



Member-Driven Advocacy: The Work Behind Federal Funding

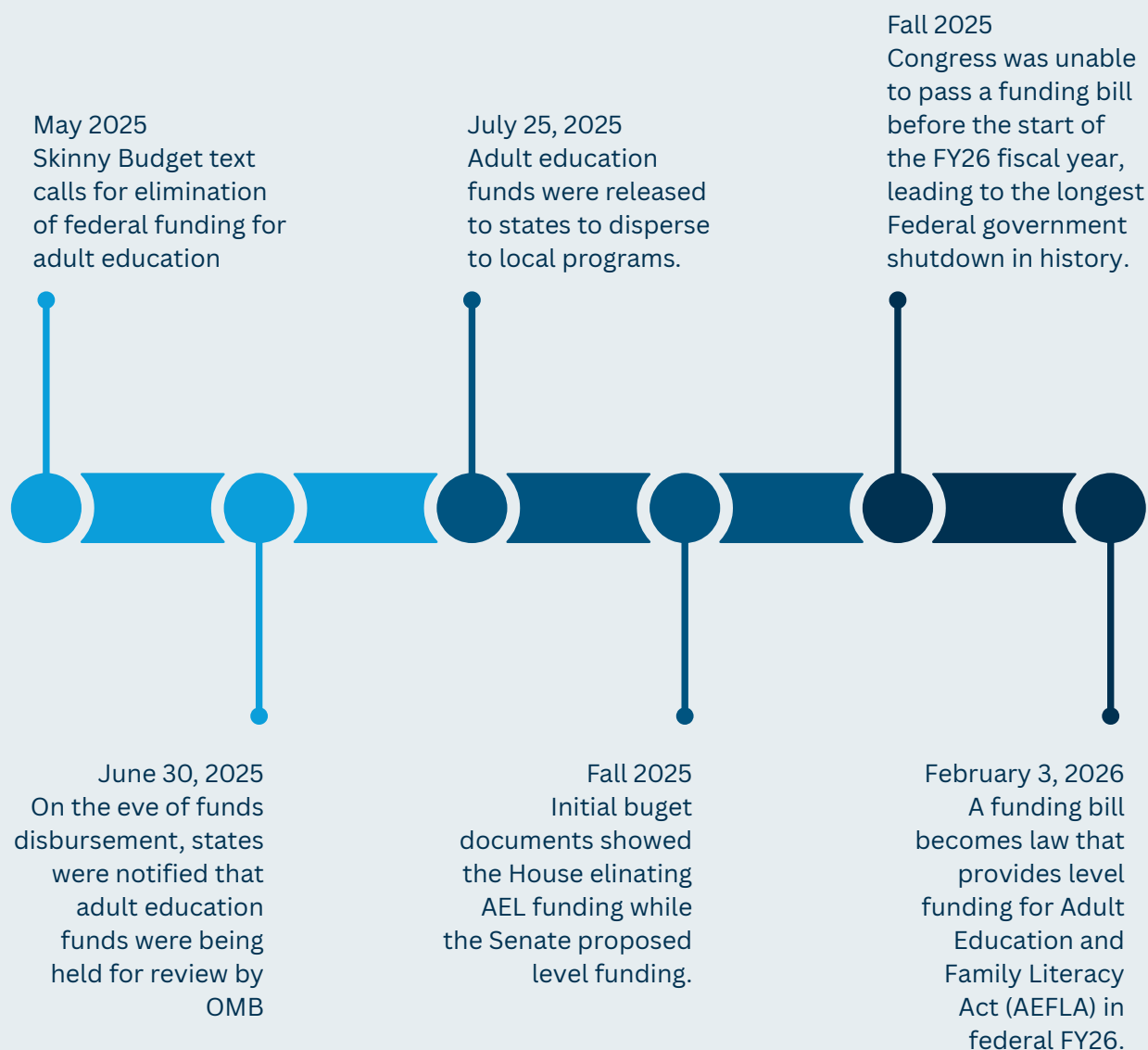
COABE members played a critical role in securing federal funding for adult education!

From January 2025 through the signing of the final appropriations bill on February 3, 2026, members consistently engaged lawmakers, built lasting relationships, and kept adult education front and center throughout the federal appropriations process.

This sustained advocacy ensured that legislators heard directly and repeatedly from constituents about the importance and impact of adult education.



An Uncertain Path to Funding



Funding complexity was heightened by an interagency agreement (IAA) transitioning the Office of Career Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) from the Department of Education (ED) to Department of Labor (DOL) and an interpretative rule concerning the implementation of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA).

Note: Wherever mentioned, FY 25 refers to the federal fiscal year, which is program year 2025-26. FY 26 is program year 2026-27.



Advocacy by the Numbers

Between January 2025 and February 2026, COABE members and supporters mobilized at scale to advocate for adult education funding.

56,242

Emails were sent to Members of Congress using COABE's 3 Clicks advocacy system, urging support for adult education in the federal budget.

Emails were sent from every state and DC, ensuring that Members of Congress heard directly from their constituents.

Over the course of the year, members documented 600+ advocacy events and media appearances, with an additional 12 events recorded in the first 35 days of 2026.

Members also secured 111 proclamations across 37 states, publicly recognizing the impact and importance of adult education and literacy.

In the past 13 months, COABE members logged 235 meetings with lawmakers, not including additional impromptu conversations that occurred throughout the year.



Advocacy Across States & Communities

Over the past 13 months, COABE members and partnering state associations brought adult education advocacy directly to their state capitols.

February 2025

Indiana – IAACE

New Mexico – NMAEA

March 2025

Mississippi – MAACE

April 2025

California – CCAE

Oklahoma – OKAAACE

Vermont - VAELN

August 2025

Michigan – MACAE

September 2025

North Dakota – NDALL

January 2026

Missouri – MAACE

Indiana – IAACE

February 2026

Utah – AEAUT

Arizona – AALL

New Mexico – NMAEA

Kentucky - KAACE

South Dakota - NDALL

COABE's Invest in the Midwest 14-State Tour

In 2025, COABE CEO Sharon Bonney led a 14-state tour, meeting with state association leadership and visiting local adult education programs. The tour provided an opportunity to see programs in action, strengthen relationships, and hear firsthand about the challenges and successes of adult education across the country.



Member Spotlight: **Advocacy in Action**

Heather Tharp
2025 SAAEF Fellow – West Virginia

Heather Tharp, a 2025 SAAEF Fellow for West Virginia, has built a strong relationship with Senator Shelley Moore Capito's office over the past year.

As Chair of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee, Senator Capito plays a critical role in setting federal funding levels for adult education. Building and sustaining a strong relationship with the Chair of this committee ensured that adult education priorities were communicated directly to one of the most influential decision-makers in the federal appropriations process.

Highlights of Heather's work include:

- Initiating contact with Senator Capito during an event on a mountain trail, which marked the beginning of an ongoing relationship and regular communication.
- Maintaining consistent engagement with the Senator's office over the summer, contributing to Senator Capito leading a letter urging the release of adult education funds being held by OMB.
- Visiting Senator Capito's Washington, DC office during COABE's Flood the Hill event in September to reinforce the importance of adult education efforts.
- Being invited to Senator Capito's annual Christmas party at her home, which provided additional opportunities to discuss adult education with the Senator and her staff.

In addition to leading the July 2025 letter supporting the release of adult education funding, Senator Capito's role on the Senate LHHS Appropriations Committee further demonstrated her support when initial funding levels released in Fall 2025 maintained level funding for adult education.