Pittsburgh using recycled materials. I am looking forward to having my own art exhibition in Pittsburgh."

These are just a few of the amazing stories Literacy Pittsburgh is privileged to be a part of. For more good news about the impact of your investment on people's lives and employers, follow us on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn (Literacy Pittsburgh on all) and X (literacypgh).

Thank you again for holding the hearing, learning about our work, and considering our urgent plea for resources. I hope our waiting students can count on your support.

ⁱ Funded through the Adult and Family Literacy line item in PDE's budget

ⁱⁱ Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

<https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap/>

COUNTY OF



ALLEGHENY

SARA INNAMORATO
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

January 24, 2024

The Honorable Josh Shapiro
Governor, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
225 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro:

I write to urge you and the General Assembly to significantly increase Pennsylvania's investment in adult basic skills as part of your investment in growing Pennsylvania's workforce. Specifically, I urge a \$15.5 million increase in the Department of Education's Adult and Family Literacy Line item in the Commonwealth's FY25 budget as well as creation of the \$15 million Adult Education and Workforce Development Recovery Fund for short term flexible dollars to address the urgent need for skilled workers.

As you know, the Adult and Family Literacy line-item funds adult basic education services for the Commonwealth's working age adults who lack basic skills required to meaningfully participate in the workforce – 18% of Pennsylvania adults meet these criteria. For too long, Pennsylvania has neglected this essential part of the education and workforce system. The line item was cut in half in 2008 and has remained level until last year's modest increase. Meanwhile costs have climbed along with compliance requirements, reducing the value of the State's investment. In addition, the influx of immigrants and refugees across the Commonwealth has provided not only a great opportunity to strengthen our communities but has also resulted in huge waiting lists for English language learning services supported by this line item. In Allegheny County, providers such as Literacy Pittsburgh has been preparing thousands of adults for work for years – work that represents critical investments not only in our local communities, but in our local economy. Today, Literacy Pittsburgh has more than 500 people waiting for English language classes. To leave the line-item level funded for another year will dramatically lessen the Commonwealth's ability to move more of our residents out of poverty and into work, while further hamstringing employers' ability to find skilled workers. I appreciate the commitment made with the current year increase and I urge you to ensure more is included in the Commonwealth's FY25 budget.

The Adult Education and Workforce Development Recovery Fund (HB25/SB462) proposal will enable adult and family literacy providers and others to apply for one-time grants to expand capacity with new and innovative programming to help employers find skilled workers and help more Pennsylvanians get back to work. Specifically, the fund would support partnerships with job training programs and employers, digital skills training, career services, and support for post-secondary costs – all issues identified by employers, job seekers and adult education providers across the Commonwealth. Adult basic education is a critical piece of our education and workforce system and I appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,


Sara Innamorato
Allegheny County Executive

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

101 COURTHOUSE • 436 GRANT STREET • PITTSBURGH, PA 15219 • PHONE (412) 350-6500 • FAX (412) 350-6512
WWW.ALLEGHENYCOUNTY.US • EXECUTIVE@ALLEGHENYCOUNTY.US

March 12, 2024

Governor Josh Shapiro
508 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro,

On behalf of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (the Conference) and our affiliate the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, I write to offer support for increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education's budget to \$30 million to address the urgent need for skilled workers.

Pennsylvania is facing a contraction of working-age adults and is met with a workforce shortage that remains an ongoing challenge. Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania is an entry point for thousands of Pennsylvanians into the state's workforce development systems. There are 1.6 million working-age adults within the Commonwealth who struggle with literacy and basic skills. With more funding, organizations such as Literacy Pittsburgh can provide adult learners with access to education services, helping them grow out of poverty and engage in the workforce.

Led by nearly 250 of the region's business and civic leaders, the Conference drives economic development in the 10-county southwestern Pennsylvania region surrounding Pittsburgh to improve the economy and quality of life for all. The Conference encourages investments that decrease barriers to employment and earning opportunities. Increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item will enable an additional 9,150 adults to access the Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education services to accelerate workforce development and meet industry talent needs.

Pennsylvania's investment in Adult and Family Literacy Education is helping thousands go from learning to earning and directly contributes to our region's prosperity. More than 700,000 working-age adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential, which keeps them out of employment and job training. Partners in Adult and Family Literacy Education provide education and help people in need secure jobs.

When the Commonwealth invests in Adult and Family Literacy Education, it invests in helping to solve the Commonwealth's workforce shortage. The conference supports additional funding for adult continuing education and thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,



Majestic Lane
Chief Equity Officer,
Allegheny Conference on Community Development



**THE
CHAMBER**
PITTSBURGH AIRPORT AREA
Connected to the world.

**850 Beaver Grade Road
Suite 101
Moon Township, PA 15108**

412.264.6270
info@paacc.com
paacc.com

1/10/2024

Governor Josh Shapiro
508 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro,

On behalf of the Pittsburgh Airport Area Chamber of Commerce, I write to urge you to support Pennsylvania's investment in workforce development by increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education's budget to \$30 million. With Pennsylvania facing a contraction of working age adults, we must find ways to ensure that no Pennsylvanian is left behind. The 1.6 million working age adults who struggle with literacy and basic skills can be part of the solution. All they need is a chance to access education services to build their skills. Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania is an entry point into the state's workforce development systems for thousands of Pennsylvanians.

Pennsylvania's investment in Adult and Family Literacy Education is helping thousands go from learning to earning and contributing to our region's prosperity. Additional resources will ensure that these programs reach more people in need and support their ability to get and keep good jobs that support their families. Yet, Adult and Family Literacy Education funding is misaligned with the need. More than 700,000 working age adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential, keeping them out of jobs and job training. More than 700,000 adults do not speak English well or at all, many who are highly skilled such as doctors, nurses, accountants, and other professionals who can only work in entry level jobs because they need to speak, read, and write English. This is what our partners in Adult and Family Literacy Education do – they help those left behind attain a basic education and help the newly arrived learn English and reclaim their careers.

When the Commonwealth invests in Adult and Family Literacy Education, it invests in helping employers like the hundreds of Pittsburgh Airport Area Chamber member companies and various training programs find qualified candidates who can succeed.

Thank for supporting Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania.
Sincerely,

Chris Heck

President/CEO Pittsburgh Airport Area Chamber of Commerce



January 10, 2024

Governor Josh Shapiro
508 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro,

On behalf of the Pittsburgh A. Philip Randolph institute, I write to urge you to support Pennsylvania's investment in workforce development by increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education's budget to \$30 million. With Pennsylvania facing a contraction of working age adults, we must find ways to ensure that no Pennsylvanian is left behind. The 1.6 million working age adults who struggle with literacy and basic skills can be part of the solution. All they need is a chance to access education services to build their skills. Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania is an entry point into the state's workforce development systems for thousands of Pennsylvanians.

The Pittsburgh A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI) is a workforce development agency that is committed to social progress for minorities, the poor, and working people and is dedicated to creating programs that extend democracy, education and opportunity to those traditionally disenfranchised or discouraged from participation. To that end, APRI operated the Pennsylvania registered Breaking the Chains of Poverty (BTCV) pre-apprenticeship program which helps individuals build the skills necessary to obtain family sustaining careers in the building and construction trades, manufacturing and emerging energy sector jobs. As local adult education provider, Literacy Pittsburgh, is helping our participants acquire the basic skills they need to be successful in the BTCV program by provided TABE Testing, GED preparation and testing, and computer literacy training to our participants.

Pennsylvania's investment in Adult and Family Literacy Education is helping thousands go from learning to earning and contributing to our region's prosperity. Additional resources will ensure that these programs reach more people in need and support their ability to get and keep good jobs that support their families. Yet, Adult and Family Literacy Education funding is misaligned with the need. More than 700,000 working age adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential, keeping them out of jobs and job training. More than 700,000 adults do not speak English well or at all, many who are highly skilled such as doctors, nurses, accountants, and other professionals who can only work in entry level jobs because they need to speak, read and write English. This is what our partners in Adult and Family Literacy Education do – they help those left behind attain a basic education and help the newly arrived learn English and reclaim their careers.



When the Commonwealth invests in Adult and Family Literacy Education, it invests in helping Workforce development providers like the A. Philip Randolph Institute find qualified candidates who can succeed.

Thank for supporting Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "DeWitt Walton". The signature is written in a cursive style.

DeWitt Walton
Vice President



1815 Metropolitan Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15233

Telephone: 412-323-4000
Fax: 412-321-2120

www.bidwelltraining.edu

December 18, 2023

Governor Josh Shapiro
508 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro,

On behalf of Bidwell Training Center, I write to urge you to support Pennsylvania's investment in workforce development by increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education's budget to \$30 million. With Pennsylvania facing a contraction of working age adults, we must find ways to ensure that no Pennsylvanian is left behind. The 1.6 million working age adults who struggle with literacy and basic skills can be part of the solution. All they need is a chance to access education services to build their skills. Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania is an entry point into the state's workforce development systems for thousands of Pennsylvanians.

Bidwell Training Center (BTC) was established in 1968 in response to the social unrest and economic declines that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Having founded Manchester Craftsmen's Guild during the same period, William E. Strickland, Jr. was asked to assume leadership of BTC in 1972. Strickland believed that the combination of adult career training, which includes adult literacy education, and youth arts programming provided a holistic means of addressing the community's needs. Importantly, BTC provides career training at no cost to eligible Pennsylvania residents, delivering education and resources to a diverse population of adults in transition. BTC's programs emphasize middle skills training and are developed in collaboration with employers in the Pittsburgh region to identify gaps in their workforce and create programs that will lead to careers that pay a living wage, demonstrate long-term demand, and provide entry-level positions with clear career paths.

