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2026

ADULT EDUCATION
TALKING POINTS





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ADULT EDUCATION

TALKING POINTS OVERVIEW

I. ADULT EDUCATION SERVES A LARGE POPULATION OF AMERICANS IN A VARIETY OF LOCATIONS.

II. ADULT EDUCATION HELPS HARD WORKING AMERICANS SECURE EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES.

III. ADULT EDUCATION HELPS EMPLOYERS BY DEVELOPING A SKILLED WORKFORCE PROFICIENT IN READING COMPREHENSION, BASIC MATH SKILLS AND DIGITAL AND INFORMATION LITERACY.

IV. ADULT EDUCATION HELPS THE ECONOMY BY ADDRESSING A GROWING SKILLS GAP AND LESSENING THE NEED FOR ASSISTANCE FROM FEDERAL BENEFITS PROGRAMS.

V. INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACT

I. ADULT EDUCATION SERVES A LARGE POPULATION OF AMERICANS IN A VARIETY OF LOCATIONS.

TALKING POINT #1

Adult education focuses on a population that is challenging to reach.

More than 2,000 federally funded adult education programs provide services to 1.5 million learners nationwide and experience a 72% success rate with this population.^[i]



[i] National Center for Education Statistics [NCES]. (2019). Data Point: Adult Literacy in the United States. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/>

TALKING POINT #2

Educating adults creates stronger communities.

Low skilled adults are:



Better-educated parents raise better-educated, more successful children who are less likely to end up in poverty or prison. Inmate participation in adult education reduces recidivism by 43%.^[i] Higher education levels are also correlated with lower rates of chronic diseases like diabetes and asthma.^[ii]

[i] Davis, L. M., Bozick, R., Steele, J. L., Saunders, J., Miles, J. N. (2013, August 22). Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs that Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults. RAND.

[ii] Zajacova, A., & Lawrence, E. M. (2018, April). The relationship between education and health: reducing disparities through a contextual approach. Annual Review of Public Health, 39, 273-289. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031816-044628>

II. ADULT EDUCATION HELPS HARD WORKING AMERICANS SECURE EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES.

TALKING POINT #3

Research shows that when our nation invests in adult education, outcomes improve

In the most recent reporting year, 72 percent of adults participating in a federally funded adult education program earned a high school equivalency (HSE), up from 66 percent in the prior year. A longitudinal study of adult education participants found that participation in at least 100 hours of adult education was correlated with an almost \$10,000 increase in annual earnings. With increased investments and attention placed on the adult education pipeline, even more adults can become educated and quickly make progress in earning the skills needed to obtain better jobs.^[ii]



[i] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. (2019, March). Adult education and family literacy act of 1998 annual report to Congress, program year 2014–15. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED626812>

[ii] Reder, S. (2014). The Impact of ABS Program Participation on Long-Term Economic Outcomes. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education.

