



# 2025 ADVOCACY VICTORIES

## Fought for Adult Education Funding

Partnered with Congressional Champions to Secure Level Funding for Adult Education in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025. Earlier in the year COABE worked with key allies in Congress—targeting Republican leadership on the Senate and House Appropriations Committees and the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittees—to ensure the Full-Year FY 2025 Continuing Resolution enacted in March safeguarded funding for adult education.

Successfully Advocated for the Release of Withheld FY 2025 Funding for Adult Education. In July, COABE members inundated Congress and the Administration with over 30,000 letters demanding the release of withheld funding for Adult Education State Grants. That included a COABE-led sign-on letter to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Russell Vought. COABE also joined a coordinated stakeholder group of many other national education organizations to advocate for the full disbursement of the withheld funds (which included other Title education programs in addition to adult education).

**30,000**  
RAISED  
THEIR  
VOICES



**193**  
**BIPARTISAN**  
CONGRESSMEMBERS  
SIGNED ON TO URGE THE  
RELEASE OF FUNDING

Due to this collective advocacy, Members of Congress took action to demand the immediate release of funding. Notably, four letters urging for the release of withheld funding were submitted by 10 Republican Senators, 32 Democratic Senators, 150 Democratic Representatives, and 1 Republican Representative. This bipartisan response in Congress can be seen as a direct result of COABE's powerful advocacy with tens of thousands of letters sent and coordinated outreach that made education funding impossible to ignore.



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## Mobilized in Response to Proposed Elimination of Adult Education Funding

In response to the President's FY 2026 budget proposal that zeroed out funding for adult education, COABE members sprang into action—demonstrating the strength, coordination, and passion of the field. In May, COABE leadership, national partners, state associations, and the State Advocates for Adult Education Fellows (SAAEF) worked together to mount a powerful advocacy campaign.

The results speak volumes:

- A Q&A document was launched to support field engagement
- Every adult education state association received a tailored resource email
- Legislators across the country responded with messages of support

This wave of advocacy shows that when our community speaks with one voice, it cannot be ignored. While the proposed cuts are deeply concerning, the energy and unity across the COABE network offer a powerful reminder: we are not backing down.

## Continued the Momentum for Adult Education Funding in FY 2026

Building on the growing recognition of adult education's vital role in workforce development and economic mobility, advocates continued to press Members of Congress for level funding at a minimum—and increased funding as the ideal—in the FY 2026 appropriations process. COABE supported the efforts of our champions in the Senate, Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Todd Young (R-IN), and Representative Dan Goldman (D-NY) in the House, who circulated letters in their respective chambers urging that the Adult Education State Grant Program be funded at \$810 million for FY 2026. Thanks to your advocacy, **thirteen additional Members of Congress expressed support**.

The following Members signed on, with new signers this year noted in bold:

- **House:** Representatives Dan Goldman (D-NY-10), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL-9), Chellie Pingree (D-ME-1), Sharice Davids (D-KS-3), Sylvia Garcia (D-TX-29), Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ-5), Jahana Hayes (D-CT-5), Lucy McBath (D-GA-6), Stephen Lynch (D-MA-8), Sean Casten (D-IL-6), **George Whitesides (D-CA-27)**, Seth Magaziner (D-RI-2), Ayanna Pressley (D-MA-7), William Keating (D-MA-9), Jimmy Panetta (D-CA-19), Danny Davis (D-IL-7), **Morgan McGarvey (D-KY-3)**, Ilhan Omar (D-MN-5), **Jonathan Jackson (D-IL-1)**, **Suzan DelBene (D-WA-1)**, **Jasmine Crockett (D-TX-30)**, **Summer Lee (D-PA-12)**, **Gabe Vasquez (D-NM-2)**, **Greg Stanton (D-AZ-4)**, and **Federica Wilson (D-FL-24)**.
- **Senate:** Senators Jack Reed (D-RI), Todd Young (R-IN), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), **Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE)**, Cory Booker (D-NJ), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Richard Durbin (D-IL), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Mark Kelly (D-AZ), **Andy Kim (D-NJ)**, Angus King (I-ME), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Edward Markey (D-MA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Christopher Murphy (D-CT), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Gary Peters (D-MI), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), **Elissa Slotkin (D-MI)**, Tina Smith (D-MN), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), **Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)**, and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI).



