

BASIC EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

Pathways to college and careers for Washington's emerging workforce



Photo courtesy of Clover Park Technical College

Basic skills for a better life

Basic Education for Adults (BEa) programs teach foundational skills — reading, writing, math, technology and English language — so adults can move through college and into high-demand jobs.

Programs are designed to advance students quickly and purposefully toward degrees and certificates. Strategies move the goal line from passing the GED®, to graduating from college and starting careers.

The programs offer a life-changing opportunity for adults to succeed as students, employees, parents and citizens.

BEa programs differ from precollege (remedial) classes. The major difference is the skill level of the student.

BEa programs take students who have below high school graduate-level skills and prepare them for college.

In contrast, precollege classes help people who are just below college level in math and English Language Arts catch up so they can take credit-bearing classes.

Skills change lives, drive economy

The need for adult education is big and the stakes are high.

- An estimated 650,000 to 700,000 Washington adults lack basic education or English language skills.¹ That's roughly the combined total populations of Spokane, Bellingham, Vancouver, Richland, Everett and Wenatchee.²
- Meanwhile, the bar to get a living-wage job is getting higher. By 2021, an estimated 72 percent of available jobs will require at least a postsecondary credential.³
- And, in the future, there simply won't be enough high school graduates to meet the higher education needs of Washington's workforce. Washington will need to fill the gap with older adults — a faster growing population that is burgeoning in areas of the state with less educational attainment.⁴

Adult education bridges these gaps, creating pathways to college and careers for Washington's emerging workforce.

Tapping potential

Washington's 34 community and technical colleges and partnering community-based organizations provide the vast majority of adult education in the state. Programs:

- Serve adults at least 16 years old who have academic skills that are below the level of a high school graduate, or who need English language skills.
- Teach skills in reading, writing, math, technology and English language.
- Include GED® and high school diploma programs, paving the way to college.
- Teach employability skills, such as critical thinking, communication, problem solving and decision making.

Strategies break barriers

Adult education is a mission of Washington's community and technical college system and is mandated under state law.⁵ Guided by the Washington State Adult Education Plan, programs are designed to:

- Connect adult education to college and careers, as required under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act.
- Set a clear destination for students from the very beginning.
- Provide instruction in job-relevant contexts.
- Advance students based on competency and skills learned rather than on seat time, accelerating their progress.

Innovations

I-BEST

Washington's nationally renowned Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training program (I-BEST) uses a team-teaching approach to combine adult education classes with regular, credit-bearing academic or job training classes so students get through school and into jobs faster.

I-BEST students are nine times more likely to earn a workforce credential than are students in traditional programs who must complete basic skills first, before training for a job.⁶

High School 21+

Adults who lack a high school diploma have a new way to get a second chance thanks to "High School 21+," a competency-based high school diploma launched in 2013.

Adults 21 years old and older can go to participating colleges to earn a high school diploma. An advisor will look at transcripts and knowledge gained from life experience, and work with the student to craft an educational plan to fill gaps.

High School 21+ is adding more rigorous, high-school level education and training to basic skills classes so students can upgrade their skills while working toward a high school credential.

Project I-DEA

Washington state has a large and rapidly growing foreign-born population.⁷ With I-DEA, English language learners who face the largest language gaps are learning English while gaining skills for college and careers.

Like I-BEST, this project uses an integrated, team-teaching approach so students learn English in tandem with college and job skills. Classes are "flipped": Students complete online modules to learn, practice and develop knowledge of concepts before coming to class. They then use classroom time to apply and practice what they've learned. Students receive computers and 24-7 access to complete college coursework.

Competency-based education

Many adult education courses are competency-based; students move through adult education into pre-college (remedial) or college-level courses based on knowledge gained rather than time spent in a classroom. Students move as quickly through courses as their competencies take them.

Student Achievement Initiative

Washington's performance-based funding system, known as the "Student Achievement Initiative," awards colleges points and funding when students reach key academic milestones that lead to certificates and degrees.

Recognizing that adult education students have a more challenging educational journey, the initiative awards extra points for adult education students who reach the milestones. This approach reinforces the importance of adult education among all colleges.

Sources:

1. SBCTC calculation from 2008-12 five-year and 2010-12 three-year American Community Survey estimates.
2. 2010 U.S. Census, 2013 city estimates.
3. Background analysis conducted by SBCTC, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, and the Washington Student Achievement Council for "A Skilled and Educated Workforce 2013 Update" published October 2013.
4. SBCTC research findings: "Washington State Population and Employment Data 2010-2030, Implications for Community and Technical Colleges," presented to House Higher Education Committee Jan. 14, 2014.
5. RCW 28B.50.090.
6. SBCTC calculation from "Educational Outcomes of I-BEST, WA State Community and Technical College System's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program," May 2009 by Community College Research Center, Columbia University.
7. Investing in Effective Employment & Training Strategies, Seattle Jobs Initiative, January 2014.

