



BASIC EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

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Photo courtesy of Seattle Central College.

Basic Skills for a Better Life

Adult basic education programs teach students critical foundational skills — reading, writing, math and English language — so they can start on the path toward a high school diploma, a college credential and a well-paying job. Along the way, students also learn valuable skills for employment, like how to think critically, solve problems, make decisions and communicate effectively. The 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.
- Include high school diploma programs and the GED®, which then lead to higher education.
- Serve incarcerated students so they can successfully re-enter their communities upon release.

Adult education is a mission of Washington's community and technical college system and is mandated by state law.¹ All 34 community and technical colleges provide adult basic education programs, along with partnering community-based organizations.

An Urgent Need

The need for adult education is great and the stakes are high. An estimated 685,000 Washington adults lack basic education or English language skills.² Meanwhile, the bar to get a living-wage job is getting higher. Of the 740,000 job openings expected by 2021, more than half will require at least some education beyond high school.³

Adult education bridges these gaps, creating pathways to college and careers for Washington's emerging workforce. People get skills they need to get good jobs and employers get the skilled workers they need to succeed.

Raising the Bar

Historically, adult basic education programs in America were called "literacy" programs. The goal was for students to earn a high school diploma or equivalent (here in Washington, the GED®). Today's programs set the bar higher. They are designed to move students to, and through, a high-school level of education and into certificates or degrees that will help them earn a living wage.

Washington state's programs influenced the federal Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), which requires adult basic education programs that receive federal funds to move students into college and careers.

Competency-based Education

Many adult education courses are competency-based; students move through courses based on knowledge gained rather than time spent in a classroom. Students move as quickly through courses as their competencies take them.

In the **High School 21+ program**, adults who need a high school diploma can get credits for what they've already learned in real life and take classes to fill in the rest of the diploma requirements. They waste no time taking classes in subjects they already know.

Teaching in Context

A growing number of students are enrolled in Washington's nationally renowned Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) job-training programs.

I-BEST uses a team-teaching approach. One teacher provides job-training or academic instruction; the other teaches basic skills — like reading, writing and math — within the context of that instruction. Students earn credits that apply both to their area of study and to a high school diploma. As a result, students get through school and into living-wage jobs faster.

In the past, students had to work through a linear series of basic education classes before they could start earning college-level credits. With I-BEST, the opposite is true: Students jump into job-training and academic programs right away and learn basic skills while they're there. Every class counts.

For students who need to boost their English language skills, our colleges offer **Integrated Digital English Acceleration (I-DEA)**. This program uses an integrated approach to teach students English. In web-enhanced classes, students learn how to speak English along with real-world skills that apply to college and the workforce.

I-DEA students participate in 31, week-long instructional modules on topics ranging from navigating the community and information literacy, to professional communication, job exploration and interview skills.

Both I-BEST and I-DEA teach students basic skills within a context that is relevant to their lives and career goals. Students “learn by doing.”

Sources:

1. RCW 28B.50.020.3
2. SBCTC calculation from 2010-14 five-year American Community Survey Estimates
3. 2016 “Washington Kids for Washington Jobs,” by the Washington Roundtable and Boston Consulting Group

Dual Credits

Our colleges believe in awarding credit where credit is due. If a student is enrolled in a college-level class and masters a subject area required for a high school diploma, the student's credits can be applied to both the program of study and the diploma. This dual-credit approach saves them time and money.

Financial Assistance

To remove financial barriers, student-support professionals work closely with students to identify funding opportunities as they move into their college-level program of study. For students without a high school diploma, the “Ability to Benefit” option is key to securing federal financial aid like Pell Grants.

Typically, students must have either a high school diploma or equivalent to qualify for financial aid. The Ability to Benefit provision of federal financial aid rules allows students who lack those credentials to prove they are capable of making progress in college. Students can provide this proof by taking a test or by earning six college-level credits. The sooner students earn these credits, the faster they can become eligible for federal aid. By getting students into credit-bearing programs of study quickly, High School 21+ and I-BEST open the doors sooner to federal financial aid.

Upward Momentum

Community and technical colleges recognize that every credential should lead to bigger and better things. Adult basic education programs provide students with the skills to earn certificates and two-year degrees. The two-year degrees then lead directly into careers or into four-year degrees. Programs are connected in a continuous path upward.

Students who enroll in adult basic education classes take an important step to a better future. Our colleges make sure that first step leads to a valuable educational journey — one that will give students life-changing skills to succeed as students, employees, parents and citizens.