Sharon Bonney, CEO pictured with Rep. Lucy McBath

As part of this effort, we also signed onto the Campaign to Invest in America's Workforce (CIAW) letter opposing the deep and damaging cuts proposed in the House FY26 LHHS bill, which would eliminate adult education and other critical workforce programs. The letter called on Congress to reject these harmful reductions. COABE also hosted the *Mobilizing for Adult Education: Responding to the FY26 Budget Threat* webinar to inform, unify, and prepare COABE members and reinforce the urgency of coordinated advocacy. This webinar drew over 1,300 live attendees, with over 600 additional views of the recording. As the budget cycle advances, continued engagement will be critical to ensure funding is not cut.

### KEEPING THE FIELD INFORMED AND CONNECTED

1,300  
LIVE  
VIEWS



600  
ADDITIONAL  
VIEWS

### Led a National Sign-On Letter Supported by Over 700 Partners and Organizations

COABE successfully led a national sign-on letter {LINK} to House and Senate Appropriations Committee leadership, urging an increase in Adult Education State Grant funding for FY 2026. The effort united over 700 partners and adult education organizers, demonstrating broad, nationwide support for expanding access to adult learning opportunities.

- 24,488 emails sent to legislators; 931 of those from current adult learners
- 5 individual cohorts of State Advocate Fellows answered the call to action
- 961 Tweets to legislators
- 15 signees on Senate Dear Colleague Letter in only a couple days

### Drove Policy Changes

Worked with Members of Congress to Garner Support for the bipartisan Adult Education WORKS Act in the Senate (S. 1400) and the House (H.R. 2789). Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Todd Young (R-IN), along with Representative Lucy McBath (D-GA), reintroduced the Adult Education WORKS Act in both the Senate and the House—an effort supported by COABE in close collaboration with adult learners, educators, and program directors nationwide. The Adult Education WORKS Act includes all of COABE's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) recommendations. Following the reintroduction of the Adult Education WORKS Act, adult education advocates mobilized to urge their Members of Congress to cosponsor the bill. As a result of this outreach, Representatives Frank Mrvan (D-IN), Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), Henry Johnson (D-GA), and Melanie Stansbury (D-MN) newly signed on as cosponsors in the House during this Congress.

### Continued to Push to Strengthen Federal Legislation to Support Adult Education

Amidst a turbulent appropriations cycle marked by funding uncertainty and withheld resources, advocates simultaneously sustained pressure on Congress to advance key adult education priorities. COABE continued to urge Congress to reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Last year, Congress nearly passed a reauthorization bill, A Stronger Workforce for America Act, which included many of COABE's recommendations from the bipartisan Adult Education WORKS Act. COABE's leadership and advocates have met members and staff of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) and House Education and Workforce Committees to reinforce the essential role of adult education in workforce development, economic mobility, and overall literacy and the need for Title II/Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) to remain and be strengthened as a core program in the WIOA reauthorization.

## Supported Local Advocacy

Advocacy Engagement at the 2025 COABE National Conference. At the 2025 COABE National Conference in Dallas, advocacy remained a central focus. COABE hosted dedicated sessions to equip members with tools and strategies to effectively engage with policymakers and elevate the visibility of adult education.

