



# CALIFORNIA'S HIDDEN GEM

**AN INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF CALIFORNIA'S ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM AS  
A KEY PARTNER IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

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MARCH 31, 2023 // PREPARED BY JOSEPH STARK  
ROBERT SAINZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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There is great potential and opportunity for social change and economic recovery in California. Yet, we know that for many younger and older adults in our communities, the promises of equitable access for all to educational and workforce opportunities have remained unfulfilled. And we know the lingering effects of Covid-19 have only exacerbated inequalities for the working poor and others living in the margins of society. In California, nearly 1 in 4 adults struggle with basic literacy and numeracy skills. This has profound social and economic impacts on the quality of life for these individuals as well as the larger community. This brief advocates that adult education programs have the capacity to play an enormously critical and transformative role in the socio-economic health and vitality of our communities by providing a unique point of entry for adults in need of basic skills as well as more advanced academic and career training.

Unfortunately, in many areas of the state, local adult education programs tend to be a “best-kept secret.” Promoting greater awareness of these programs among workforce development entities and other adult services providers will hopefully lead to enhanced levels of regional coordination of efforts to ensure all Californians, especially those most in need of services, will not be left behind in workforce training and economic recovery efforts.



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The Road  
**AHEAD**

# NON O T C U D O R T N

California is home to one of the most robust adult education systems in the nation. These programs are often hidden gems in local communities, sometimes misunderstood or even unknown by the public at large, as well as other workforce development or community-based entities serving similar adult populations. Yet, they are an integral component of the educational and workforce development continuum of services in California, providing access and opportunity for hundreds of thousands of adults seeking continuing education and workforce training and certification courses.

Adult education programs provide pre-collegiate courses for adults of all ages, including young adults aged 18 to 24, as well as older adults. These courses provide viable “first-chance” access to accessible, affordable, and high-quality education and workforce training, as well as offer “second-chance” opportunities for adults, who for a variety of reasons, may not have been successful in traditional educational settings. Adult education classes are mostly offered tuition free throughout the state.

The purpose of this report is to present a concise overview of key features and elements of California adult education programs—with a focus on the Los Angeles Basin—to promote broader awareness of their value as well as posit the importance of strategic partnerships and greater collaboration between adult education programs, county and city workforce development agencies, community-based organizations, and other entities providing services to adults.

# WHO ARE CALIFORNIA'S ADULT LEARNERS?

Adult education learners include immigrants learning English to gain citizenship, other adults with limited formal education in need of improving literacy or numeracy skills so they can transition to the workforce or college, students who have dropped out of school and want to complete a high school diploma or equivalency test, and adults seeking career and technical training resulting in workforce-ready certifications.



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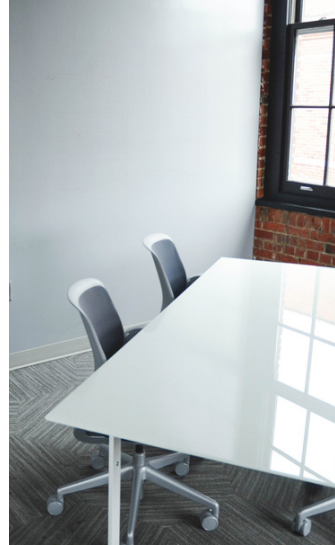
The largest segment of adult education learners participate in classes to learn English (40%). The next largest segments are those completing high school diploma or equivalency preparation (30%) and career technical education and training (30%). Latinx individuals make up the majority (58%) of adult education learners served in California. Almost half (47%) of adult learners are between 25-44 years of age and 64% of adult learners identify as female (Cal-PASS Plus/LaunchBoard).

## California's Need for Adult Education

In 2022, a report from the non-profit, World Population Review, found that California had the lowest literacy rate in the nation at 77%. This means that nearly 1 in 4 people (23%) over the age of 15 in California are considered to have a "low literacy" rate, which means they struggle significantly with basic literacy and numeracy skills.

California also has the highest proportion of immigrants (27%) of any state. And according to recent statistics, 18% of California's population over age 25 do not have the equivalent of a high school diploma. Worth noting is the poverty rate for this demographic at 26% (15% higher than those with either some college or an associate degree).





