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COABE APPOINTS SHARON BONNEY AS FIRST CEO

She has led adult education organization to significant membership growth, increased visibility

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE), the nation’s leading advocate for the adult education field, has appointed as its first CEO Sharon Bonney, who has raised the organization’s profile and grown its membership to nearly 18 times what it was in 2009.

Bonney will assume the new position July 1, transitioning from the executive director role she has held with the organization since July 2015. In the new position, she will be responsible for growing and diversifying COABE’s funding sources and sponsors, while enhancing its relationships with longstanding supporters. She also will focus on establishing adult education as a gateway to higher education and employment, working to shift the perception that adult education leads only to a high school equivalency.

“Sharon has a long-standing history with COABE and as a forward-thinking leader has been very instrumental in taking the organization to a new level,” said Kaye Sharbono, COABE president. “She not only has extensive knowledge of adult education issues, but she has a tremendous passion for ensuring adult education providers are equipped with the best practices and tools they need to deliver services on a broader scale and that America has the capacity to meet the needs of every citizen who needs a hand up and out of poverty.”

The timing is right in the field of adult education – and in the life of COABE – to appoint a chief executive officer, Sharbono said. Adult education is coming of age with new approaches to delivering services; increasing exposure of the brand and best practices; building new relationships and engaging other communities into the field.

“I am honored to be appointed the first-ever CEO for an organization and a cause I love,” Bonney said. “COABE has made great strides in bringing awareness to adult education and how important it is to families and entire communities. Much work lies ahead to raise still more awareness and increase funding to ensure more people have access to quality programs. I look forward to working with the Board, our members, and our partners on those efforts.”

Bonney began her career with COABE as a part-time administrator in 2009, moving up in the organization as she showed an unparalleled commitment to the field of adult education. Bonney has helped advance the organization on a number of fronts, including managing efforts to move it from a 1,300-member group in 2009 to 23,000 active members in 2019.

She was the guiding force behind designing and implementing a new national conference model; developing new state, national, and workforce partnerships with more than 100 organizations; rebranding the COABE research journal and a related research-to-practice initiative; and designing all new professional development offerings, including webinars that engage more than 18,000 members. Bonney also developed the internationally acclaimed, six-time award-winning Educate and Elevate public awareness campaign, which brought much-needed visibility to the value of adult education and prompted more than 106,000 contacts with legislators at the local, state, and federal levels. These efforts resulted in a \$35 million increase in funding for adult education. In addition, Bonney has diversified and increased revenue streams for the organization.

COABE supports the teachers and administrators who work with adult learners by providing knowledge, professional development, and information through an online repository packed with resources, from lesson plans to research on best practices, journal publications, webinars, and an annual virtual conference that draws about 10,000 attendees. COABE also hosts the premiere adult education conference, which has more than 2,000 attendees and more than 400 concurrent sessions offering expert presenters associated with all arenas of the field.

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