



Chaer Robert, Coordinator  
Colorado Center on Law and Policy  
789 Sherman St #300  
Denver, CO 80203  
303-573-5669 x307  
[www.cclponline.org/skills2compete](http://www.cclponline.org/skills2compete)  
@skill2competeco

## ADULT EDUCATION: The Cornerstone of Workforce Development

Colorado's economy is healthy. There is nothing like a healthy economy to provide opportunities to people who would otherwise be overlooked. Yet employment and upward mobility remain challenging for those who did not complete high school.

The 9.4% of Colorado adults –394,471 individuals<sup>i</sup> -- without a high school diploma are much less likely to be in the work force than those with more education. Those without a high school diploma have a 6.4% unemployment rate, versus 2.1% for those with a Bachelors or more. When they are employed, their median wages are much less (\$23,004 for those without high school diploma, compared to \$30,568 for high school graduates and \$48,818 for college graduates.)<sup>ii</sup> But finding employment can be a challenge as only 12% of jobs nationally are open to people who do not have a high school diploma.<sup>iii</sup> Colorado's workforce tends to be highly educated, so competition can be fierce.

Upward mobility can also be very hard. Most education and training opportunities require a high school diploma or equivalency diploma. With the exception of a few approved career pathway training programs, Pell grants and other federal finance aid may not be available for community college or other post-secondary opportunities that might be open to students without high school diplomas.

The Federal Adult Education and Family Literacy Act provides \$7,089,369 in funding to Colorado as part of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. A majority of Adult Education students under AEFLA are English language learners. This federal money requires a local match, but increasing any local or state funding does not enable Colorado to draw down more federal money. AEFLA programs serve less than 2% of those Coloradans who lack a high school diploma.<sup>iv</sup>

In Colorado, students pay class fees. And unlike some other states, Colorado does not subsidize students taking high school equivalency exams. Students pay to take the High School equivalency exam. Current prices for exams are \$150 for GED<sup>®</sup>, \$137.50 for HiSet and \$139.50 for TASC, with part of the student fee paying for the state program overseeing High School Equivalency exams. The high cost of the exam can discourage students who might pass from trying.

With HB2014-1085 – **Adult Education Workforce Partnerships**, Colorado became the 50<sup>th</sup> state to provide state funding for adult education. Our legislation anticipated the passage of the Federal WIOA law, which requires organization partners to work together to smooth the path from education to employment. Workforce Centers, vocational rehabilitation, adult education and even Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are supposed to coordinate to help people find training and employment. The legislation provided \$960,000, which funds programs to develop partnerships to help adult education students get a high school equivalency diploma, job training and job placement. The Adult Education Workforce Partnerships are a leading edge and demonstration of how the departments can work together for the betterment of job seekers.

Due to the extremely limited funding, it is a competitive grant process. In the initial cycle- just months after the legislation passed- 19 proposals were submitted and 9 multi-year grants were funded. In the upcoming round this fall, even more proposals are expected.

Under WIOA, services for those with barriers to employment are supposed to be prioritized. Among the populations listed are “those with low levels of literacy. “

Colorado is developing exciting workforce development programs in response to employer needs. Yet without additional “on-ramps” to career pathways through adult education, those without a high school degree will struggle to find a way for hard work to result in upward mobility.

9/27/16

---

<sup>i</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey 2015 Retrieved from [http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_15\\_1YR\\_S1501&prodType=table](http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_1YR_S1501&prodType=table)

<sup>ii</sup> *Skills for Jobs Act Report*, January 2016,

[http://highered.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Legislative/Workforce/2016\\_SkillsforJob.pdf](http://highered.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Legislative/Workforce/2016_SkillsforJob.pdf) p.7

<sup>iii</sup> *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020*. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from [https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES\\_Web\\_.pdf](https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES_Web_.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> 2014-15 Colorado Annual Performance Report, retrieved from <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeadult/apr>