To support these efforts, COABE provided a customizable outreach letter template for members to:

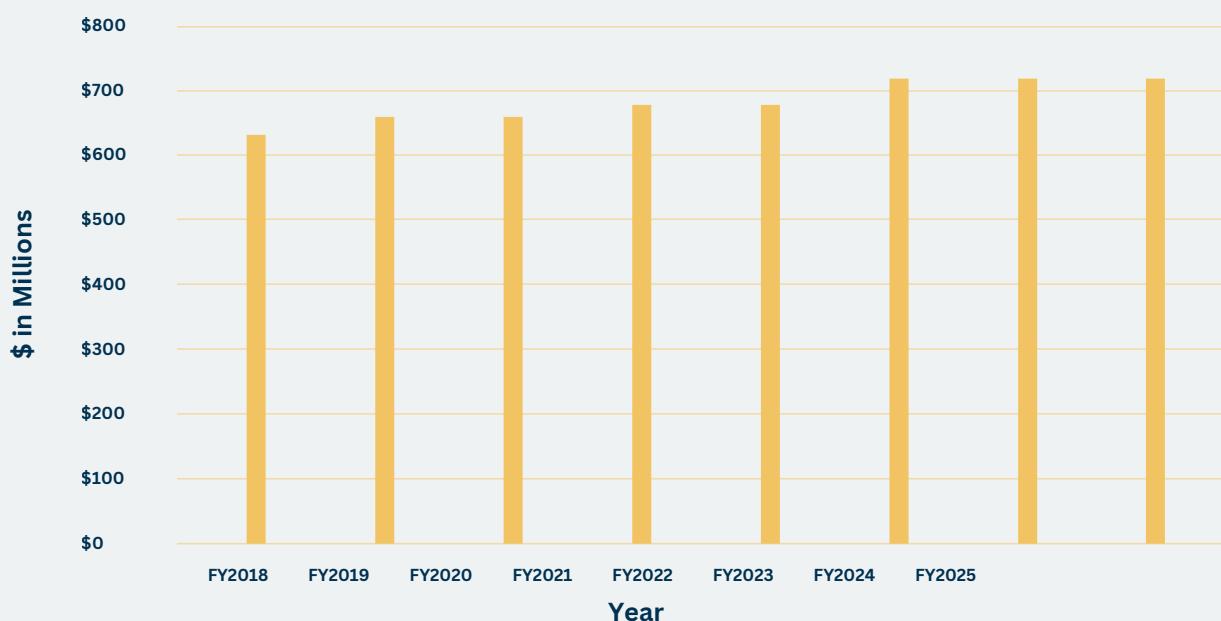
- Introduce themselves to newly elected or returning representatives;
- Advocate for the reauthorization of WIOA; and
- Invite Members of Congress to visit local adult education programs and witness their impact firsthand.

These resources were designed to strengthen relationships with policymakers and ensure adult education remains a national priority.

## Legislative Outreach Support

COABE provided targeted advocacy resources to help our members engage with lawmakers around key federal priorities. This included drafting letters for adult education leaders to encourage Senators to spearhead and support adult education legislation. COABE also created template letters and tweets for members nationwide to urge their Senators and Representatives to sign the FY 2026 appropriations letters supporting adult education funding. These tools were designed to make outreach simple, effective, and timely, ensuring that the voice of the adult education field is heard loud and clear on Capitol Hill.

### Funding Over Time



**Total increase between FY2018 and FY2025: \$133,500,000**

To contextualize this data from FY2024-FY2025, while programs across the nation faced funding cuts and the threat of all federal funding being completely withheld, adult education funding remained stable and avoided the losses we anticipated.



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### **Responded to Administration Requests for Comments**

Urged ED to Prioritize adult education in the national agenda. In response to Secretary McMahon's proposed priorities for discretionary grant programs, COABE submitted a formal letter urging ED to elevate adult literacy as a core national focus. The letter emphasized that adult learners should be included in federal literacy initiatives—not just K-12 students. COABE highlighted the essential role adult education plays in workforce development, economic mobility, and lifelong learning for over 1.1 million adult learners served by WIOA Title II programs. To amplify the field's voice, COABE also provided customizable templates to help educators and advocates submit their own letters to ED. In response, ED acknowledged the feedback and agreed that literacy is a critical component of workforce readiness. You can read COABE's full comment [here](#) and more of ED's responses [here](#).

