



ADULT EDUCATION ALUMNI STUDY

Adult Learners Report the Benefits of Adult Education Programs **Adult Education Alumni Study 2025 Update** **Don Finn, Ph.D.**

Adult education programs across the United States play a crucial role in supporting learners who seek to complete their high school education, improve their employment prospects, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. The COABE Alumni Study is a multi-year research project designed to assess the long-term impact of participation in adult education on its graduates. The findings from data collected between summer 2024 and summer 2025 complement the initial project findings reported in early 2024, highlighting the transformative power of adult education, particularly in advancing education, employment, civic engagement, and family life.

Alumni Study Background & Purpose

In 2021, COABE initiated an ongoing research effort to gather comprehensive longitudinal data on adult education alumni.



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This initiative addresses a critical gap in adult education research: the need for high-quality, student-centered data that demonstrate program effectiveness to policymakers and educators. Through collaboration with program administrators and educators nationwide, COABE developed and refined the study instrument to assess outcomes in employment, education, family and community relationships, financial stability, and civic engagement.

Participant Demographics

Understanding the characteristics of study participants provides essential context for interpreting program outcomes and identifying which populations adult education serves most effectively.

Between summer 2024 and summer 2025, 121 alumni from 26 states participated in the study. The demographics of this cohort were similar to those of the earlier study sample: 81% were female, 19% were male, and 2 participants did not disclose their gender. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 59 years; 2 participants did not disclose their age. The 18-29 age group was the largest (34%), followed by ages 40-49 (29%), 30-39 (27%), and 50-59 (12%).

Participants represented diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds: Caucasian (34%), African American (30%), Hispanic (22%), Asian (6%), Multiracial (4%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (3%), with the remaining participants not disclosing their ethnicity.

Before enrolling in adult education, 73% of participants had not earned a high school diploma or equivalent. Other participants reported varied educational backgrounds: high school diploma (11%), college diploma from another country (10%), or some college coursework without completing a degree (7%).



Nearly half of alumni (48%) had completed their adult education program within one year of taking the survey. Others had graduated one to two years prior (26%), three to five years prior (16%), five to seven years prior (2%), or more than eight years prior (8%). The most common locations for their programs were public schools (33%) and community colleges (31%). At the time of the survey, 69% of participants were employed, and 69% of those employed worked full-time.

Educational Goals and Achievement

Adult education participants entered programs with clear goals, and the data reveal substantial achievement of those objectives across multiple domains.

Survey responses indicated strong educational motivations and outcomes: nearly two-thirds of respondents cited multiple reasons for participating in adult education. The majority (79%) enrolled to earn a GED® or high school equivalency credential, while nearly half (47%) enrolled to prepare for college.

When asked to report accomplishments resulting from their participation, 71% identified achieving two or more accomplishments. The most frequently reported accomplishment was earning a high school diploma or equivalent (82%). Additional education-related accomplishments included increased confidence in pursuing further education (62%), securing better employment (48%), and increased community involvement (31%).

Regarding post-graduation pathways, 50% reported current enrollment in post-secondary education or training programs, while 37% planned to enroll in community college.



Additionally, 21% had already completed a community college degree or certificate program since graduating from adult education. Further, 16% reported securing better employment due to newly acquired skills, and 12% had taken online courses to develop additional job-related competencies.

Family, Finances, and Community Engagement

Beyond educational and employment outcomes, the alumni demonstrated positive impacts in family engagement, financial stability, and community participation, indicators of holistic life improvement.

Family involvement and community engagement represented significant areas of positive impact. Over half of the participants (54%) reported being married or in a long-term partnership, and 50% had at least one school-aged child living in their home.

Of the participants with children in the home, 92% indicated they were the parent or legal guardian. The remaining 8% were caring for children other than their own biological or adopted children, such as grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or children of relatives or neighbors.

Among all participants with school-aged children in the home, high levels of educational engagement were reported: 92% regularly read to their children, 55% regularly helped with homework, 67% communicated with teachers, 71% attended parent-teacher conferences, 64% volunteered at their children's schools, and 69% reported that their children were performing very well academically. These findings demonstrate strong intergenerational learning patterns and family stability, suggesting that adult education benefits extend beyond individual participants to their children and households.



Financial outcomes also showed positive trends. Twenty-seven percent of alumni reported homeownership, 87% had banking accounts, nearly half had emergency savings of at least \$500, and 20% paid off at least one debt during or after their participation in adult education.

Civic and Community Engagement

Civic engagement represented another significant area of positive impact, with participants demonstrating active citizenship at rates that suggest adult education fosters community participation.

Sixty-eight percent of alumni reported voting in local, state, or national elections: 43% voted regularly and 25% voted occasionally. Additionally, 38% occasionally attended public meetings (such as school board or city council meetings), while 7% reported regular attendance.

Half of the participants reported community involvement through volunteering. Of these volunteers, 75% participated in one or two settings, and 25% volunteered in three to eight settings. The most common volunteer setting was religious institutions (33%), followed by adult education programs (23%). Other notable volunteer activities included: caring for elderly family or community members (25%), school volunteering (20%), childcare for family members or neighbors (20%), community center activities (20%), and participation in community action or advocacy organizations (21%). These findings underscore the role of adult education in fostering active citizenship and strengthening community connections.



Adult Education Improves Lives

Adult education programs support learners in accomplishing educational and personal goals while fundamentally improving their life trajectories. When asked to assess adult education's overall impact, 89% of alumni rated its influence on their lives as high (25%) or very high (64%). Their additional comments illustrate the personal transformation and empowerment that adult education fosters:

"Not having a diploma for so long stunted my growth; it was a major roadblock that kept me from pursuing anything. Graduating from high school is an essential and critical experience when it comes to personal development and confidence to participate in society. I was able to obtain my GED at the age of 35. Something I thought I'd never be able to accomplish."

"Adult education has helped me to pursue my dreams."

"It [adult education] is the best gift I have ever given myself."

Conclusions & Recommendations

The COABE Alumni Study demonstrates that adult education provides far-reaching benefits that extend well beyond academic credentials. Participants reported substantial gains across multiple life domains: employment, family engagement, financial stability, and civic participation. For administrators and policymakers, these outcomes provide compelling evidence that investing in adult education strengthens communities, enhances workforce readiness, and generates positive returns across generations.



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The evidence is clear: Adult education transforms lives and strengthens communities.

To learn more about COABE's Alumni Study and how your program can partner in this research, visit: coabe.org/alumni-study

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