In Allegheny County, Literacy Pittsburgh is working with Bidwell Training Center to prepare participants for a variety of our training programs, including Pharmacy Technician, Chemical Laboratory Technician, Medical Assistant, Medical Coder/Biller, Culinary Arts, and Horticulture Technology. Literacy Pittsburgh staff is on site to coordinate and support basic skills education such as math, reading, writing, and digital literacy skills through tutoring and class-based instruction. Working together, we ensure more adults can be successful in our job training programs and move into middle skills work.

Pennsylvania's investment in Adult and Family Literacy Education is helping thousands go from learning to earning and contributing to our region's prosperity. Additional resources will ensure that these programs reach more people in need and support their ability to get and keep good jobs that support their families. Yet, Adult and Family Literacy Education funding is misaligned with the need. More than 700,0000 working age adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential,

keeping them out of jobs and job training. More than 700,000 adults do not speak English well or at all, many who are highly skilled such as doctors, nurses, accountants, and other professionals who can only work in entry level jobs because they need to speak, read, and write English. This is what our partners in Adult and Family Literacy Education do – they help those left behind attain a basic education and help the newly arrived learn English and reclaim their careers.

Bidwell Training Center believes adult basic literacy is a critical piece of our education and workforce system and warrants investment to help solve the Commonwealth's workforce shortage. When the Commonwealth invests in Adult and Family Literacy Education, it invests in helping training programs like Bidwell Training Center find qualified candidates who can succeed.

Thank you for supporting Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kevin L. Jenkins".

Kevin L. Jenkins, LSW
President & CEO
Manchester Bidwell Corporation

cc: Dr. Kimberly Rassau, Vice President
Bidwell Training Center



Downtown Pittsburgh
914 Penn Ave, 6th floor.
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

P (412) 248 - 5627
TTY (412) 552-7044
F (412) 552 -7051
PACareerLink.pa.gov

January 9, 2024

Governor Josh Shapiro
508 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro,

On behalf of PA CareerLink® Pittsburgh, I write to urge you to support Pennsylvania's investment in workforce development by increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education's budget to \$30 million. With Pennsylvania facing a contraction of working age adults, we must find ways to ensure that no Pennsylvanian is left behind. The 1.6 million working age adults who struggle with literacy and basic skills can be part of the solution. All they need is a chance to access education services to build their skills. Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania is an entry point into the state's workforce development systems for thousands of Pennsylvanians.

PA CareerLink® Pittsburgh is a collaborative project between multiple agencies to provide career services to Pennsylvania employers, potential employees, and others. Our local education provider, Literacy Pittsburgh, is helping adults acquire the basic skills they need to be successful in their jobs and prepare them for building career pathways with the employers within our pipeline.

Pennsylvania's investment in Adult and Family Literacy is helping thousands go from learning to earning and contributing to our region's prosperity. Additional resources will ensure that these programs reach more people in need and support their ability to get and keep good jobs that support their families. Yet, Adult and Family Literacy Education funding is misaligned with the need. More than 700,000 working age adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential, keeping them out of jobs and job training. More than 700,000 adults do not speak English well or at all, many who are highly skilled such as doctors, nurses, accountants, and other professionals who can only work in entry level jobs because they need to speak, read, and write English. This is what our partners in Adult and Family Literacy Education do – they help those left behind attain a basic education and help the newly arrived learn English and reclaim their careers. When the Commonwealth invests in Adult and Family Literacy Education, it invests in helping agencies like PA CareerLink® and various training programs find qualified candidates who can succeed.

Thank you for supporting Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania,

Sincerely,

Amy Sljva-Blystone

Amy Sljva-Blystone
PA CareerLink® Pittsburgh
Site Administrator/Interim One-Stop Operator



Latino Resource & Welcome Center

An Outreach of the Sisters of St. Joseph

2116 Broadway Ave
Pittsburgh, PA 15216
Phone: 412-343-3111

Fax: 412-343-3210

office@casasanjose.org

January 25, 2024

Governor Josh Shapiro
508 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro,

On behalf of Casa San Jose, I write to urge you to support Pennsylvania's investment in workforce development by increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education's budget to \$30 million. With Pennsylvania facing a contraction of working age adults, we must find ways to ensure that no Pennsylvanian is left behind. The 1.6 million working age adults who struggle with literacy and basic skills can be part of the solution. All they need is a chance to access education services to build their skills. Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania is an entry point into the state's workforce development systems for thousands of Pennsylvanians.

Casa San Jose is the largest Latino serving organization in the Western Region of the Commonwealth. We have seen a population growth of Latinos of over 80% in the past 10 years and that number is rising. Over 70% of the people we serve every week are new arrivals that are monolingual Spanish speaking immigrants. Our population in Allegheny County has been steadily declining for over 20 years and the only population that is growing is the immigrant population. We need immigrants to help our neighborhoods grow and thrive. Learning English is one of the top priorities that our new neighbors have and by gaining this skill they are able to better acclimate to their new lives and find better jobs to help them on their journey to finding better lives for themselves and their families

Pennsylvania's investment in Adult and Family Literacy Education is helping thousands go from learning to earning and contributing to our region's prosperity. Additional resources will ensure that these programs reach more people in need and support their ability to get and keep good jobs that support their families. Yet, Adult and Family Literacy Education funding is misaligned with the need. More than 700,000 working age adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential, keeping them out of jobs and job training. More than 700,000 adults do not speak English well or at all, many who are highly skilled such as doctors, nurses, accountants, and other professionals who can only work in entry level jobs because they need to speak, read and write English. This is what



Latino Resource & Welcome Center

An Outreach of the Sisters of St. Joseph

2116 Broadway Ave

Pittsburgh, PA 15216

Phone: 412-343-3111

Fax: 412-343-3210

office@casasanjose.org

our partners in Adult and Family Literacy Education do – they help those left behind attain a basic education and help the newly arrived learn English and reclaim their careers.

When the Commonwealth invests in Adult and Family Literacy Education, it invests in helping organizations like Casa San Jose and other social service organization provide quality resources to our community members so that they can succeed.

Thank for supporting Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

Monica Quigg, MSW



SUPPORTING PEOPLE THROUGH LIFE'S CHANGES & CHALLENGES

1/22/2024

Governor Josh Shapiro
508 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro,

On behalf of Jewish Family and Community Services of Pittsburgh, I am writing to urge you to support Pennsylvania's investment in workforce development by increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education's budget to \$30 million. With Pennsylvania facing a contraction of working age adults, we must find ways to ensure that no Pennsylvanian is left behind. The 1.6 million working age adults who struggle with literacy and basic skills can be part of the solution. All they need is a chance to access education services to build their skills. Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania is an entry point into the state's workforce development systems for thousands of Pennsylvanians.

JFCS Pittsburgh has been a nonprofit organization in Allegheny County since 1937, providing a range of social services including refugee resettlement, immigration legal services, employment support, mental health services, and food pantry services. Our services are designed to maximize self-sufficiency, which strengthens individuals, families, and our regional economy. Many of our services depend on our clients developing the skills necessary for obtaining and maintaining employment.

Pennsylvania's investment in Adult and Family Literacy Education is helping thousands go from learning to earning and contributing to our region's prosperity. Additional resources will ensure that these programs reach more people in need and support their ability to get and keep good jobs that support their families. Yet, Adult and Family Literacy Education funding is misaligned with the need. More than 700,000 working age adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential, keeping them out of jobs and job training. More than 700,000 adults do not speak English well or at all, many who are highly skilled such as doctors, nurses, accountants, and other professionals who can only work in entry level jobs because they need to speak, read and write English. This is what our partners in Adult and Family Literacy Education do – they help those left behind attain a basic education and help the newly arrived learn English and reclaim their careers.

Thank you for supporting Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania.
Sincerely,

Jordan Golin, President & CEO





January 18, 2024

Governor Josh Shapiro
508 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro,

On behalf of Job Training for Beaver County, Inc., I write to urge you to support Pennsylvania's investment in workforce development by increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education's budget to \$30 million. With Pennsylvania facing a contraction of working age adults, we must find ways to ensure that no Pennsylvanian is left behind. The 1.6 million working age adults who struggle with literacy and basic skills can be part of the solution. All they need is a chance to access education services to build their skills. Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania is an entry point into the state's workforce development systems for thousands of Pennsylvanians.

Our organization is a PA CareerLink® partner and delivers WIOA Title I career and training services for youth, adults and dislocated workers. One of the greatest challenges for these populations is acquiring the level of basic literacy skills necessary to train for and secure employment offering family-sustaining wages and a career pathway. Our local adult education provider, Literacy Pittsburgh, also a PA CareerLink® partner, has been instrumental in helping these populations acquire these skills.

Pennsylvania's investment in Adult and Family Literacy Education is helping thousands go from learning to earning and contributing to our region's prosperity. Additional resources will ensure that these programs reach more people in need and support their ability to get and keep good jobs that support their families. Yet, Adult and Family Literacy Education funding is misaligned with the need. More than 700,000 working age adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential, keeping them out of jobs and job training. More than 700,000 adults do not speak English well or at all, many who are highly skilled such as doctors, nurses, accountants, and other professionals who can only work in entry level jobs because they need to speak, read and write English. This is what our partners in Adult and Family Literacy Education do – they help those left behind attain a basic education and help the newly arrived learn English and reclaim their careers.

When the Commonwealth invests in Adult and Family Literacy Education, it invests in helping youth, adults and dislocated workers acquire the level of basic literacy skills necessary to train for and secure employment offering family-sustaining wages and a career pathway. This also provides employers with the pool of skilled job candidates they need to grow and compete.