### **Urged ED to Include Adult Learners in Career Pathways Priority**

COABE submitted formal comments in response to Secretary McMahon's proposed supplemental priority focused on expanding career pathways and workforce readiness. The letter urged ED to explicitly include adult learners in this priority recognizing that millions of working-age Americans lack the foundational skills needed to participate in the modern workforce. COABE emphasized the economic impact of low literacy and the urgent need to invest in adult education to meet labor market demands. A customizable template was also provided to the field to encourage the submission of aligned comments and amplify the message. You can read COABE's full comment [here](#).

### **Urged Inclusion of Adult Education in National Advanced Manufacturing Strategy**

COABE collaborated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to shape its response to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy's (OSTP) National Strategic Plan for Advanced Manufacturing. COABE contributed a detailed letter emphasizing the urgent need to invest in adult education as a foundational strategy to close skill gaps, address labor shortages, and prepare millions of working-age Americans for careers in advanced manufacturing. The letter highlighted the economic impact of low literacy and digital skills and made a compelling case for integrating adult education into national workforce development efforts.



President of COABE, Shaketta Thomas, with CEO, Sharon Bonney



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## State and Local Leaders Showed Unprecedented Support for Adult Education

This year a record-breaking 111 proclamations were issued by governors, mayors, and councilmembers across the country—an extraordinary testament to the power of collective advocacy. These declarations are more than symbolic—they provide visibility, legitimacy, and momentum for local and state-level advocacy efforts. To help sustain this momentum year-round, COABE developed a timeless proclamation template for members to use to request recognition from governors, mayors, and other leaders.



111  
PROCLAMATIONS  
110  
LEGISLATIVE CHAMPIONS  
125  
NEWS ARTICLES & PRESS RELEASES  
206  
LEGISLATIVE VISITS

## Represented Adult Learners and Educators in Stakeholder Discussions

### Familiarized the Incoming Administration with the Value of Adult Education

During the federal Administration transition, COABE remained a strong voice for adult education, ensuring it stayed on the radar of incoming leadership. COABE sent letters to President Trump, Vice President Vance, and Secretary of Education McMahon, urging them to prioritize adult education as they develop national priorities. These letters emphasized the importance of sustained investment in adult education and offered COABE as a resource to help shape effective policy. By proactively engaging with the new Administration, COABE ensured that the needs of adult learners and educators were represented from day one.

Since then, COABE has continued to engage with the Administration to reinforce these priorities and provide insight on how adult education can support national goals, including through meetings with senior leadership of the Department of Education (ED) and the Department of Labor (DOL).



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## Flooded the Hill During Adult Education and Family Literacy (AEFL) Week 2025

AEFL Week 2025 marked a record-breaking moment for the field, as more than 130 COABE advocates, from 44 states, flooded Capitol Hill to champion adult education. Together, they held over 120 meetings with congressional offices, including 70 scheduled in-office visits, 20+ impromptu conversations, and one Zoom meeting. In total, COABE members in all 50 states took part in AEFL Week through advocacy in D.C., state capitals, and local communities.



At the AEFL Week breakfast, COABE also significantly expanded its congressional recognition efforts in 2025, presenting 83 awards—up from just 5 the previous year. This dramatic increase reflects the surge in congressional support for adult education. To acknowledge the new advocates, COABE introduced the “Friends of Adult Education” award category, honoring Members of Congress who recently began championing adult education. This new category complemented the longstanding “Champion of Adult Education” designation. At the breakfast, we proudly recognized all of our champions. The event featured remarks from five Members of Congress who spoke passionately about the importance of adult education. Additionally, staff from 33 congressional offices met with their constituents, further underscoring the growing momentum for adult education on Capitol Hill.



Senator Jack Reed speaking at the legislative breakfast.



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Following the breakfast, COABE hosted a Congressional briefing titled *America's Hidden Talent Pipeline: From Learning to Earning – How Adult Education Strengthens Communities and the Workforce*, a panel briefing featuring SAAEF fellow Erika Simmons; Workforce Development Director Cathy Tyler; NCCER Committee Member Sabra Phillips; Indiana State Director Marilyn Pitzulo; and former adult learner Kendric Marshall. The packed room of Congressional staff and national partners reflected the growing momentum behind adult education policy as the hidden workforce pipeline.

