

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

Position Statement on Adult Education

Adopted February 4, 2009

The Connecticut State Board of Education is committed to quality adult education programs which are accessible to all Connecticut adults and lead to mastery of the essential proficiencies needed to function as productive citizens in work, family and community environments. Connecticut's adult education programs are governed by Connecticut General Statutes, which require local school districts to offer education programs necessary to acquire basic literacy skills, elementary education, English language proficiency, secondary school completion and/or preparation for equivalency or proficiency examinations.

More than half a million Connecticut adult residents lack basic skills in reading, writing and computation, yet each year only a fraction of this population participates in the adult education programs offered throughout the state. An enhanced public awareness program and aggressive recruitment by local school boards to reach greater numbers of adults served would foster expansion of these programs, help more residents learn the skills they need to become more self-sufficient and responsible citizens, and would empower them to more fully participate in the education of their children.

Connecticut businesses and industry would be strengthened by a workforce with greater skills in reading, thinking critically, solving problems and communicating effectively. Appropriate adult education programs also teach skills individuals need to enjoy their rights and fulfill their responsibilities as citizens. Further, educated parents are better equipped to actively support and reinforce the education of their children. By addressing the educational needs of the adult learner, local educational agencies can help educate the whole family. Effective adult education programs can be a bridge across the achievement gap. Local boards of education should refer adult education students who are parents of preschool age children to School Readiness or other preschool programs and services.

The State Board of Education encourages the following efforts to strengthen Connecticut's adult education system:

Accessibility

All adults must have access to a well-defined system of adult education, English-language and literacy services. Strong local information and referral systems help students easily find adult education programs and support services, such as child care, transportation and counseling. Programs for adults should provide services at times and in places that are convenient for adult students based on the needs of adults, the labor market and the community. The following components should be included to maximize the effectiveness of any program:

- safe, supportive environments conducive to learning;
- sufficient hours of instruction in all program areas, on a year-round basis;
- learning opportunities through workplace programs; and
- distance learning options to increase access to learning opportunities.

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An important component for all learners is technology, which has increased the need for greater literacy while at the same time serving as an important tool for developing it. Local programs should integrate distance learning technologies with more traditional teacher- and tutor-based instruction and provide for the needs of adult education personnel to ensure they have the requisite skills to successfully use technology and integrate it into instruction.

Family and workplace literacy programs address two of the compelling motivators for adults to seek services: stronger families and a more highly skilled workforce. Family literacy programs such as school readiness centers, family resource centers, Head Start and Even Start programs, working with local adult education programs, should enable adult learners to understand how to use their new skills and knowledge to assist their children in their studies. Early childhood and adult education programs which work collaboratively can ensure that children enter kindergarten ready and able to benefit from instruction and have parents who can support them. Effective family literacy programs can be a significant factor in promoting literacy across language, generational and ability groups.

Adult education programs coordinated with the regional Workforce Investment Boards and the One Stop Centers can address the needs of employers in each labor market in Connecticut. Support for maintaining success at work is offered by providing (1) access to programs that upgrade skills of current workers and provide additional academic assistance to individuals leaving income-assistance programs and entering the job market and (2) instruction at the work site in partnership with employers.

Quality and Accountability

The adult education system must identify, report on and continue to refine appropriate measures to determine program effectiveness in meeting the needs of the individual. Quality adult education programs do the following:

- use research-based knowledge to develop and sustain programs;
- use clear, measurable standards to guide the evaluation and assessment of program quality;
- feature instruction that integrates academic skills with life and employability skills using curriculum and materials responsive to the needs of diverse student populations;
- employ professional staff members who are proficient in providing instruction to meet the unique needs of adult learners;
- offer effective academic, career guidance and personal counseling activities to assist in the transition to further education, training and employment;
- use a uniform assessment process for initial placement, interim growth measures and program goals attainment; and
- receive adequate funding to ensure quality services for all adults.

Adult education plays an important role in Connecticut's economy and in educating our children. It is a critical investment in the social and economic fabric of our state. Adult education, through a coordinated and collaborative approach, can help adults succeed, provide the foundation for the appreciation of lifelong learning, play an enhanced role in early childhood and family literacy programs and enable Connecticut to enhance its competitiveness in the national and international economies.