TALKING POINT #4

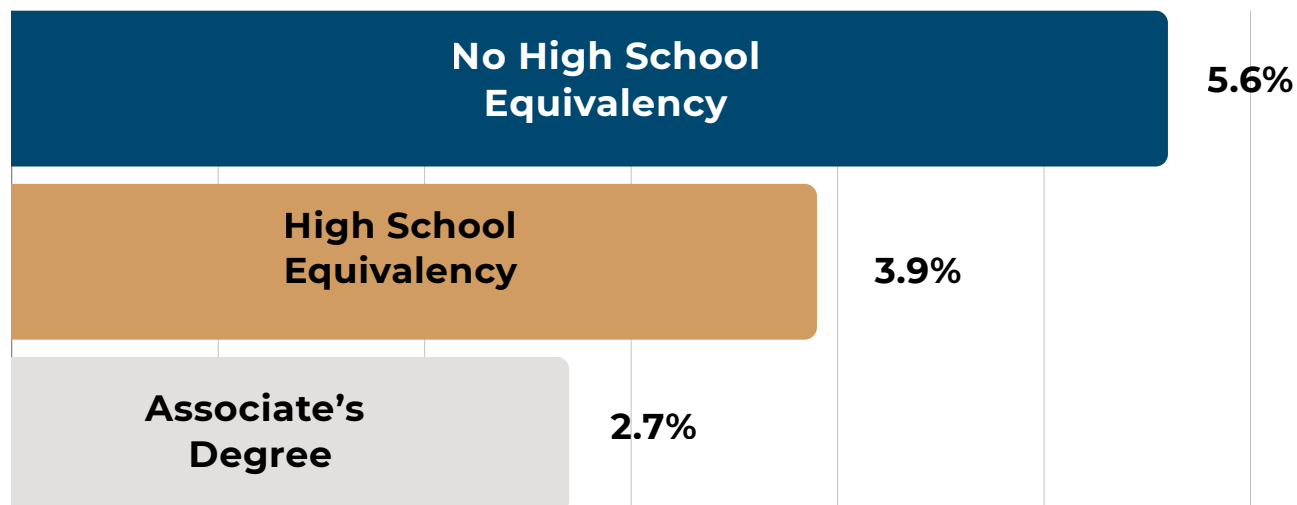
Research shows that earnings increase and unemployment rates decrease with educational attainment.

On average, the earnings of an individual with a high school diploma or its equivalent are **27% higher** than those without. ^[i]



Additionally, the unemployment rate of those without a high school diploma is 5.6%, while the unemployment rate of those with a high school diploma drops to 3.9%. For those with an Associate's degree, the unemployment rate drops to 2.7%.

Unemployment Rate by Academic Achievement



[i] "Education Pays." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Table 5.1 Unemployment rates and earnings by educational attainment, 2023, August 29, 2024. <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/unemployment-earnings-education.htm>.

TALKING POINT #5

30% of GED® recipients go on to higher education and have a 60% persistence rate.

More than 30% of all HSE graduates enroll in college within one year of taking the test, and more than 60% of those college enrollees re-enroll for a second year.

But college enrollment and persistence rates are even higher for college-ready HSE graduates who say that educational gain is their primary motivation for taking the test: Among the highest-achieving, educationally motivated HSE graduates, college enrollment rates exceed 50% and 2nd year persistence rates exceed 70%—a far cry from 20 years ago, when GED®'s own longitudinal analysis found that more than 75% of their graduates who enrolled in college dropped out after a single semester



3 in 10

GED® grads go on to
higher ed



6 in 10

GED® grads who enter
higher ed finish their degree

III. ADULT EDUCATION HELPS EMPLOYERS BY DEVELOPING A SKILLED WORKFORCE PROFICIENT IN READING COMPREHENSION, BASIC MATH SKILLS AND DIGITAL AND INFORMATION LITERACY.

TALKING POINT #6

A recent analysis found that 92% of jobs require digital skills, despite one third of workers having low or no digital skills. ^[i]

Despite this, most adults in the workforce must use computers every day on the job.^[ii] We must invest in digital literacy to ensure a competitive workforce. Federally funded adult education programs provide digital literacy services while providing literacy, numeracy, citizenship, and workforce readiness skills. In addition to digital literacy skills, information literacy skills are crucial for adult learners so they are prepared for accelerating advances in technology in the workplace.



That's about 70.8 million working-age Americans who are ill-equipped to use digital literacy skills!