In a major win to further cement national recognition of adult education and its impact, bipartisan AEFL Week resolutions were introduced in both chambers of Congress—[H.Res. 714](#) in the House and [S.Res. 400](#) in the Senate. While the House does not traditionally pass such resolutions, the Senate resolution passed by unanimous consent.

COABE also produced an impact report highlighting national and state data, funding metrics, and adult learner success stories. The report was distributed to Congressional offices throughout AEFL Week, providing lawmakers with a clear picture of the value and reach of adult education at both the national and state levels. To extend its impact, COABE made the report publicly available for future downloads, ensuring continued access for advocates, policymakers, and the broader education community.

Thought leadership from national partners further elevated the week's impact. The National League of Cities published [Unlocking Potential, Powering Communities](#), while the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation released [Unlocking the Potential of Adult Workers](#). Both articles were co-authored by COABE CEO Sharon Bonney, spotlighting the economic and workforce value of adult education.



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## Investing in the Field of Adult Education

Our CEO, Sharon Bonney, traveled to 14 states this year to connect and strengthen adult education programs all across America. In each state she met with local, state and federal legislators to champion the cause for adult education. Throughout her travel, over 45 local and national news outlets picked up stories about adult education, including a special interview with NPR that highlighted the need for adult education funding to be released on a national stage.

### Highlighting Hawaii

COABE leadership connected with programs across Hawaii to encourage collaboration, broaden support, and strengthen existing infrastructure. They stopped at Waipahu Adult Education, an impressive program spread over 5 campuses and serving nearly 4,000 learners. They met at the University of Hawaii and discussed broadband access, device availability, the need for digital literacy skills and digital credentials for work readiness training. Leadership was able to demonstrate how COABE membership helps adult learners across the state develop these workforce skills completely free through our IBM SkillsBuild and eCornell partnerships. Perhaps the most exciting development is our connection with Linda Fehoko, a new advocate for adult education, who now has all of the resources and training she needs to make the voice of adult education heard on the Big Island.

### Invest in the Midwest Tour

Throughout 2025, COABE completed a 23-day, 9-state tour as part of COABE's Invest in the Heartlands initiative. COABE coordinated a series of strategic in-district meetings and program visits across multiple states to elevate the importance of adult education with key Members of Congress. These efforts spanned states such as Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, and Nevada.

Meetings often included adult learners, state directors, and program coordinators, offering a powerful, personal lens into the challenges and successes of adult education. By engaging with Senators and Representatives these visits highlighted the deep commitment, collaboration, and innovation that define adult education across the region. Through these meetings, COABE underscored the vital role adult education plays in advancing opportunity, strengthening the workforce, and transforming lives, making a compelling case for continued federal investment and support.

### Invest in the Heartlands Tour

In Kansas as well as Oklahoma, COABE leadership traveled to programs around each state to amplify the voices of adult learners and educators. They met with key stakeholders and empowered new voices and leaders throughout the state. They also had several meetings with legislators and advocated for a continued investment in America's workforce through adult education programs.



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## **Shaped the Direction of the Interagency Agreement**

COABE leadership held strategic meetings with the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) at ED, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the DOL Employment and Training Administration (ETA) and staff from the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee to discuss the existing and anticipated impact of the Interagency Agreement between ED and DOL.

