



February 20, 2014

**HB-1085
SUPPORT**

Adult Education And Literacy
Programs

Sponsors: Rep. Fields,
Sen. Zenzinger

Proposal Highlights:

- \$1.2 million in state-appropriated funding to support adult education and literacy programs will help Colorado families achieve self-sufficiency
- Adult basic education needs to be linked to subsequent skills training programs to create career pathways
- Adult education will help address Colorado's "middle-skills gap"

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Expanding adult education increases family economic security

HB-1085, Sponsors: Representative Fields, Senator Zenzinger

Adult education and literacy programs provide pathways out of poverty. More than 300,000 working-age Coloradans lack a high school diploma or GED. Colorado has an opportunity to bolster adult education and literacy programs to ensure that more low-skilled, low-income adults move quickly from basic skill acquisition to post-secondary credential attainment and employment.

Workforce development

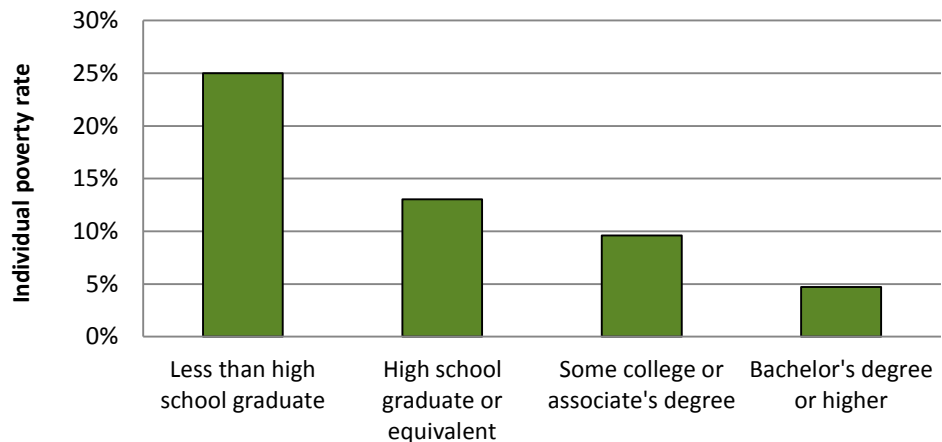
Despite the need for workers with post-secondary training and skills in our workforce, roughly one in 10 Coloradans do not have a GED or high school diploma.ⁱ Many of these individuals do not have the basic literacy or numeracy skills to enroll in job skills training. In fact, almost 40 percent of low-income working families in Colorado have a parent without a GED or high school diploma.ⁱⁱ

Due to the limited funding available, and no state appropriation, Colorado's adult education and literacy programs only serve about 14,000 students per year – just 4 percent of the eligible population. The number of students served has actually been decreasing for the last few years.

Increased educational attainment is a proven pathway out of poverty

A clear link exists between an individual's level of education and his or her annual earnings. In 2011, 25 percent of Coloradans without a high school diploma were living in poverty while just five percent of people with a bachelor's degree were in poverty.

Poverty rate by education level



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. Rates based on 100 percent FPL. (data for 2011)

Colorado's skills gap

Colorado has a significant “middle-skills gap.” Middle-skill jobs are those that require some post-secondary education or training but less than a four-year degree. These positions make up 47 percent of Colorado's jobs, but only 36 percent of Colorado workers have the training necessary to fill them. ⁱⁱⁱ

This is not a short-term problem: two-thirds of today's working Coloradans will still be in the workforce in 2025. Projections also indicate that by 2025, two-thirds of all jobs will require some level of post-secondary education or technical skill training. ^{iv} Post-secondary education and credential attainment is increasingly central to the ability of adults to earn family-sustaining wages, participate more fully in Colorado's twenty-first century workforce, and contribute to our state's economic health and vitality. And yet, substantial economic barriers to education and skills training seriously hinder progress toward self-sufficiency for many Coloradans. ^v

Proposal

Colorado is the only state that does not provide state funding for adult education and literacy programs. A bill to provide **\$1.2 million in state-appropriated funding** annually to support adult education and literacy programs would move Colorado's financial commitment to educating its workforce and helping families achieve self-sufficiency closer to the national average. New workforce realities and the goal of poverty-reduction necessitate a meaningful state-appropriated financial investment in adult education and literacy programs.

Colorado must also re-envision its adult education and literacy programs to create meaningful career pathways for low-income, low-skill individuals. A state grant program incentivizing collaboration between local education providers, postsecondary education or training providers, and workforce development providers will help ensure enrollees move as quickly as possible from basic-skill acquisition to post-secondary credential attainment and employment.

Supporters

9to5 Colorado

All Families Deserve a Chance (AFDC) Coalition

AAUW Colorado

Colorado Adult Education Professional Association

Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry

Colorado Business Women

Colorado Center on Law and Policy

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless

Colorado Community College System

Colorado Competitive Council

Colorado Impact

Colorado Social Legislation Committee

CWEE

FRESC

Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metro Denver

Independent Electrical Contractors-Rocky Mountain

Pretty Good Consulting

Skills2Compete-Colorado

Spring Institute

The Bell Policy Center

The Learning Source

The Weifield Group

Women's Foundation of Colorado

Women's Lobby of Colorado

ⁱ CCLP's *State of Working Colorado 2013* reports this number at 8 percent of workers over the age of 25. The Bell Policy Center's 2013 *Measuring Opportunities for Working Families* report states 10.4 percent of all Coloradans aged 18 to 64 did not have a GED or high school diploma. Both these reports use data from 2012.

ⁱⁱ In 2012, 38 percent of low-income working families had a parent without a GED or high school diploma. Colorado is ranked 43rd in the nation on this measure. See Hallgren, Kathleen, Green, Cortney, Jones, Rich, and Waterous, Frank. *Measuring Opportunities for Working Families*. The Bell Policy Center, 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Calculated by National Skills Coalition from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

^{iv} Calculated by National Skills Coalition from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

^v Only 32 percent of Colorado minority students aged 18-24 are enrolled in post-secondary institutions. Colorado is ranked 38th in the nation on this measure. See Hallgren, Kathleen, Green, Cortney, Jones, Rich, and Waterous, Frank. *Measuring Opportunities for Working Families*. The Bell Policy Center, 2013.