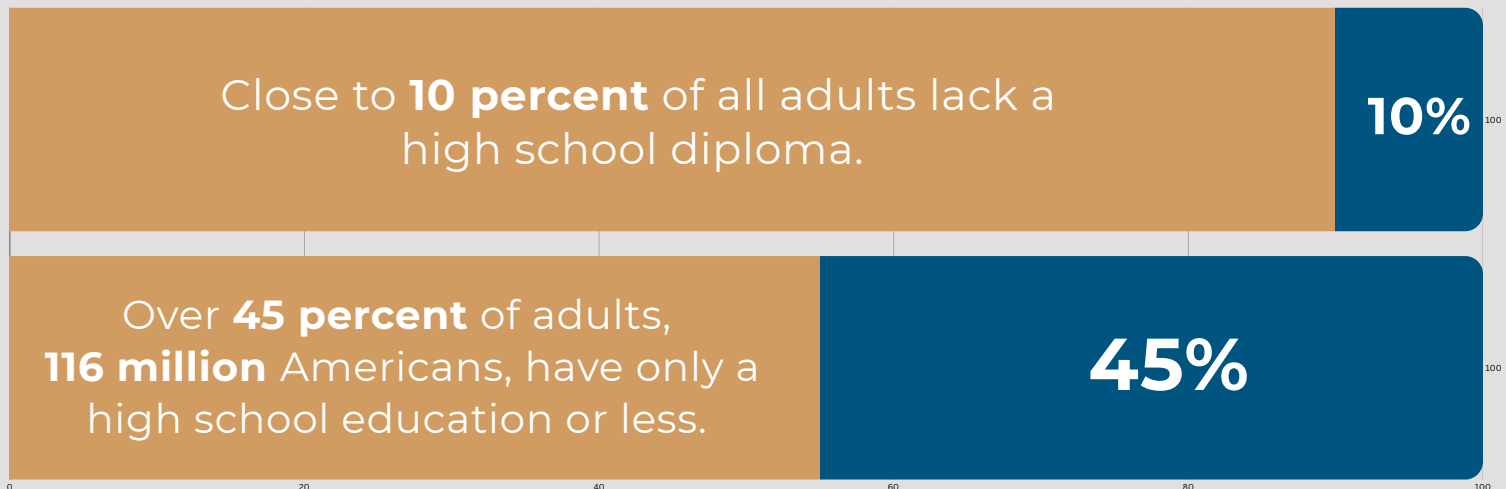
[i] 17 National Skills Coalition. (2025, July 9). New report: 92% of jobs require digital skills; one-third of workers have low or no digital skills due to historic underinvestment and structural inequities. <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/news/press-releases/new-report-92-of-jobs-require-digital-skills-one-third-of-workers-have-low-or-no-digital-skills-due-to-historic-underinvestment-structural-inequities/>

[ii] National Center for Education Statistics [NCES]. (2019). Data Point: Adult Literacy in the United States. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/>

TALKING POINT #7

As of 2024, 23 million adults (25 years+) had not received a high school diploma. ^[i]

Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that over the next decade, there will be over seven million projected job openings each year in occupations typically requiring a high school diploma or its equivalent and nearly two million jobs requiring at least some postsecondary. Further, it is predicted that by 2031, 4.7 million job openings will be available for workers with a high school diploma compared to only 1.3 million job openings for those with less than a high school diploma. ^[ii]



Currently, over 50 million Americans have jobs that require no more than a high school education, but jobs with this comparatively low level of educational attainment are disappearing quickly. Americans need additional education and upskilling opportunities to fill those job openings and contribute to our economy.

[i] U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). Educational attainment in the United States. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2024/demo/educational-attainment/cps-detailed-tables.html>

[ii] Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith, Martin Van Der Werf, and Michael C. Quinn. After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2023. cew.georgetown.edu/Projections2031.

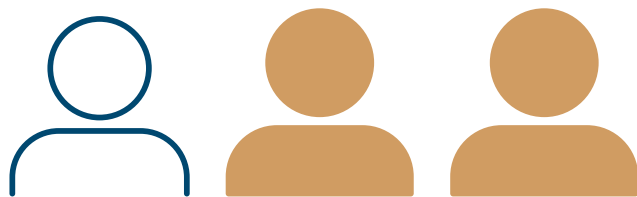
TALKING POINT #8

Adult education can train students to fill the jobs industry needs today.