Thank for supporting Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Strother". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" being the most prominent part.

Rich Strother
Executive Director



LATINO COMMUNITY CENTER

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & FOUNDER

Rosamaria Cristello

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2/5/2024

Governor Josh Shapiro
508 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro,

On behalf of the Latino Community Center (LCC), I write to urge you to support Pennsylvania's investment in workforce development by increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education's budget to \$30 million. With Pennsylvania facing a contraction of working age adults, we must find ways to ensure that no Pennsylvanian is left behind. The 1.6 million working age adults who struggle with literacy and basic skills can be part of the solution. All they need is a chance to access education services to build their skills. Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania is an entry point into the state's workforce development systems for thousands of Pennsylvanians.

The LCC is a nonprofit organization established and governed by our Latinx community in Pittsburgh. Our mission is to Empower, Advocate with and Celebrate Latinos in Allegheny County. We focus on providing high quality education programs from Early Childhood Education to College Readiness, and we run the Latino Family Center whose focus is on supporting parents and caregivers to raise healthy and happy children. This year, we are seeing an average of 50 *new* Latinx families moving into our region and coming to our Welcome Center to seek support in settling into the region. In fact, the Latinx community grew by 80% in Allegheny County between 2010-2020. One of the main requests we get from our community is the need for ESL classes. It is clear to us that our community is hungry to learn and continue to grow.



412-335-7446



info@latinocommunitycenter.org



latinocommunitycenter.org



LATINO COMMUNITY CENTER

Pennsylvania's investment in Adult and Family Literacy Education is helping thousands go from learning to earning and contributing to our region's prosperity. Additional resources will ensure that these programs reach more people in need and support their ability to get and keep good jobs that support their families. Yet, Adult and Family Literacy Education funding is misaligned with the need. More than 700,000 working age adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential, keeping them out of jobs and job training. More than 700,000 adults do not speak English well or at all, many who are highly skilled such as doctors, nurses, accountants, and other professionals who can only work in entry level jobs because they need to speak, read and write English. This is what our partners in Adult and Family Literacy Education do – they help those left behind attain a basic education and help the newly arrived learn English and reclaim their careers.

When the Commonwealth invests in Adult and Family Literacy Education, it invests in helping hardworking families break the cycle of poverty and ensure they are positioning their kids for a better future.

Thank for supporting Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

Rosamaria Cristello, Founder & Executive Director
rcristello@latinocommunitycenter.org



412-335-7446



info@latinocommunitycenter.org



latinocommunitycenter.org

January 11, 2024

Governor Josh Shapiro
508 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro,

On behalf of Partner4Work, I write to urge you to support Pennsylvania's investment in workforce development by increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education's budget to \$30 million. With Pennsylvania facing a contraction of working age adults, we must find ways to ensure that no Pennsylvanian is left behind. The 1.6 million working age adults who struggle with literacy and basic skills can be part of the solution. All they need is a chance to access education services to build their skills. Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania is an entry point into the state's workforce development systems for thousands of Pennsylvanians.

As the workforce development board for Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh, Partner4Work works with businesses throughout our service area who are still in need of skilled workers. Job seekers served by the PA CareerLink® in our local area often need the additional support provided by organizations like Literacy Pittsburgh in order to be ready to work. Literacy Pittsburgh is helping adults acquire the basic skills they need to be successful in their jobs and prepare them for building a career pathway with the employers in our region.

Pennsylvania's investment in Adult and Family Literacy Education is helping thousands go from learning to earning and contributing to our region's prosperity. Additional resources will ensure that these programs reach more people in need and support their ability to get and keep good jobs that support their families. Yet, Adult and Family Literacy Education funding is misaligned with the need. More than 700,000 working age adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential, keeping them out of jobs and job training. More than 700,000 adults do not speak English well or at all, many who are highly skilled such as doctors, nurses, accountants, and other professionals who can only work in entry level jobs because they need to speak, read and write English. This is what our partners in Adult and Family Literacy Education do – they help those left behind attain a basic education and help the newly arrived learn English and reclaim their careers.

When the Commonwealth invests in Adult and Family Literacy Education, it invests in helping employers and training programs find qualified candidates who can succeed.

Thank you for supporting Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,



Rob Cherry
Chief Executive Officer

January 9, 2024

Governor Josh Shapiro
508 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro,

On behalf of the Southwest Corner Workforce Development Board (SCWDB), I write to urge you to support Pennsylvania's investment in workforce development by increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education's budget to \$30 million. With Pennsylvania facing a contraction of working age adults, we must find ways to ensure that no Pennsylvanian is left behind. The 1.6 million working age adults who struggle with literacy and basic skills can be part of the solution. All they need is a chance to access education services to build their skills. Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania is an entry point into the state's workforce development systems for thousands of Pennsylvanians.

The mission of SCWDB is to develop policies, oversee public funds, and procure services that will help employers and job seekers throughout Washington, Greene and Beaver counties. Job placement assistance, education, training and counseling are offered in order to achieve a skilled workforce and economic development throughout the region. We envision a regional labor pool that possesses the skills and attitudes to attract and retain employers who offer sufficient wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. Our local adult education provider, Literacy Pittsburgh, is helping adults acquire the basic skills they need to be successful in their jobs and prepare them for building career pathways with our regional employers.

Pennsylvania's investment in Adult and Family Literacy Education is helping thousands go from learning to earning and contributing to our region's prosperity. Additional resources will ensure that these programs reach more people in need and support their ability to get and keep good jobs that support their families. Yet, Adult and Family Literacy Education funding is misaligned with the need. More than 700,000 working age adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential, keeping them out of jobs and job training. More than 700,000 adults do not speak English well or at all, many who are highly skilled such as doctors, nurses, accountants, and other professionals who can only work in entry level jobs because they need to speak, read and write English. This is what our partners in Adult and Family Literacy Education do – they help those left behind attain a basic education and help the newly arrived learn English and reclaim their careers.

When the Commonwealth invests in Adult and Family Literacy Education, it invests in helping local employers and various training programs find qualified candidates who can succeed.

Thank for supporting Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,



Ami Gatts
Director

October 12, 2024

Governor Josh Shapiro
508 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro,

On behalf of UPMC Presbyterian/Shadyside, I write to urge you to support Pennsylvania's investment in workforce development by increasing the Adult and Family Literacy Education line item in the Department of Education's budget to \$30 million. With Pennsylvania facing a contraction of working age adults, we must find ways to ensure that no Pennsylvanian is left behind. The 1.6 million working age adults who struggle with literacy and basic skills can be part of the solution. All they need is a chance to access education services to build their skills. Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania is an entry point into the state's workforce development systems for thousands of Pennsylvanians.

UPMC Presbyterian/Shadyside is one of the largest employers in western PA, with more than 95,000 workers. Our workforce includes entry level positions through highly skilled workers. Our local UPMC EVS Training program is helping adults acquire the basic skills they need to be successful in their jobs and prepare them for building a career pathway at UPMC.

Pennsylvania's investment in Adult and Family Literacy Education is helping thousands go from learning to earning and contributing to our region's prosperity. Additional resources will ensure that these programs reach more people in need and support their ability to get and keep good jobs that support their families. Yet, Adult and Family Literacy Education funding is misaligned with the need. More than 700,000 working age adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school credential, keeping them out of jobs and job training. More than 700,000 adults do not speak English well or at all, many who are highly skilled such as doctors, nurses, accountants, and other professionals who can only work in entry level jobs because they need to speak, read, and write English. This is what our partners in Adult and Family Literacy Education do – they help those left behind attain a basic education and help the newly arrived learn English and reclaim their careers.

When the Commonwealth invests in Adult and Family Literacy Education, it invests in helping employers like UPMC and various training programs find qualified candidates who can succeed.

Thank you for supporting Adult and Family Literacy Education in Pennsylvania.

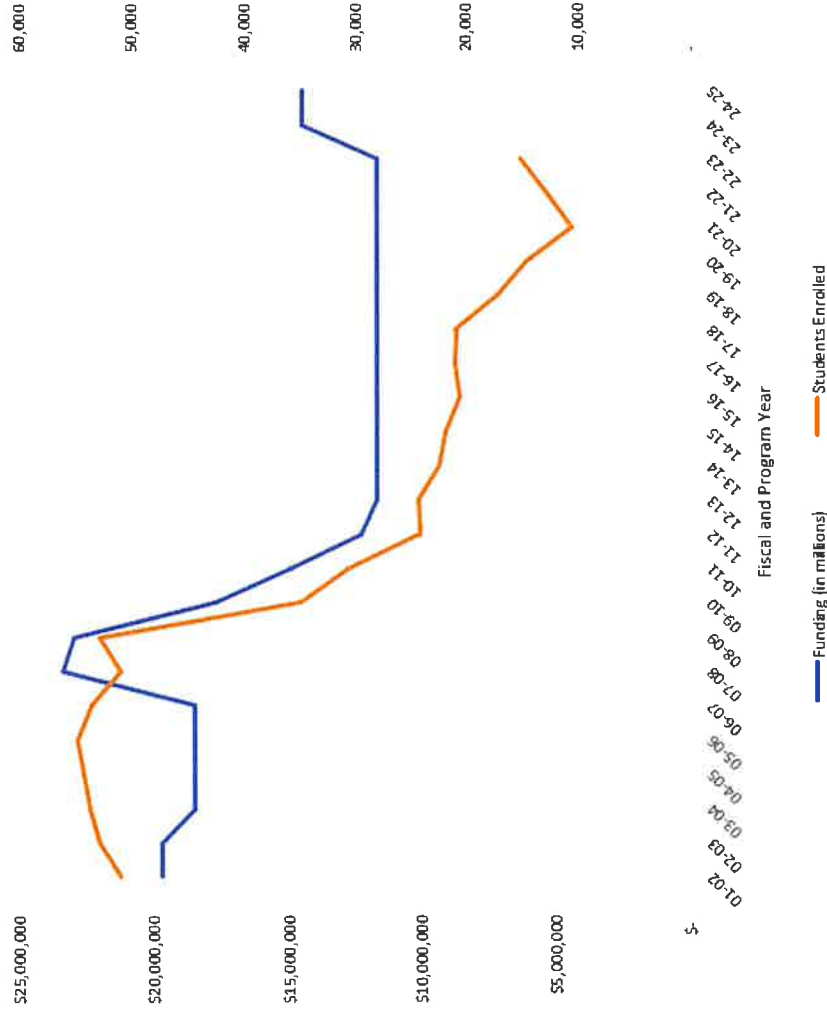
Sincerely,



Darnell Grinage
Senior Director, Environmental Services



Adult and Family Literacy Education Funding 2001-2024



Increase the Adult and Family Education line item by \$7 million to serve more working and job-seeking adults.