# RECOVERY ON THE HORIZON

Adult education programs specialize in providing accessible courses tailored to the needs of adult English learners, low-income individuals, adults with disabilities, justice-involved, and other vulnerable or historically marginalized adult populations most in need of preparation for college and workforce success. These programs are typically imbedded within communities with high need and offer accessible, convenient opportunities for classes. Consequently, adult education programs should be key equity partners in any education and workforce development efforts and initiatives state-wide and locally.

**700K** ADULT LEARNERS IN 2018-19

**43%** ENROLLMENT DROP IN 2020-21

**400K** NUMBER OF REMAINING ADULT LEARNERS

In 2018-19, California served over 700,000 learners in adult education classes offered by public school districts, community colleges, community-based organizations, libraries, and correctional institutions, among others. By 2020-21, adult education enrollment dropped 43% to 400,000, as a result of Covid-19 and related impacts. As the California economy and job market rebound from Covid-19, adult education programs have the capacity and are well-positioned to collaborate with other local organizations to re-engage, reskill, and upskill youth and adult learners through education and training programs. This will ensure that these populations are not left behind in economic recovery efforts, including new job opportunities in health care, construction, and energy and utilities, among other high-growth sectors.



# THE CALIFORNIA ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM AND REGIONAL CONSORTIA

Historically, publicly funded California adult education programs are delivered by both community college districts and school districts. Between 2013-2015, the statewide adult education system was reorganized as a result of legislative and budget action, and a dedicated funding stream was established called the Adult Education Block Grant (AEBG), subsequently renamed the California Adult Education Program (CAEP). Initially, the state provided \$500 million in ongoing funding to create and fund regional adult education consortia composed of community college districts and K-12 districts to develop regional plans and coordinate services to better meet the educational and workforce training needs of adults. In 2022-23, the statewide CAEP allocation was over \$597 million.



**There are 71 regional consortia in California. [Click here](#) for the statewide consortium directory, which includes member districts and local contact information.**

As a condition of funding and per state law, each consortium must develop and submit a regional plan every three years—as well as an annual progress plan—documenting consortium member actions and strategies to meet the educational and workforce training needs of adults in their region. Moreover, each consortium must hold regular public meetings to provide the public and other stakeholders with information as well as opportunities to provide input into consortium regional planning, progress, and related activities. Such opportunities provide valuable opportunities for leaders in community-based organizations, workforce development agencies, and other entities serving adults to connect with, inform, and leverage regional consortium educational and training efforts in local communities throughout California. Allowable instructional areas under CAEP are English as a second language courses, basic skills and academic courses leading to a high school diploma or equivalent, programs for adults with disabilities, career technical education and workforce preparation courses (including pre-apprenticeship), and courses for parents designed to support school-aged children’s success.



# WORKFORCE INNOVATION & OPPORTUNITY ACT

In addition to state CAEP funding for adult education, the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) grant provides supplemental funding to adult education agencies (many of which are also CAEP funded) to address adult literacy needs for purposes of workforce readiness and preparation for further education and training. WIOA AEFLA activities focus on assisting adults in (a) gaining/upgrading employment opportunities; (b) obtaining a high school diploma (HSD) or high school equivalency (HSE) certificate; (c) attaining skills necessary to enter postsecondary education and training; (d) exiting public welfare and becoming self-sufficient; (e) learning to speak, read, and write the English language; (f) mastering basic academic skills to help their children succeed in school; and (g) becoming US citizens, exercising their civic responsibilities, and participating in a democratic society (California WIOA Title II Narrative Report, 2019-2020).

During the 2019-2020 program year, there were over 383,000 adult education learners enrolled in WIOA AEFLA programs in California, a decrease of 12% from the prior year due to Covid-19 disruptions. California's enrollment represents approximately 20% of the total adults enrolled nationally in the AEFLA program. In 2022-23, California received over \$106 million in WIOA AEFLA funds administered by the California Department of Education (CDE) and distributed to eligible adult education program agencies.

(<https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r8/wioa22result.asp>).