A recent survey found that 69% of employers in the U.S. said they are struggling to find the skilled talent they need and a national analysis found that in half of U.S. labor markets, more than 50% of middle-skill credentials would need to shift to different fields to meet projected workforce demands through 2031.^{[i] [ii]}

By 2030, companies stand to miss out on a collective \$8.5 trillion in revenue if they fail to fill the projected 85 million skilled-job vacancies.^[iii]

These industries don't need to wait until 2030 to experience shortages though. A recent study found that 79% of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have skills gaps,^[iv] and in a cross-industry survey of more than 500 employers, one in three indicated that their average employee lacks the necessary literacy skills to perform their job effectively.^[v]



1 in 3 employers stated that their average employee lacks the necessary literacy skills to perform their job effectively

[i] ManpowerGroup. (2026). Global talent shortage. <https://www.manpowergroup.com/en/insights/2026-global-talent-shortage>

[ii] Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. (2024). The Great Misalignment. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/greatmisalignment/>

[iii] MIT Technology Review. (2023, September 21). New approaches to the tech talent shortage. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/09/21/1079695/new-approaches-to-the-tech-talent-shortage/>

[iv] AICPA & CIMA. (2025). Mind the skills gap. <https://www.aicpa-cima.com/professional-insights/download/mind-the-skills-gap>

[v] All In: The Adult Literacy & Learning Impact Network, "Advancing Adult Literacy: Mobilizing Business & the Beltway," (2023). <https://allinliteracy.org/advancing-adult-literacy-mobilizing-business-the-beltway/>

TALKING POINT #9

Adult education is good for business.

Companies miss out on growth opportunities, product development suffers, and profits stagnate without a skilled national workforce. America needs an “all hands on deck” approach to bring every available worker to the labor pool.



Adult education brings businesses options by preparing existing workers with competing life and family responsibilities with the skills that companies need through flexible classrooms and curriculum.

TALKING POINT #10

English language learners are important to the job market.

Significant portions of the U.S. labor force rely heavily on foreign-born workers, such as the IT and construction industries, at roughly 4.5 and 3.5 million, respectively, and nearly 2.8 million—or 18%—of health care workers. Foreign-born workers account for one in every four doctors, one in five registered nurses, and one in four health aides.^[i]

Nearly **1 in 5** adult workers in the U.S. were born in another country.^[ii]

26 million people in the U.S. have limited English proficiency.^[iii]



We must allow these adults opportunities to increase their English language proficiency, improve their basic skills, or help them achieve an HSE if necessary, so that they are prepared to join and contribute to the workforce.

[i] Lightcast. (2025). The rising storm: Building a future-ready workforce to withstand the looming labor shortage. <https://lightcast.io/resources/research/the-rising-storm>

[ii] Fry, R., Horowitz, J. M., & Kochhar, R. (2024, December 10). Key labor force trends. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/12/10/key-labor-force-trends/>

[iii] Gonzalez-Barrera, A., et al. (2024, May 16). Language barriers in health care: Findings from the KFF survey on racism, discrimination, and health. KFF. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/language-barriers-in-health-care-findings-from-the-kff-survey-on-racism-discrimination-and-health/> 7National Skills Coalition. (n.d.). Analysis of long-term occupational projections from state labor/employment agencies.