- **646,612** working age adults **lack** high school diplomas.
- **387,549** working age adults **do not speak** English well or at all.
- More than **64,000** students **dropped out** of high school in the last five year.

2020 PIAAC DATA: State & County Indicators of Adult Literacy and Numeracy for PA's 9,435,000 residents ages 16-74

- **18%** of Pennsylvanians ages 16-74 are at or below PIAAC **proficiency level 1** in literacy – meaning **at risk** for difficulty using or comprehending print material.
- **29%** of Pennsylvanians ages 16-74 are at or below PIAAC proficiency level 1 in numeracy – considered at risk for difficulties with numeracy.



Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education

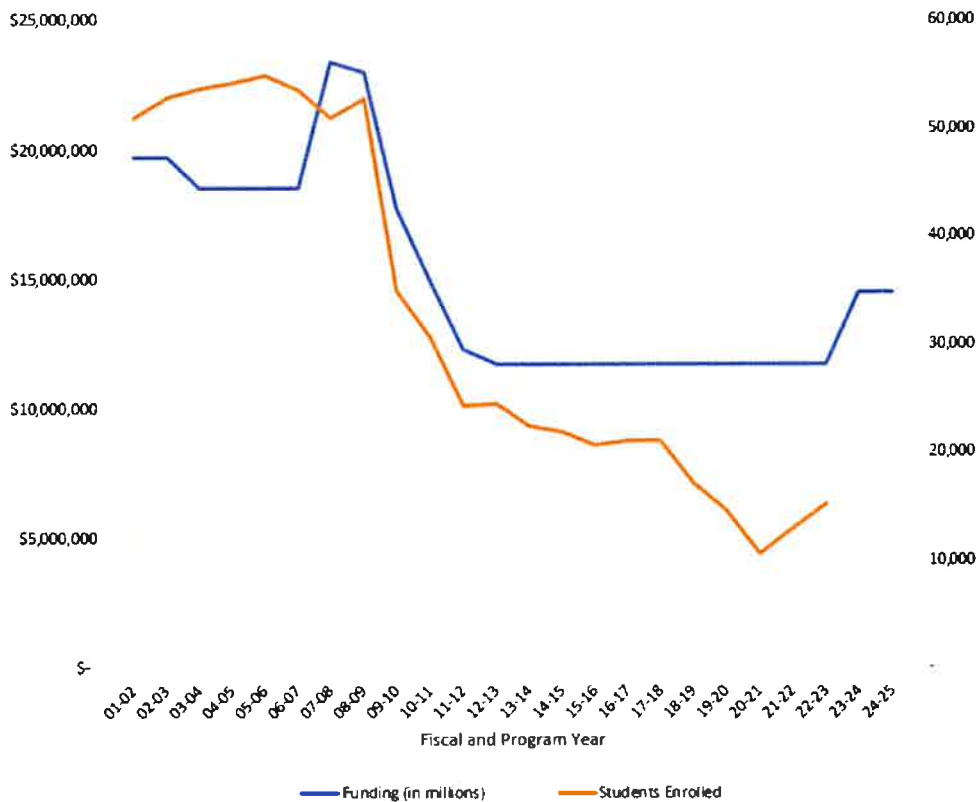
September 2024

ADULT AND FAMILY LITERACY EDUCATION IS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

For Fiscal Year 2025-2026, our goal is to increase the ADULT and FAMILY LITERACY EDUCATION line item to \$23 million.

- By 2026-2027, full restoration of the line to \$30 million so that Pennsylvania will move more adults into middle skills work and help employers fill openings.
- The Adult and Family Literacy line item in the Pennsylvania Department of Education provides the required match for the Federal Title II funding of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA).

The Adult and Family Literacy line item was flat funded for 12 years until the \$3.8 Million increase in the FY 24 budget. The Governor's proposed \$1M increase did not make it into FY25 final budget.



WHO WE ARE

PAACE (Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education) is a membership association of professionals in the field of adult basic and continuing education. Our more than 1,200 members work in community-based organizations, school districts, intermediate units and colleges to provide services throughout the Commonwealth. Our mission is to inspire adult education partners through advocacy, networking, and professional development so that adults succeed, and communities thrive.

THE WORK

Adult and Family Literacy Education expands the talent pipelines for jobs and job training by providing education that under-skilled adults need in order to successfully attain and retain good jobs. Adult and Family Literacy Education programs provide ongoing career pathway support to working adults who need to continue to develop their skills to advance. Pennsylvania must join employers and higher education providers in valuing these critical services and invest in them so that no Pennsylvanian is left behind.

Adult and Family Literacy Education organizations provide a wide range of services designed around the needs of adult learners, including:

- College & Career Readiness (planning & preparation for careers in high-demand industries)
- Adult Basic Education
 - High School Equivalency Test Preparation
 - English for Speakers of Other Languages
 - Basic Academic Skills – Reading, Writing, Mathematics
- Family Literacy
- Health Literacy
- Digital Literacy

THE NEED

- 18% of Pennsylvania adults have literacy skills at or below the level needed for work, family, and community life. *
- 646,612 working adults between 18 and 64 do not have a high school credential. *
- 396,637 have less than a 9th grade education.
- 387,549 do not speak English well or at all.
- 62,459 students dropped out of school between 2018 and 2023.

In the last 2 years, we have received high demand from both American and foreign-born adult learners. This surging need for services has resulted in crowded programs and growing wait lists.

*Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap/>

OUR IMPACT

We serve working age adults with significant skills gaps who are typically under-employed and raising families. Participation is at their own pace and often includes breaks of months or years as they balance educational needs with life's demands. These factors influence the field's reported outcomes (see endnote for detail). The majority (66%) of students who continuously attend for at least 60 hours make educational gains equivalent to two K-12 school years – a remarkable accomplishment for them and a significant return on investment for Pennsylvania at an estimated cost of \$2,500 per student.

Adult education programs are not just a second chance at a basic education; for many adults in Pennsylvania, these programs are the last chance. Our programs connect the untapped labor force of under-skilled adults to employers in need of workers.

On behalf of the more than **1.4 million Pennsylvanians** who require adult basic education to earn middle skills jobs, PAACE urges Governor Shapiro and the General Assembly to make these vital investments:

- 1** **Increase the Adult and Family Literacy line in the Department of Education budget to \$23 million for the FY 2025-2026 budget, with the goal of reaching \$30 million by 2026-2027. The 2023-2024 increase moved us closer and yet it does not align with the need and the value of these programs. Increasing this investment will enable thousands of additional adults to access services.**
- 2** **Mobilize unspent dollars to directly support high performing instructional programs through incentive funds.**

END NOTE

In any given year, approximately 66% of the students who persist in adult education for at least 60 hours will make educational gains equivalent of 2 grade levels in K-12 schooling. This is an amazing testament to the dedication and determination of both students and adult educators. Due to the challenges of federal reporting requirements, these impressive results often get overshadowed by the volume of adults that seek out services and end up stepping away before 60 hours of instruction and/or making a learning gain.

Being an adult student is a significant commitment that is not undertaken lightly. In fact, in any given year, approximately half of the adults that seek out our services will step away due to the very real challenges of balancing work, family and their own education. These challenges include shift changes at work, overtime, new jobs, moves, family obligations, illness, and/or lack of transportation and childcare. Federal reporting includes these adults who have not actually persisted, and thus can mislead a reader to think that as few as 44% of adult education students have made a gain.

We hope this context helps you provide further understanding of that data point. Thankfully, adult education staff work with those who are unable to persist to ensure they know they are welcome back when the commitment can be accommodated.

The Adult and Family Literacy Education line item of \$16,310,000 includes \$1,050,000 earmarked for HSE testing. The Department of Education is working on a plan to implement an HSE testing fee program for Pennsylvania. Given the huge unmet need for educational programming across the Commonwealth, we urge the Department to deploy any unspent testing funds toward the delivery of educational programming.

Notably, the line also includes funds earmarked for a K-12 after-school program.

For more information, please email Cheryl Hiester at Cheryl@literacysuccess.org.



September 16, 2024

House Education Committee

Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Topper, and Distinguished Members of the House Education Committee:

Imagine what it would be like if you couldn't read the directions on a prescription, help your child with homework, apply for a job, find the bus route to the hospital, write a check to pay bills, or ask police for help. These are just some of the everyday challenges that people with low literacy levels face. They are simple but essential tasks that many of us take for granted.