# WIOA, AEFLA PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The California Department of Education (CDE) uses the following key performance measures in calculating allocations to WIOA AEFLA agencies:

- Pre/post literacy and numeracy testing
- Attainment of high school diploma or equivalent
- Passage of citizenship courses/tests
- Obtaining employment post program completion
- Passage of approved English and civics assessments

## **Integration with the Workforce Development System**

In recent years, there have been deeper coordination and collaboration efforts—including co-enrollment strategies—between WIOA AEFLA funded adult education programs, the Employment Development Department (EDD), America’s Job Centers of California (AJCCs), workforce development boards (WDBs), and other entities concerned with assisting adults in overcoming barriers to employment. Through local coordination and memoranda of understanding, applicable services provided by adult education programs often include (a) outreach, intake, academic assessment, and orientation services, (b) workforce training and related instructional services, (c) English language acquisition programs, (d) integrated education and training programs (i.e., programs that combine basic literacy and numeracy skills instruction with career-specific content), and other supportive activities in coordination with other WIOA providers. In addition, California’s Eligible Training Provider **List (ETPL)** provides information on workforce training programs offered through adult education and other WIOA funded agencies.



# WHAT IS THE ELIGIBLE TRAINING PROVIDER LIST (ETPL)?

WIOA regulations require states to create and maintain a listing of training providers eligible to receive WIOA Title I funds for training. Eligible individuals such as out of school youth and dislocated workers can be issued individual training accounts (ITAs) from AJCCs to fund training services from any provider on the ETPL.

This listing is maintained by the Employment Development Department (EDD) and offers detailed information for job seekers, allowing them—with assistance from AJCC staff—to select an appropriate training program to meet their needs.

## **Spotlight:**

In 2017, the Los Angeles Unified School District, Division of Adult and Career Education developed a formalized partnership with the City of Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department (EWDD) to create “navigator” staff positions to provide outreach, career development, and case management services to clients at City of Los Angeles worksorce centers as well as adult education campuses throughout L.A. Unified. As a result, over 6,000 adults were enrolled into workforce training programs at adult education centers—and were co-enrolled to receive services at City of Los Angeles worksorce centers.

## **Workforce Preparation and Specialized Training**

Many adult education programs offer a growing number of in-demand career and technical education (CTE) training programs (including pre-apprenticeship training) designed for adults to secure employment in high-growth sectors. Programs are typically short-term and can be completed within a few weeks or months with low or no cost to the students; additionally, most programs lead to industry-recognized certifications or credentials. Some examples of high-demand training programs are pharmacy technician, electrician trainee, licensed vocational nurse, medical assistant, aircraft mechanic, information technology support technician, and numerous others. Many of these training programs are listed on the EDD ETPL website ([https://edd.ca.gov/en/jobs\\_and\\_training/eligible\\_training\\_provider\\_list](https://edd.ca.gov/en/jobs_and_training/eligible_training_provider_list)).

## **Spotlight:**

Basset Unified School District, located in the San Gabriel Valley and part of the Mt. San Antonio Regional Consortium for Adult Education, recently developed an electrical trainee certification program in direct response to regional labor market need for skilled, certified electricians. (<https://caladulthood.org/Practice/ModelProgram/Story/227>). Students who complete the 150-hour course earn a portable state license called the Electrician Trainee Card (T-Card). The program has a student pass rate for the state exam of over 81%. And over 70% of student completers find immediate employment as an electrician on residential and/or commercial projects.



Finally, there are a growing number of adult education programs offering integrated education and training (IET) courses. IET courses offer accelerated learning opportunities by combining and contextualizing basic skills instruction with career training content to provide more equitable and accessible career pathways for English learners and other adult learners with lower levels of literacy or numeracy. These courses typically articulate with more advanced CTE training pathways as well as provide workforce certifications for entry level positions in a number of industry sectors.

### **Spotlight:**

In Northern California, the Sierra Joint Consortium (SJC) partnered with a forestry company, Mountain F. Enterprises, to create a customized IET program designed to upskill approximately 180 workers, most of whom were non-English speakers.

(<https://caladulthood.org/Practice/ModelProgram/Story/231>). The curriculum is customized to the needs of the employer and students, and the program is delivered in a “hyflex” format, which blends in-person and remote instruction. This flexible learning model also supports student success as it can accommodate learners’ various work schedules.

### **Los Angeles County**

L.A. County, with a population of over 10 million in 2022, is the largest and one of the most densely populated counties in the U.S. It is also richly diverse ethnically and linguistically with over 30% of the population being foreign born. In terms of educational attainment, nearly 1.4 million adults (20% of the total adult population) have less than a high school degree or equivalent and are more likely to live in poverty. On average, this demographic earns about 37% less than those with some type of post-secondary education or credential.