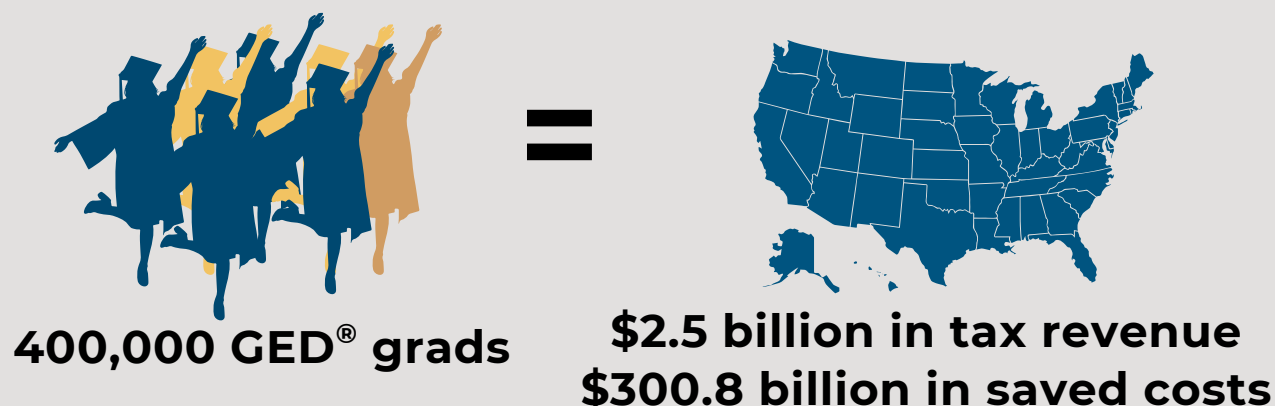
IV. ADULT EDUCATION HELPS THE ECONOMY BY ADDRESSING A GROWING SKILLS GAP AND LESSENING THE NEED FOR ASSISTANCE FROM FEDERAL BENEFITS PROGRAMS.

TALKING POINT #11

The return on investment from adult education is undeniable.

Low literacy costs the U.S. economy over \$300.8 billion.^[i]

The adult education graduate can typically earn close to \$10,000 more per year once they get their high school diploma.^[ii] And as we gain more skilled workers, the entire economy benefits as well. For every 400,000 adults who earn a high school diploma, we gain \$2.5 billion back in tax revenue and reduced expenses.^[iii] That's \$6,250 per person!



[i] World Literacy Foundation. (2023). The economic & social cost of illiteracy: A snapshot of illiteracy in a global context. <https://f005.backblazeb2.com/file/WLF-FILES-WEB/WLF-Reports/The-Economic-Social-Cost-of-Illiteracy-2023.pdf>

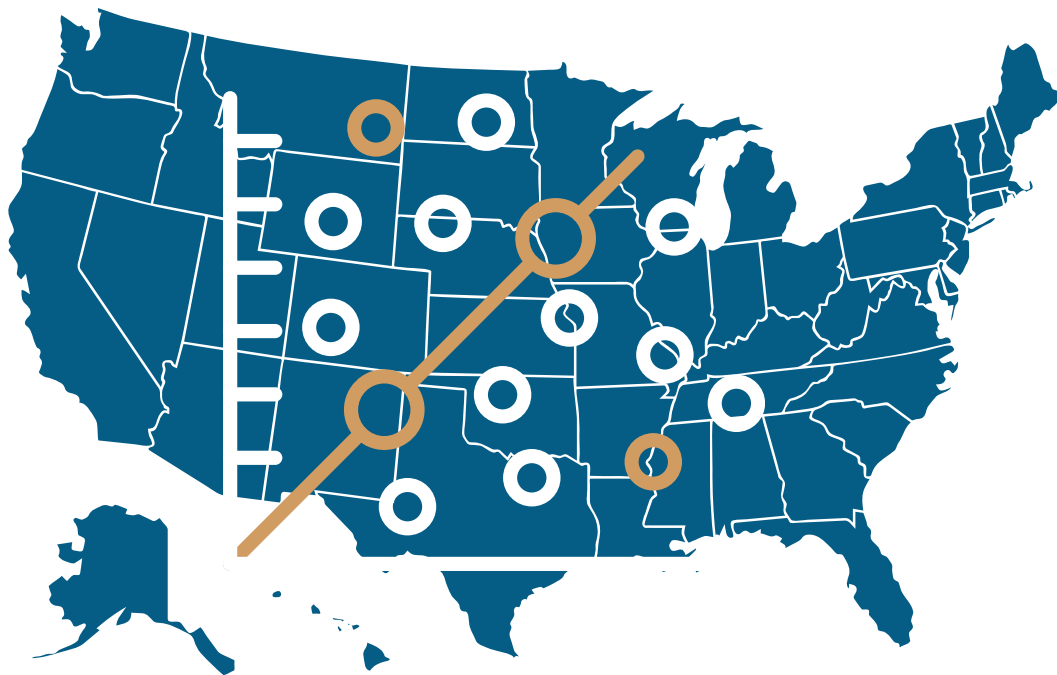
[ii] Morgan, Kevin, et al. The Case for Investment in Adult Basic Education. ProLiteracy, 2017, <https://www.proliteracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Case-for-Investment-Reder.pdf>.