Community Need

More than 51% of people who live in Allentown speak a language other than English at home ([2023 American Community Survey](#)). A large percentage of these adults attended college and have work experience from their home countries. But their inability to speak, read, and write in English inhibits their professional growth and limits their economic opportunities. Because of their limited language skills, they frequently work one or more low-wage, part-time jobs. Without English language proficiency, these adults lack the ability to return to their professional fields and improve their earning power.

Approximately 22% of Allentown residents aged 25 and older do not have a high school diploma and over 7,500 Allentown residents have less than a 9th grade education ([2023 American Community Survey](#)). There are many reasons why people are unable to complete high school, including the need to work to support their families, bullying, learning disabilities, and feeling unsafe at school. People who do not complete high school are more likely to struggle with employment, live in poverty, be dependent on welfare benefits, have poor physical and mental health, and engage in criminal activity more often than those with higher education levels ([Healthy People 2030](#)).

Studies have shown that those without a High School Diploma earn up to 24% less than those who have completed high school ([Healthy People 2030](#)). The economic consequences of dropping out of high school do not stop with the individual. Society also pays a high price. The average high school dropout costs the economy approximately \$272,000 over his or her lifetime in terms of lower tax contributions, higher reliance on Medicaid and Medicare, higher rates of criminal activity, and higher reliance on welfare ([National Center for Education Statistics](#)).

The Literacy Center

The Literacy Center (TLC) is a leader in community-based adult literacy education built on innovative, cost-effective instructional services that ensure excellence in student outcomes. TLC is

Education for Work, Family and Life

1132 Hamilton Street, Suite 300 • Allentown, PA 18101-1025 • Phone: 610-435-0680 • Fax: 610-435-5134

www.TheLiteracyCenter-LV.org



addressing the concerns above by delivering high-quality programs in English as a Second Language (ESL), High School Equivalency (GED), and Workforce Development. We firmly believe that adult education and training can positively transform lives by opening the door to limitless opportunities.

Year after year, TLC consistently achieves excellent student outcomes. This is thanks to an exceptional team effort from our board members, volunteers, instructors, support staff, administrative staff, partners, and vendors. Everyone is fully committed to empowering struggling adults through education. Serving the Lehigh Valley since 1977, our mission is to deliver high-quality instruction, training, and support for adults who are experiencing language, education, and employment barriers.

A primary reason why our student retention rates are so high is because of our Student Support Services. We provide students with support counseling and referrals to partner organizations for assistance with housing, food insecurity, medical issues, mental health, domestic violence, legal issues, transportation, childcare, and other obstacles they may be experiencing. We also provide an annual community resource fair, regular information sessions on community resources, citizenship preparation study groups, financial literacy instruction, and health literacy workshops.

Our Students

Almost half of our ESL students have college degrees and professional experience from their home countries. They worked as accountants, computer programmers, medical professionals, economists, electricians, engineers, lawyers, mechanics, psychologists, and teachers. Becoming proficient in English allows them to return to their chosen fields and bring their skills and expertise to local employers.

Our ESL graduates without degrees and experience are just as motivated and eager to display their hard-working skills in the workplace. They enroll in our Digital Literacy Program to improve their computer skills. ESL graduates participate in our Administrative Professional Training Program to develop job skills. They work with our Career Counselor to find employment. And ESL graduates interested in post-secondary education enroll in our College Access Program, which helps students apply to and enroll in college and other training programs.

Over the last five years, TLC has tripled the number of students served and currently helps over 1,500 adults a year. Despite this dramatic increase, the need for English classes continues to rise at a startling rate. As of September 12, 2024, our current waitlist for ESL classes stands at 1,742 adults.

TLC has also witnessed a significant enrollment increase for our GED Program over the last few years. More adults need to obtain their high school equivalency diploma to further their education and employment opportunities. GED graduates also utilize our College Access and Workforce Development Programs. They are eager to prove their resiliency and work ethic for local employers.

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Our Request

TLC respectfully requests additional funding so that we may expand our services to include the 1,742 students on our waitlist. This would unleash a goldmine of talent and skills for Pennsylvania employers. TLC graduates are positively transforming Allentown and the Lehigh Valley, with many more waiting in the wings.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the importance of expanding Adult Literacy instruction for our community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer M. Doyle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Jennifer M. Doyle, MPA
Chief Executive Officer
The Literacy Center

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EDUCATION FUNDING COMMITTEE – SEPTEMBER 16, 2024

Education Funding Committee – September 16, 2024

Senior Vice President I-LEAD Futures Workforce: Angel Figueroa

Powered By. I-LEAD USA

EMPOWERING PENNSYLVANIA'S WORKFORCE: THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN
ADULT EDUCATION

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EMPOWERING PENNSYLVANIA'S WORKFORCE: THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN ADULT EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION:

Delivered by Angel Figueroa

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Good afternoon, Honorable Chairman Schweyer, committee members, and distinguished guests: My name is Angel Figueroa. I am honored to represent I-LEAD INC, an organization dedicated to empowering disenfranchised communities in Pennsylvania through education since 1995. I am here today to advocate for increased funding for adult education programs, which are critical not only to the individuals who participate but also to the overall health of our communities and the growth of our economy.

We come before this body not just as a representative but as someone who has personally experienced the transformative power of adult education. I was once a high school dropout with limited prospects, struggling to envision a future beyond day-to-day survival. In 1998, I decided to earn my G.E.D., which changed my life's course. Since then, I have proudly served in the Pennsylvania National Guard, completed my Bachelor's degree in Business from Albright College, and earned an M.B.A. from Kutztown University. The doors that education opened for me are those countless others are now walking through, thanks to programs like those offered by I-LEAD INC.

At I-LEAD, we provide comprehensive adult education programs to meet the diverse needs of our learners. Our English Language Foundation (E.L.F.) program helps non-native English speakers develop the vocational language skills necessary to thrive in the workplace and become fully integrated members of their communities. Our **HISET**® program has expanded in response to the urgent demand from our communities. I-LEAD Futures Workforce operates training and testing centers in Chester, Philadelphia, Allentown, Reading, and Lancaster. Our

EMPOWERING PENNSYLVANIA'S WORKFORCE: THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN ADULT EDUCATION

HiSET® program enables adults to earn high school equivalency diplomas in six weeks, an essential credential that paves the way to better jobs, higher wages, and continued education. We also offer literacy and numeracy programs, which equip adults with critical reading, writing, and math skills, empowering them to manage their finances, support their children's education, and contribute more effectively at their workplaces.

Our community faces a crisis amid inflation and economic uncertainty. The need for language education and high school credentials is urgent, and the benefits of these programs are far-reaching.

Let me tell you about **Cassandra**, a participant in our **HiSET®** program from Berks County. Cassandra is a mother of three who emigrated from the Dominican Republic. She struggled to find employment due to her limited English proficiency and lack of a high school diploma. Through I-LEAD's programs, Cassandra learned English and earned her **HiSET®** diploma. Today, she works as a certified nursing assistant (C.N.A.) for a local hospital, where her earnings help support her family. Her story is one of many that highlight the impact of adult education on individuals, families, and communities.

Economic and Workforce Development Impact

The economic benefits of adult education are profound and well-documented. Studies have shown that adults who earn a high school equivalency diploma see an average increase in lifetime earnings of approximately \$200,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Additionally, those who complete adult education programs are 20 percent more likely to secure employment, with many securing jobs that offer higher wages and better benefits, including health insurance and retirement savings (National Coalition for Literacy, 2022). It translates to greater economic mobility for individuals and a more substantial tax base for the commonwealth.

EMPOWERING PENNSYLVANIA'S WORKFORCE: THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN ADULT EDUCATION

In Pennsylvania alone, over **1.6 million adults** lack a high school diploma or equivalent, and many face significant barriers to entering or advancing in the workforce (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). By investing in adult education, Pennsylvania can directly address the skills gap hindering the growth of critical industries, including healthcare, manufacturing, and skilled trades. According to the National Skills Coalition, 52 percent of jobs in Pennsylvania require middle-skills training, yet only 43 percent of the workforce is trained to that level (National et al., 2020).

Our community is facing educational barriers and economic challenges exacerbated by inflation and an ever-evolving job market. In Pennsylvania, rising living costs are putting more pressure on working families, making it even more critical for adults to access education that leads to higher-paying jobs. According to recent studies, individuals without a high school diploma are nearly twice as likely to be unemployed, contributing to higher rates of poverty and economic instability in our state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). By investing in adult education now, we provide immediate relief and long-term solutions to help Pennsylvanians better navigate this inflationary economy.

Consider the Lehigh Valley, Berks County, Lancaster, Pottstown, and Philadelphia, areas where the impact of educational disparities is acutely felt in minority and impoverished communities. Investing in adult education programs in these regions can reduce the state's reliance on public assistance programs, decrease unemployment rates, and increase the number of residents earning sustainable wages. Individuals who improve their literacy skills are likelier to earn higher wages, with literacy proficiency linked to a 5 percent to 15 percent wage premium across various sectors (OECD, 2013).

EMPOWERING PENNSYLVANIA'S WORKFORCE: THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN ADULT EDUCATION

In addition to healthcare, industries like manufacturing, technology, and renewable energy also feel the impact of Pennsylvania's skills gap. More than 35 percent of employers in the manufacturing sector report difficulty finding workers with the necessary skills, particularly in areas like C.N.C. machining, welding, and robotics (Workforce Development Institute, 2022). Technology companies are also experiencing shortages of qualified candidates, particularly as demand for I.T. professionals and cybersecurity experts grows. Meanwhile, renewable energy, one of the fastest-growing sectors, requires workers skilled in electrical systems and green technologies. By investing in adult education, particularly in programs like *HiSET*® and vocational English language training, we can ensure these industries have access to the skilled labor they need to thrive.