## EDUCATIONAL & WORKFORCE NEEDS

**10M** LA COUNTY  
POPULATION

**30%** PERCENTAGE OF  
POPULATION  
FOREIGN BORN

**1.4M** ADULTS WHO  
HAVE LESS THAN  
A HIGH SCHOOL  
DIPLOMA

Considering the aforementioned statistics, adult education programs are well-suited and should be leveraged to address the educational and workforce needs of this population. In particular, adult education programs offer numerous academic and career pathways leading to industry-recognized certifications for “middle skills” occupations.

These are jobs that generally require a degree or credential beyond a high school diploma but less than a 4-year degree. According to recent estimates, over 40% of new jobs in the L.A. County region over the next five years will be in the middle skills category. Middle skills jobs are becoming more prevalent across all industry sectors with some of the highest expected growth projected in the health care, construction, and service-related industries.

# SPOTLIGHT ON REGIONAL ADULT EDUCATION CONSORTIA IN THE LOS ANGELES BASIN

Within the Los Angeles Basin there are 19 adult education consortia listed on the map below followed by links to key contacts and member information. In addition to contact information, there are links to all consortia plans, which are designed address the educational and workforce needs of adults in their region.

## Citrus College

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/336>

## Rio Hondo Region Adult Education

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/372>

## Coast Adult Education Consortium

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/337>

## Riverside

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/373>

## Glendale Community College District

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/346>

## San Bernadino – Inland Adult Education

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/374>

## Santa Monica Regional

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/383>

## Long Beach Adult Education

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/353>

## South Bay Adult Education

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/342>

## Los Angeles Regional Adult Education

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/354>

## South Orange County Regional

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/389>

## Mt. San Antonio Regional

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/361>

## Southeast Los Angeles

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/333>

## North Orange County Regional

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/364>

## Southwest Riverside County

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/362>

## Pasadena Area

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/368>

## Tri City Adult Education

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/338>

## Rancho Santiago Adult Education

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/370>

## West End Corridor – Chaffey

<https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDetails/225>



# SPOTLIGHT ON REGIONAL ADULT EDUCATION CONSORTIA THROUGHOUT CALIFORNIA

Within the State of California, there are 71 adult education consortia. By clicking on the map below, you will find contact information and a funding overview for each member.



# RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

There is wide variation in the quantity and quality of regional networks as well as the level of engagement of partners in regional planning efforts specific to adult education. Some regions may already have strong and inclusive regional networks, while in other regions, such networks may be underdeveloped. The following broad recommendations can apply to a number of regions along the continuum and can serve to both enhance existing relationships as well as contribute to new partnerships.

## 01

### **Connect with and Continue to Build Regional Networks and Relationships**

– The state-wide adult education system, though robust, can only be maximized through intentional, sustained engagement among key partners. Leaders in workforce development boards, county offices of education, community-based organizations, and others with an interest in assisting adults gain essential educational and workforce training, may consider reaching out and connecting with adult education consortium leaders to explore opportunities for outreach and collaboration. A great start is to request a visit to a local adult education program to see firsthand how innovative programs are meeting students' needs and changing lives.

## 02

### **Integrate and Leverage Regional Planning Efforts**

– Each consortium has developed regional plans addressing the educational and workforce training needs of adults in their region. Regional plans are developed in three-year cycles along with annual progress plans and are available online: <https://caladulthood.org/ConsortiumDirectory>. Workforce development leaders may consider engaging consortium leaders on strategic opportunities to integrate regional planning efforts with other county, district, or other local workforce development plans that include adult populations in need of education and training services. Through these collaborations, agencies can look for avenues to coordinate and strengthen regional workforce initiatives and maximize collective impact.



# 03

## **Engage with Regional Adult Education Consortia Leadership Boards–**

Each consortium has developed a local executive leadership board with regular public meetings to inform constituents of activities and progress related to regional planning efforts. These meetings provide ongoing opportunities for workforce development leaders to engage consortia leadership in facilitating greater awareness and understanding of other related efforts and opportunities to address the workforce and training needs of adults. In addition it provides an avenue to provide valuable input into the development of adult education regional plans.

As a community of dedicated workforce development leaders, we possess a shared passion and commitment to improving outcomes for all younger and older adults who deserve a pathway to economic and social prosperity. The intention is that this brief will be useful in assisting leaders in workforce development, community-based, and other agencies to gain a better understanding of adult education programs and engage adult education consortia leadership with a shared goal of building and strengthening regional networks to improve services for our community's most vulnerable younger and adults.

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