[iii] McLendon, L., Jones, D. and M. Rosin. (2011). The Return on Investment from Adult Education and Training. McGraw Hill Research Foundation.

TALKING POINT #12

Expanding your focus on adult education will fill more jobs.

Some jobs will be filled by those currently on a postsecondary track or by those who can easily be retrained and provided with a new skill set. However, in order to support local businesses and build the U.S. economy, we must focus on lower-skilled workers to meet future demand.

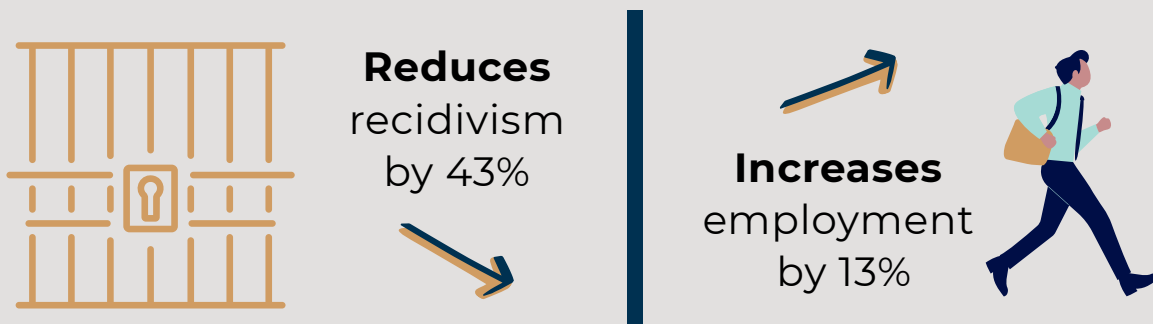


Without a major correction, tens of millions of Americans will be unprepared to fill the next wave of jobs, and we could face a dramatic increase in unemployment nationwide. We must ensure that the 43 million working-age Americans who possess low literacy skills get the education they need to access the skills training that will help fuel our future economy.

TALKING POINT #13

You can medicate, incarcerate, or educate.

A 2013 meta-analysis by the RAND Corporation found that participants in correctional education programs were 43% less likely to be rearrested^[i] than those who did not participate. This is a key finding that supports adult education programs in correctional facilities as a deterrent to recidivism. The same study also found that these programs were associated with a 13% higher employment rate after release.



- **Broader benefits:** Effective education programs can help with social skills, academic and vocational development, and provide strategies to help inmates deal with emotions, all of which can contribute to successful reintegration into society.
- **Cost-Effective:** Research indicates that these programs are cost-effective, with studies finding that they save money by reducing the costs associated with reincarceration.

This is just one of many reasons why sustaining the federal investment in adult education is essential—adult education delivers vital learning opportunities both behind and beyond the walls.

[i] Davis, L. M., Bozick, R., Steele, J. L., Saunders, J., Miles, J. N. (2013, August 22). Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs that Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults. RAND.

V. INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACT

TALKING POINT #14

Educating adults creates an intergenerational impact.



A mother's education level is the highest determinant of a child's academic success, correlated at 72%, outweighing all other factors including poverty. Elevating a mother's literacy level is a powerful lever to break intergenerational poverty cycles.

[i] National Institutes for Health. (2010). Improving mothers' literacy skills may be the best way to boost children's achievement. <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/news/releases/pages/102510-reading-family-income.aspx>



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