Furthermore, as Pennsylvania's population ages, the demand for a skilled workforce will continue to grow. Investing in adult education now is not just about filling jobs today; it is about preparing our workforce for the demands of tomorrow. Programs like *HiSET*® and English Language Foundations are critical to ensuring we can meet this growing need and compete in the global economy.

Strengthening Families and Communities

Beyond the economic benefits, adult education fosters stronger families and more resilient communities. Research shows that children of parents who pursue further education are more likely to succeed academically and aspire to higher education themselves (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). A parent earning a degree or certification sets a powerful example for their children, showing them that education is a pathway to a better future.

Moreover, investing in adult education helps reduce reliance on public assistance programs. Studies show that adults with higher levels of education are less likely to need

EMPOWERING PENNSYLVANIA'S WORKFORCE: THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN ADULT EDUCATION

unemployment benefits, Medicaid, or food assistance programs (National Coalition for Literacy, 2022). By helping individuals gain the skills they need for stable, well-paying jobs, we are reducing the financial burden on the commonwealth while creating more robust, self-sufficient families. Our shared goal transcends political differences and serves the long-term interests of all Pennsylvanians.

In addition, adults who participate in our programs at I-LEAD are more engaged in civic life. They vote, volunteer, and advocate for their families and neighborhoods. They become leaders within their communities, helping to build a more inclusive and equitable society. In short, adult education is not just about economic growth but social cohesion and civic participation, which are the bedrock of a healthy democracy.

A Balanced Approach to Funding

I understand that funding is always a concern, but the cost of inaction is even greater. With adequate resources, many adults will be included, and the ripple effects will be felt across our commonwealth. Lower literacy rates, higher unemployment, and greater reliance on social services are the actual costs of failing to invest in adult education (Pennsylvania Partnerships for Adult Literacy, 2021).

To ease the burden on state finances, we propose a balanced approach: reallocate existing resources where possible and encourage public-private partnerships. For example, you could offer tax incentives to businesses that support adult education programs and hire new graduates, particularly those in industries experiencing a skills gap. By bringing the public and private sectors together, we can share the responsibility and ensure that adult learners can access the resources they need to succeed.

EMPOWERING PENNSYLVANIA'S WORKFORCE: THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN ADULT EDUCATION

Call to Action

I am joined today by **Joel Pujols**, a former student from the I-LEAD Futures Workforce Center in Allentown, who is here to share his personal experience. Before joining our **English Language Foundation (E.L.F.)** program, Joel struggled to communicate in English. His ability to speak confidently, interact with others, and pursue better opportunities was limited. However, Joel transformed his language skills with the help of our dedicated teacher, **Ms. Amy Markwood**, and his supportive classmates. He gained the ability to speak, read, and understand English and the confidence to take control of his future.

Today, Joel has more opportunities available and feels proud of his progress. His story is a powerful example of how **language programs** like ours can empower individuals to overcome barriers, improve their lives, and contribute to their communities. Similarly, our **HiSET®** program opens doors for adults who lack a high school diploma, offering them the opportunity to earn a recognized credential that significantly improves their chances of securing stable employment and even further education.

However, Joel will point out, many others in the community want the same opportunity. Without adequate funding for **language programs** and **HiSET®**, too many people remain trapped in low-paying jobs, unable to advance or fully participate in our society. The demand for these programs far outweighs the availability, leaving many adults without access to the education they need to succeed.

Joel's story is not unique; thousands like him across Pennsylvania are eager to learn, work, and succeed. Our stakeholders urge the committee to support increased funding for adult education, particularly for **language programs** and **high school equivalency programs** like

EMPOWERING PENNSYLVANIA'S WORKFORCE: THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN
ADULT EDUCATION

HiSET®. Investing in these initiatives strengthens our communities, ensures our industries have the skilled workforce they need, and fosters economic growth across the state.

Together, we can ensure that every adult in Pennsylvania has the chance to learn, grow, and contribute to a prosperous future, benefiting not only their families but also the communities and industries that rely on a skilled and educated workforce.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Angel Figueroa

EMPOWERING PENNSYLVANIA'S WORKFORCE: THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN ADULT EDUCATION

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Good afternoon.

My name is Joel Henriquez Acosta, and I'm here to share how learning English through the I-LEAD Adult Education Center in Allentown has changed my life.

Before I started these classes, I struggled with English. I felt nervous when I had to talk to people, and I didn't feel confident. But when I joined the English program at I-LEAD, with my teacher, Ms. Amy Markwood, things began to change. She and my classmates helped me improve every day. My speaking, reading, and understanding of English all got better.

Because of these classes, I can communicate better. I have more opportunities. I feel proud of myself. I have more confidence, and I know I can do even more in the future. Learning English has truly made a difference in my life.

There are many people like me in the Latino community who want this same opportunity. They want to work hard, get better jobs, and take care of their families. But without knowing English, it's very hard. These classes give us the skills we need to succeed. They help us find better jobs, earn more money, and feel proud of what we can achieve.

But we need more classes. Right now, there aren't enough English programs for everyone who needs them. That's why we desperately need more funding for programs like the one at I-LEAD. More funding means more people can join these classes, improve their lives, and help our community grow.

Thank you for listening to my story, and I hope you will support more funding for English programs. It's important for people like me and for our entire community.

Thank you.



9/16/2024

The Honorable Pete Schweyer
Democratic Chairman, House Education Committee
128 Main Capitol Bldg.
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Jesse Topper
Republican Chairman, House Education Committee
400 Irvis Office Bldg.
Harrisburg, PA 17120

RE: House Education Committee Hearing – September 16th, 2024

Dear Chairman Schweyer and Chairman Topper,

On behalf of Peirce College, I want to thank you and the House Education Committee (Committee) for holding today's informational meeting on adult education in the Commonwealth and for the opportunity to submit this note on the record.

Peirce College is an independent, nonprofit, regionally accredited college in Philadelphia that is the only institution in Pennsylvania dedicated exclusively to serving working adult students. Further, Peirce has the highest percentage of adult students at any college or university in the country. With this in mind, we are particularly interested in the issue of adult education and are thrilled that the Committee is taking the time to discuss it in more depth.

As you may already know, several weeks ago we announced an exciting merger with Lackawanna College. Once the merger is complete, our combined institution will be the largest private, nonprofit open enrollment institution in Pennsylvania at the undergraduate level, with an expanded geographic and programmatic presence to serve students in eight locations and online. This partnership will leverage Lackawanna's dedication to degrees, certificates and innovative learning experiences with Peirce's commitment to career-focused, flexible academic programs and student services designed around the unique needs of busy adults, empowering learning at all stages of life. It is important to note that this merger will not change our students' experience, but rather enhance the opportunities they are offered. We are excited to continue advancing opportunities for adult learners throughout the Commonwealth and look forward to this union coming to fruition.

Peirce was originally founded in 1865 to provide career-focused education for soldiers returning from the Civil War and has since developed a long history of serving adults from across the Commonwealth. Our mission is to empower adult learners to improve their lives by achieving career goals through academic offerings aligned with evolving workforce needs. Today, we serve nearly 1,400 undergraduate and graduate students, 71% of whom are residents of Pennsylvania. Our student body is 76% female, and more than 70% of our students identify as persons of color. The average age of a Peirce student is 39.

Peirce's students represent a traditionally underserved segment of adult learners in search of a way to transform their lives and those of their families, with more than half of the student body considered lower-income. Our model is designed with the adult learner in mind, as we understand that adults cannot always sacrifice their personal and professional responsibilities to go back to college. We have built programs that involve a network of collaborative



partners dedicated to leveraging diverse credit-earning options that are aligned with stackable, market-driven academic programs that meet the unique needs of adult students and employers. This model maximizes transfer credits and leverages prior learning assessment to lower costs, expand access, and increase flexibility for adults who need it the most in the Greater Philadelphia Region.

At Peirce College, we are in the business of removing barriers and empowering students to achieve their goals. Our students – and most of the 39 million people in the United States with some college credits but no degree – are generally hyper-focused on career advancement. They know that higher education is the path to get there. To meet this need, we provide solutions that help students see results sooner than traditional programs.

One innovative Peirce program I'd like to highlight, Career Bridge, specifically prepares students with the skills, certifications and credentials needed for jobs that pay family-sustaining wages and guides them to job opportunities in less than a year. Modeled after a formerly successful program for opportunity youth, the Career Bridge program uses proven methodology applied to today's unique circumstances to provide upskilling opportunities for people who lost jobs, primarily due to COVID-19, and many of whom will return to a workforce where their jobs are no longer in demand or even exist. Career Bridge directly translates Peirce's mission into action. In a matter of months, graduates will be qualified for high-demand, high-growth occupations that pay family-sustaining wages in the following industries/sectors:

- Cybersecurity
- IT User Support
- IT Network Support
- Medical Billing
- Medical Coding
- Project Management
- Financial and Business Operations
- Sales & Client Service

All in all, our students demonstrate grit and determination in completing their programs despite the multitude of challenges facing them. We are proud to serve Pennsylvania's adult learners and take very seriously our role in advocating for policies and investments that address their needs and fuel their success.

We are very appreciative of the Committee's continued interest in adult education in Pennsylvania and would welcome any questions you or your members may have regarding Peirce and our role in the adult education space. Please find additional information attached.

Sincerely,

Joseph Guzzardo
Chief of Staff and Chief Marketing & Strategy Officer, Peirce College

Attachments



Who We Serve

Peirce College is one of the only institutions in the country to focus exclusively on serving adults.