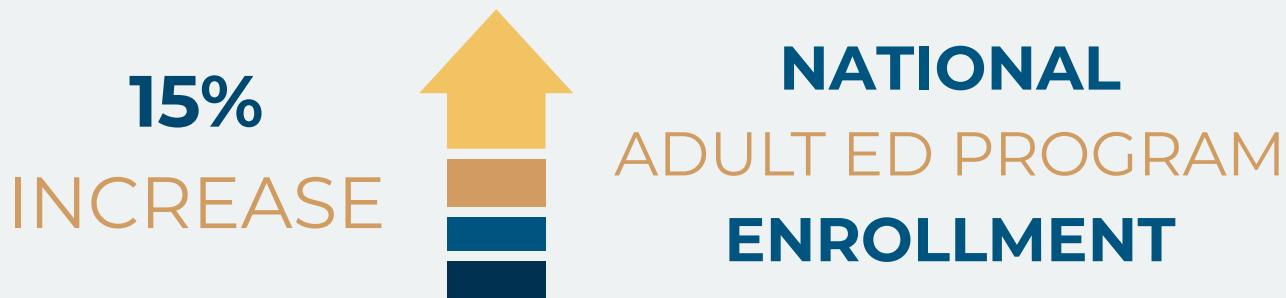
These conversations focused on how the agreement affects state adult education programs, educators, and learners—many of whom are seeking greater clarity, future direction, and stability. COABE used these meetings to advocate for transparency, alignment across agencies, and stronger support for adult education within federal workforce initiatives.

## **WIOA Title II Performance Data for PY 2023–24 Data Confirmed Growth in Adult Education**

Following a productive meeting between COABE leadership and senior officials at ED, the long-awaited WIOA annual performance reports for Program Year (PY) 2023–24 were officially released. These reports provide critical insight into the impact of programs authorized under AEFLA, Title II of WIOA, across all states.

The data revealed a year of significant growth and achievement for adult education:

- 1,288,367 participants were enrolled in the national adult education program—marking a 15 percent increase over the previous year.
- With 167,598 additional participants, AEFLA posted the largest consecutive enrollment growth of all WIOA core programs.
- Performance gains were recorded in median quarterly earnings, credential attainment, and measurable skill gains, with 689,321 skill gains achieved by adult learners nationwide.
- Corrections education enrollment rose by 8,104 participants, an 8 percent increase, highlighting expanded access for justice-involved learners.



## **April Advocacy Efforts Strengthened Federal Support for Adult Education**

COABE kicked off a successful spring advocacy push in April, focused on increasing funding for adult education and advancing key reforms to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). COABE leadership held a full day of in-person meetings with staff from both the majority and minority sides of the Senate HELP Committee, senior leadership at ED and several Member offices on both sides of the aisle.

Throughout April, COABE also encouraged the field to join in advocacy efforts—mobilizing educators, program leaders, and adult learners to contact their Representatives and Senators to amplify the message that adult education is a vital investment.



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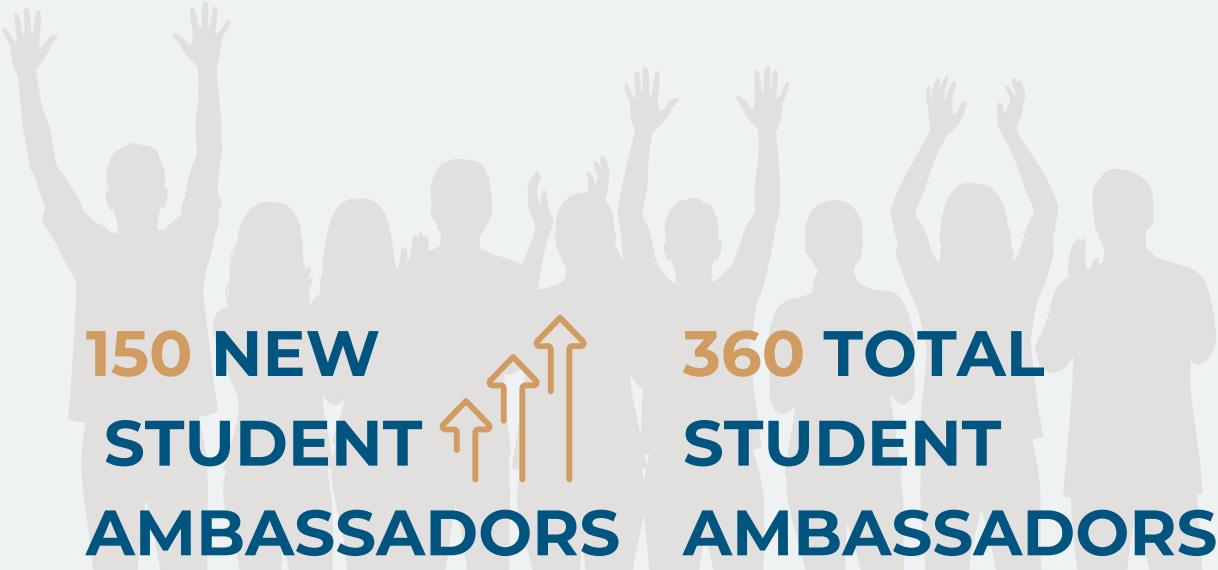
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## Student Ambassador Training

