

# MOVEMENT TO INCREASE College and Career Readiness for America's ADULTs MEETS AND SEEKS SUPPORT FROM NEW EDUCATION SECRETARY AND CONGRESS

WASHINGTON (April 28, 2017) – As part of a campaign to improve access to adult education and the skills programs, which dramatically increase job opportunities, leaders of two major adult education organizations met this week with U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and more than 80 members of Congress and staff.

Tens of millions of adults in America can't read or handle even simple math. They often are unable to find work or even qualify for job training programs.

According to officials of the [Coalition on Adult Basic Education](#) (COABE) and the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education (NCSDAE), Secretary DeVos told the leaders she was committed to strengthening adult college and career readiness and is eager to find innovative and high-tech solutions to help. The meetings came as COABE members, joined by various adult education state directors, fanned out across Washington for the spring Capitol Hill Day.

The two organizations, which represent more than 55,000 adult education teachers and administrators, recently launched the national [Educate & Elevate](#) campaign to raise awareness about and ensure funding critical to support adult education programs nationwide.

The United States consistently scores below the international average in literacy, numeracy and in modern problem-solving, according to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#). One of every six adults in the U.S. lacks basic reading skills and cannot read a job application, understand basic written instructions or navigate the Internet. And two out of every six adults in the U.S. cannot understand basic numbers, like working a cash register or understanding a transit schedule, as COABE and NCSDAE leaders pointed out.

"The Secretary assured us she is very interested in finding innovations and new technologies to help the 36 million adults in America who can't read job ads (this may come across as 36 million can't read) or even qualify for job-training programs," said COABE's president Tom Nash from Windham Raymond Adult Schools in Maine. "We thank the Secretary for her interest and look forward to working with her and the Department of Education."

With providing more job opportunities for American workers, a goal of the Trump administration, the leaders discussed the need to prepare more adults to fill current and newly created job openings at all levels. Adults with high school diplomas or equivalency certificates are more likely to work full time than those without, earn an average of \$30,000 a year more and are better able to lift themselves above the family poverty line.

“It’s time we move beyond the concept of ‘leaving no child behind’. Today we need everyone pulling together so that adults, too, can move ahead with the skills they need to find and get good jobs, support families and minimize strain on social and legal services in communities nationwide,” Bonney added.

Federal and state funds support the majority of adult education programs. These funds have served approximately 1.5 million adults a year of the 36 million adult Americans in need. Budget decisions are pending for appropriations to support the bipartisan Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This act was overwhelmingly approved by Congress in 2014 to transform the nation’s adult education system. .

“The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is a game changer that will transform our work in preparing students to compete in today’s workforce,” said Reecie Stagnolia, incoming chair of the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education (NCSDAE) and vice president of adult education for the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. “Adult education is a wise investment in America’s future that will yield a strong return. Improving the educational attainment of our adults prepares them for successful transition to college and careers and is an economic catalyst for global competitiveness.”

Nationwide, many potential students languish on waiting lists, some can’t afford transportation to get to distant classes and some, without child care are unable to attend night or weekend classes. Secretary DeVos, COABE and NCSDAE leaders pledged to look for strategies to connect with more adult students through innovative technologies and informational campaigns.

Following the meeting, the leaders expressed confidence that Secretary DeVos would consider adult education a priority in her policy agenda. “It was truly an honor to meet with Secretary DeVos and discuss the critical role our nation’s adult education system plays in increasing the education and skill levels of our adult population,” Stagnolia said.

Other leaders at the meeting included Kaye Sharbono, incoming president for COABE and adult education leader in Louisiana; Sharon Bonney, executive director of COABE; and Patricia Tyler, executive director of NCSDAE. The hour-long session concluded a successful day of meetings with more than 80 Congressional members and staff.

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