- Approximately 76% of students at Peirce College are women
- More than 70% of students at Peirce College are people of color
- Approximately 52% of Peirce's student body live in the City of Philadelphia
- Approximately 50.5% of students at Peirce are eligible to receive Pell grants

What Makes Us Unique

What sets Peirce College apart from every other institution in Pennsylvania? The students we serve and how we serve them.

We serve our students in ways that fit their lives, not the other way around.

We know that adults cannot sacrifice their personal and professional responsibilities to go back to college, so at Peirce, they don't have to. We've created a new model that delivers affordability, flexibility, academic integrity, and career relevancy for adult learners.

Our model is built on a network of collaborative partners dedicated to leveraging diverse credit-earning options that are aligned with stackable, market-driven academic programs that meet the unique needs of adult students and employers.

This model maximizes transfer credits and leverages prior learning assessment to lower costs, expand access, and increase flexibility for adults who need it the most in the Greater Philadelphia Region.

Our Students: At a Glance

Enrollment

Total students: 1,359

Undergraduate: 1,229

Graduate: 130

Gender

76% women

24% men

Ethnicity

53.7% Black/African American

20.2% White

11.8% Hispanic/Latino

2.9% Asian

9.1% Chose not to disclose

1.3% Two or more races

0.1% Non-citizen/Non-resident

0.5% Native American/Alaskan

0.4% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

Average Age

39 years old

Location

52% Philadelphia

71% Pennsylvania

Financial Aid

54.5% Receive Pell grants

75.6% Some form of financial aid

Accreditations & Approvals

- American Bar Association (ABA)
- Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP)
- Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management (CAHIIM)
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)
- Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) alignment



CAREER BRIDGE



Like GPS for Navigating Career Change

Career Bridge at Peirce College prepares students with the skills, certifications and credentials needed for jobs that pay family-sustaining wages, and guides them to job opportunities in our region.

Using a career-integrated advising model, the College first identifies a student's career goal and then guides the student through the program to achieve that goal in less than a year.

Peirce College has embedded professional, employer-recognized certifications into short, stackable Career Tracks that validate students possess the skills and credentials employers are looking for.

Graduates are connected with employment opportunities in the region and receive personalized coaching and assistance to apply for jobs, prepare for interviews and leverage the Peirce College alumni network.

The Career Bridge program is designed to accelerate and prepare a diverse talent pipeline for employers and support the region's equitable recovery. Peirce College has raised approximately \$1 million to support the program and is working with local workforce agencies to recruit students and employers interested in participating in the program.

For more information on Career Bridge or becoming a partner, contact Dr. Stephanie Gibbs-Emenaka at:

sgibbs-emenaka@peirce.edu or 215.670.9279

Program at a Glance

Target Audiences:

- Low-wage workers, displaced workers and those who are unemployed, as well as veterans and their spouses and other career changers.

Program Length:

- Students can complete the program in less than a year, depending on their course loads and schedules.

Career Tracks:

- Medical Billing
- Medical Coding
- IT User Support
- IT Network Support
- Cybersecurity
- Project Management
- Financial & Business Operations
- Sales & Client Service
(see back for more information)

Customization:

- New tracks can be developed based on the needs of employers, partners and students.

Current Career Tracks

Medical Billing: *16 stackable credits*

- Certificate of Proficiency in Medical Billing
- American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) Certified Professional Biller (CPB™) certification.

Medical Coding: *22 stackable credits*

- Certificate of Proficiency in Medical Coding
- American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) Certified Professional Coder (CPC®) certification.

IT User Support: *16 stackable credits*

- Certificate of Proficiency in IT Support
- CompTIA IT Fundamentals (ITF+) certification
- CompTIA and A+ certification (optional)

IT Network Support: *16 stackable credits*

- Certificate of Proficiency in IT Support
- CompTIA IT Fundamentals (ITF+) certification
- CompTIA Network+ certification (optional)

Cybersecurity: *19 stackable credits*

- Certificate of Proficiency in Cybersecurity
- CompTIA Security+ certification

Project Management: *16 stackable credits*

- Certificate of Proficiency in Project Management Administration
- Google Project Management Certificate

Financial & Business Operations: *19 stackable credits*

- Certificate of Proficiency in Client Service
- FINRA Securities Industry Essentials (SIE) certification

Sales/Client Service: *16 stackable credits*

- Certificate of Proficiency in Client Service.

How It Works: 5 Steps

Students work one-on-one with advisors and counselors to complete the program.

- 1** Peirce works with students to explore and navigate sustainable employment opportunities aligned with their career goals.
- 2** Peirce determines how a student's existing skills, training and prior learning may map to skills required for sustainable occupations.
- 3** Peirce determines if a student can earn credit for those skills via the College's Prior Learning Assessment program.
- 4** Peirce identifies the training, certification and credentials still needed for the desired occupation; students then complete the Career track to acquire the training, certification and credentials needed for the job.
- 5** Peirce connects students with employment opportunities in the region, and helps students apply for jobs, prepare for interviews and leverage the College's alumni network.

Mary Ellen Caro, Ed.D.
President & CEO, Peirce College
Testimony for the House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing – Affordability and Online Options in Higher Education
October 26, 2022

Good morning, Chairman Bizzarro and all of the distinguished members of the committee. My name is Mary Ellen Caro and I am the president & CEO of Peirce College, an independent, nonprofit, regionally accredited college in Philadelphia. We are one of the country's earliest adopters of online education and the first college in Philadelphia to offer a degree program completely online. I want to thank you all, and especially Vice-Chair Isaacson, for taking up this important issue of affordable online education in higher education, as it plays a critical role in expanding access and removing barriers for many students. The nexus of higher education and workforce has never been more critical.

I am here today to testify on behalf of working adult learners, and the institutions that serve them, and to advocate for investment, acceptance, and expansion of non-traditional academic environments and programs, such as online learning, to create greater equity and improve the outcomes of those furthering their education in Pennsylvania.

Peirce is the only college or university in Pennsylvania that is dedicated exclusively to serving working adult students, and U.S. News & World Report recently ranked Peirce as having the highest percentage of adult students at any college or university in the country. Peirce is also a federally designated Predominantly Black Institution and a Minority Serving Institution.

At Peirce, we have always done things differently because of the type of students we serve. Adults and other nontraditional learners have unique needs that most traditional college students do not face. Our students cannot sacrifice their personal and professional responsibilities to advance their education and their careers. Online education has removed this barrier for thousands of students at Peirce over the past 30 years.

Peirce College was founded in 1865, to provide career-focused education for soldiers returning from the Civil War and was one of the country's first schools to embrace women as students. We have a long history of serving adults from across the Commonwealth and our mission is to empower adult learners to improve their lives by achieving career goals through academic offerings aligned with evolving workforce needs.

Today, we serve approximately 1,400 undergraduate and graduate students, 85% of whom are residents of the Commonwealth. Our student body is 75% female, and more than 73% of our students identify as persons of color. The average age of a Peirce student is 37. While Peirce has served adult learners since our founding in 1865, the traditional idea of a college student is now changing dramatically for other institutions. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, more than 40% of all students currently enrolled in a college or university are 25 or older.

While many have the impression that independent nonprofit colleges serve wealthy students, that is not the case. Peirce students are largely from a traditionally underserved segment of adult learners in search of a way to transform their lives and those of their families. More than half of Peirce students are considered low-income and 44% of all low-income students in Pennsylvania are enrolled at independent nonprofit schools. Our students demonstrate grit and determination in completing their programs despite the multitude of challenges facing them. We are proud to serve these students and take very seriously our role in advocating for policies and investments that address their needs and fuel their success.

Students come to Peirce looking for a pathway to a better future. They are faced with myriad obstacles that research shows puts them at greater risk of not completing their postsecondary degree and accumulating debt without a credential. Because of this, Peirce's programs are stackable, career-focused, and correlate with high-demand occupations that pay family-sustaining wages. Classes are offered in flexible, online formats to reduce costs and we are always looking for new ways to accelerate completion and improve outcomes.

Because of our long and innovative history, we have a unique perspective into nontraditional methods of delivering higher education. We have always created ways to deliver higher education around the needs of our students and employer partners. For purposes of this discussion, higher education covers a broad spectrum of credit bearing and non-credit bearing programs, embedded industry credentials and other non-traditional paths of learning. There is no doubt that as higher education continues to become unbundled, the business models underpinning market driven educational options will require partnerships among constituents and providers to meet adult learner needs. I maintain that attention to these needs is not optional but essential to help improve access, lower cost and transform lives.

This may sound strange coming from a college president, but we know that many employers no longer require a degree for a good job. We are seeing seismic shifts in hiring practices – especially following the COVID-19 pandemic – and a baccalaureate degree is no longer the only way to a family-sustaining career. Employers are increasingly seeking employees who possess the skills for a particular position and the degree requirement is no longer required for many jobs. It is imperative that we begin to focus on shorter, and more flexible and affordable paths to credential attainment, which include certificates and industry certifications.

That is not to say there is no value in a baccalaureate or graduate education – quite the opposite. Earnings are still higher with a degree; advancement opportunities often require power skills taught in bachelor's program; and earning a baccalaureate degree is a necessity for many. But the path to get there is changing rapidly and colleges must adapt to focus on stackable milestones, flexible deliveries, and skills attainment.

Adult learners typically do not have an educational journey that is linear. Many have started and stopped out of post-secondary education and have previous college credits. Peirce College and other adult focused institutions enable students to transfer those credits, thus accelerating their completion. Peirce welcomes transfer credit from accredited institutions. We accept at least 90 credits from community college partners.

Adult students have very different needs than traditional aged college students. In addition to the flexibility of online learning, they need shorter programs that prepare them for in-demand jobs a lot sooner than a typical two-year or four-year degree. They need the opportunity to earn credit for professional and military training and other college-level knowledge they already have. And they need guidance to understand which professional certifications employers are looking for and the support needed to earn those certifications. At Peirce, supporting these students begins "Day 1" with career coaching and student services.