COABE's Student Ambassador Program is a cornerstone of our advocacy efforts, designed to empower current adult learners to speak for the field and elevate the visibility of adult education nationwide. As part of this growing movement, COABE released its first-ever Student Ambassador Training Handbook this year—an important milestone in formalizing training, offering consistency across programs, and equipping ambassadors with the tools they need to advocate effectively. In 2025 alone, COABE trained 150 new ambassadors, bringing the total to more than 360 active student ambassadors across the country who are prepared to share their stories, meet with policymakers, and shape the conversation around adult education.



**150 NEW  
STUDENT AMBASSADORS** 

**360 TOTAL  
STUDENT AMBASSADORS**

This progress reflects COABE's long-term commitment to building learner-led advocacy and strengthening our national voice. At the COABE National Conference in Dallas, we hosted our second Students as Leaders Summit and offered our first in-person national ambassador training event since 2019, marking a return to hands-on, collaborative development. Beyond the conference, COABE continues to sustain momentum with monthly virtual trainings that keep ambassadors connected, supported, and actively engaged in advocacy work throughout the year. This ongoing investment ensures that adult learners are not just participants in the system—but leaders who help influence funding, policy, and public awareness for the field.



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## Social Media Advocacy

### Total Impact Across All Platforms

In the past year, COABE published more than 1,300 advocacy-focused posts across LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter), reaching nearly 500,000 people. These posts generated over 23,000 reactions, nearly 2,000 comments, more than 7,000 shares and reposts, and over 15,000 clicks to advocacy-related content.

The data clearly demonstrates the growing impact of COABE's digital advocacy strategy in amplifying learner voices, mobilizing supporters, and elevating adult education as a national priority. From urgent funding alerts to learner success stories and leadership-driven campaigns like #FundAdultEd and #FundFutures, COABE's social media channels played a critical role in expanding awareness, engagement, and action at both the state and federal levels.

### Total Reach and Visibility

Platform	Reach/Impressions
LinkedIn	213,803
X (Twitter)	26,096
Facebook	202,583
Instagram	44,656
TOTAL	487,138

#### Key Highlights:

- Over HALF A MILLION people were reached by COABE's advocacy content this year
- Over 1,300 advocacy posts across all platforms this year
- Instagram is growing its influence by curating content for adult learners

### Total Engagement

Metric	Total
Likes/Reactions	23,163
Comments	1,842
Reposts	7,026
Clicks	15,461

#### Key Highlights:

- Thousands of people took visible action (like, share, comment)
- Tens of thousands clicked to learn more or take action
- Hundreds amplified COABE's message into their own networks
- Facebook saw huge growth this year in followership and in reach capacity

## Thank You

We close with a thank you to more than 100,000 incredible COABE members for the vital work you do every day to elevate adult education across the nation. Your dedication to learners, your commitment to innovation, and your tireless advocacy ensure that adults of all backgrounds have the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive. Because of your leadership and passion, communities are stronger, opportunities are expanding, and the transformative power of adult education continues to reach those who need it most. We are deeply grateful for all you do to advance this field and to change lives through literacy and learning.



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