This must all be completed in a modality and timeframe that works for these students; not what is easiest for an institution to administer.

Adult learners reflect a wide range of backgrounds and challenges, so it is important to consider the entire spectrum of needs of our citizens. This is why, at Peirce, we are committed to working closely with all of the colleagues you see here today, to ensure that the ecosystem is represented.

At Peirce College, we are in the business of removing barriers and empowering students to achieve their goals. Our students – and most of the 39 million people in the United States with some college credits but no degree – are generally hyper-focused on career advancement. They know that higher education is the path to get there. To meet this need, we provide solutions that help students see results sooner than traditional programs. Our online model provides stackable opportunities so students can earn a credential in less than a year, improve their career prospects, and then continue on to a bachelor's program while fully employed. This provides tangible outcomes during the journey and serves to motivate students.

While many barriers to higher education are systemic, others encountered by students are a result of traditional models of higher education. For instance, in-person synchronous learning requirements often exclude adult and non-traditional students who are raising families, caring for loved ones, working full-time, or those who lack access to reliable transportation. Flexible online options, with supports provided by the institution, can provide true equitable access to a higher education curriculum. At Peirce, we have seen the impact of this in the decades since we began offering online programs.

Removing the requirement of time-in-seat can also open up access to those often marginalized. For instance, someone who has managed a retail store for a decade may not need to sit through a Management 101 course. Providing online prior learning assessment opportunities, such as test-out or portfolio assessment, can save students money on tuition, shorten their path to completion and get them to career advancement faster. It also adds value and currency to what they have learned outside the traditional classroom.

Additionally, the materials we use to teach curriculum must be critically evaluated to ensure they provide value for the cost. The average price of a college textbook is currently estimated at \$105.37 ([Education Data Initiative](#)). But there are other options. Thanks to several grants provided by the Commonwealth and the federal government, Peirce has transitioned 50 of our courses to utilize open and affordable educational resources, which are learning materials provided through a Creative Commons or other open license that students can access at little or no cost. We intend to continue transitioning every course we can to this model, to save our students the burden of choosing between their education and their basic needs.

These flexible options provide students with the framework they need to be successful and meet their goal of career advancement. In turn, they fuel the economy of the Commonwealth and our communities.

I highlight the barriers of long programs, synchronous learning requirements, expensive textbooks, and inattention to prior learning assessment because they are, in many cases, what is holding back higher education from reaching all those who need it. Traditional collegiate models are feasible for fewer and fewer students every year. Data from the National Student Clearinghouse indicates that traditionally-aged students are now enrolling at online colleges more than ever. While many of my colleagues are doing tremendous work to move their operations to these new flexible models, I encourage us all to examine whether we are truly re-envisioning how we offer education, or if we are simply doing what we have always done, just not in a physical space.

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, we as a collegiate community took a moment to assess if students' needs were being met. We saw that our students were being disproportionately impacted by changes to the labor market. What we observed anecdotally was later confirmed in [a report from Pew Charitable Trusts](#) examining the impact of COVID-19 in Philadelphia, including job losses. Researchers found that “Black and Hispanic residents of Philadelphia were two and three times more likely than white residents, respectively, to lose jobs and income” during the pandemic. So, we took a step back and reexamined our portfolio of programs, evaluated our support services, and realigned our employer

pathways to better serve students and this new reality. Given Peirce's 156 years of experience helping adult learners transition and advance in their careers, we as an institution knew that we could help fuel recovery for our students and the Commonwealth in a unique way. From that self-reflection and in direct response to the need for a strong recovery plan, Peirce College developed a new program called Career Bridge, to assist those in our region and throughout the Commonwealth with shorter, credential embedded and credit bearing courses that stand alone or can be transferred into degree programs.

Modeled after a formerly successful program for opportunity youth, the Career Bridge program uses proven methodology applied to today's unique circumstances to provide upskilling opportunities for people who lost jobs, primarily due to COVID-19, and many of whom will return to a workforce where their jobs are no longer in demand or even exist. Career Bridge directly translates Peirce's mission into action. In a matter of months, graduates will be qualified for high-demand, high-growth occupations that pay family-sustaining wages, including:

- Medical Coding
- Medical Billing
- IT User Support
- IT Network Support
- Cybersecurity
- Project Management
- Financial and Business Operations
- Sales & Client Service

Career Bridge is designed to accelerate an equitable recovery by leveraging the current skill sets of unemployed and low-wage workers through prior learning assessment opportunities, and providing the additional training, certifications, and credentials needed for them to access careers that support both the individual student and their family. All courses are offered in asynchronous online formats, with optional synchronous meetings with professors and classmates available, and OAER course materials used wherever possible.

The mission of Career Bridge is to leverage skills that students already have and add new ones that will most efficiently lead students to a new career path that pays a family sustaining wage. For example, a bank teller may have years of experience and a good skill set but struggles to find work after the pandemic. Since bank tellers already possess a large percentage of the technical and power skills for quality customer service and service management roles, Career Bridge would help connect this bank teller to a new career track that builds on these existing skills. Current career tracks for Career Bridge that have similar competencies to bank tellers but include the need for a short upskilling component include IT User Support, Project Management, and Financial and Business Operations.

Our first graduate of Career Bridge was a student who stopped out in 2020 due to the pandemic, but was interested in re-enrolling in 2021. His previously earned credits counted for 50% (9 credits) of those needed for the Client Service Certificate of Proficiency. He finished the remaining credits in less than a year and graduated in June 2022. He has since applied all of the credits from his certificate program to an Associate in Science in Business Administration, which he completed in August 2022. He is currently enrolled in a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration program and received a job offer in September 2022. While still enrolled at Peirce, he is now a Human Resources Coordinator for a large health system in the Philadelphia region, making more than \$54,000 a year.

To further promote the role of prior learning assessment in Career Bridge and our other programs, we recently launched a proprietary tool that helps students quickly identify their roadmap to completion. Through an interactive online platform, they can see the credentials, certifications, and skills required for in-demand occupations; match up Peirce programs to these industries; estimate how their transfer credits and professional and military training apply to credential requirements; and find real job opportunities correlated to their chosen path. We anticipate this will accelerate the onboarding process for students, better capture all relevant previous experiences, and ensure they are applied to students' programs.

I highlight this program to illustrate what a solution could look like for all Pennsylvanians who have been displaced by the pandemic, and who could benefit from investment by the Commonwealth.

As I mentioned previously, adult students need to be treated differently. Traditional models do not meet their needs or fit into their lives and create affordability issues for most students. We need to invest in programs that work around the unique needs of adults and prepare them for in-demand jobs. As you evaluate the types of programs you will consider for investment, there are a number of things I urge you to remember for this unique population:

- **Stackability is critical for adults.** Being able to earn credit for transfer credits, professional and military training and other college-level knowledge saves them time and money.
- **Time-to-completion is also critical for adults – and employers.** Adults often do not have two or four years to prepare for a new job. With the right type of programs, we can get people back to work in one year or sooner.
- **Programs should be able to apply across industries.** For example, our Career Bridge track in project management is directly applicable to applied manufacturing, agricultural businesses, and more.
- **Employer participation is critical for all parties.** When adults enter a training program, they need to see results. A credential is one success indicator, but the most important one is connection to a career that pays a family-sustaining wage. At Peirce, our Career Bridge program is working with employers across the Commonwealth to provide interview opportunities and internships for all participants. Our program curriculums have also been developed with direct employer assistance, so we know that we're preparing graduates with the knowledge employers are actually looking for.
- **Academic credentials and industry certifications should be combined to demonstrate real value.** Academic certificates and degree programs are essential to illustrating skills mastery and competency attainment. However, to complement these credentials and to further demonstrate value to employers, we have tied each of our Career Bridge tracks to an industry-recognized credential that takes it a step further. For instance, in our Medical Coding track, students earn a Certificate of Proficiency in Medical Coding, and are also prepared to sit for the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) Certified Coding Specialist (CCS®) exam and Certified Coding Specialist- Physician-based (CCS-P®) exam, as well as the American Academy of Professional Coders™ (AAPC) Certified Professional Coder CPC® exam. We also pay for students to sit for these exams, to remove additional obstacles that may prevent them from advancement and increased earnings. For reference:
 - [Medical coders who hold CCS® certification and have one year of experience earn an average annual salary of \\$60,160.](#)
 - [Medical coders who hold the CPC® certification earn an average annual salary of \\$55,100.00 in Pennsylvania.](#)

In testifying today, I encourage further partnerships between government and higher education to meet the needs of Pennsylvania citizens and fuel the innovation of the higher education sector. Our students rely on public funding to fuel their success and I believe it is a wise investment for the Commonwealth.

I would also like to make a few recommendations for next steps.

1. With surplus funds available for the first time in decades, create opportunities for adults throughout the Commonwealth to upskill and reskill in ways that work for them. Online education is a way to increase equitable access for many, but general higher education costs remain a barrier. Opportunities for investment are possible through programs that provide scholarships for short, stackable credentialing programs.
2. Continue to invest in adult students in general. Make sure that they are included in PHEAA funding discussions and future grant opportunities.
3. Eliminate the biases that remain toward online education, and recognize that the new normal is here to stay. Wherever possible, remove any exclusions of online learners from funding or certification opportunities.
4. Encourage innovation and out-of-the-box thinking. Trailblazers like Peirce and my colleagues at Western Governors University need investment opportunities to expand programs like PLA, textbook elimination and more.

Thank you for your attention and your consideration of this very important subject. If I can answer any questions, I will be happy to do so.