

Reed & Young Introduce Bipartisan Adult Education WORKS Act to Strengthen and Expand Programs for Adult Learners

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WASHINGTON, DC – For millions of Americans, adult education programs can make the difference between earning a family-sustaining wage and struggling to make ends meet. According to the [Department of Education](#), at current funding levels, adult education programs reach about 1.1 million people out of [43 million adults that are low-skilled in literacy and 62.7 million that are low-skilled in numeracy](#). In an effort to address the long-standing adult education crisis affecting quality of life for individuals and their families and holding our economy back, U.S. Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Todd Young (R-PA) today introduced the Adult Education Workforce Opportunity and Reskilling for Knowledge and Success Act, or the Adult WORKS Act, to reauthorize adult education programs and expand upon the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

A study commissioned by the [Barbara Bush Foundation](#) estimates that getting all American adults to the equivalent of a sixth-grade reading level would add \$2.2 trillion to the country's annual income. Without the opportunities provided by adult education programs, like numeracy, literacy, digital literacy, English language skills, soft skills, work readiness, high school equivalency, and other wraparound services, many adults will be left on the sidelines of an economy that needs more qualified workers in order to grow.

The Adult Education WORKS Act provides a roadmap for addressing this crisis by updating WIOA and by strengthening and expanding access to adult education services. Specifically, the legislation calls for doubling the authorized funding for adult education by 2026 to \$1.35 billion while making significant changes to the adult education system. Critical for achieving success in modern workplaces and for navigating everyday life, the bill calls for a new emphasis on digital and information literacy. Furthermore, the legislation will help to enhance the role of adult education providers by ensuring representation in the workforce planning process, with a focus on college and career navigators in public libraries and community-based organizations.

The Adult Education WORKS Act invests in the professionalization of the adult education field, strengthening state certification policies, encouraging full-time staffing models, and expanding professional development opportunities and career pathways for adult educators. Investments will enhance innovation and provide increased accountability through pilot projects that test new approaches to measuring program performance and outcomes for adult learners.

“Adult education is the gateway to opportunity, connecting people with the skills needed to succeed while also strengthening America’s workforce and economy,” said **Senator Reed**. “When I go around Rhode Island, and I ask employers what their biggest hurdle is, they say they don’t have enough qualified workers. The Adult Education WORKS Act will help ensure that more Americans have access to programs that equip them with skills to go out and take the opportunities that are available to them.”

“It’s critical that all Hoosiers have the tools necessary to succeed in the modern economy – and that starts with strengthening adult education,” said **Senator Young**. “Our new

bipartisan bill would bolster critical services for adult learners, while also making important updates that ensure participants are prepared for the 21st century workforce.”

The Adult Education WORKS Act would amend Title I and reauthorize Title II of the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#) (WIOA), which was signed into law on July 22, 2014. WIOA was designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. Congress passed the Act with a wide bipartisan majority and it was the first legislative reform of the public workforce system since 1998.

The legislation is supported by the American Library Association, the Coalition for Adult Basic Education, the National Coalition for Literacy, ProLiteracy, The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), and TESOL International Association.

“Library services play a vital role in empowering and strengthening the nation’s workforce. As the job market evolves to meet the needs and demands of a changing economy, libraries are here with resources for jobseekers to gain the skills they need for better paying jobs and new career opportunities,” said **ALA President Lessa Kenani-Opua Pelayo-Lozada**. “ALA is proud to support the Adult Education WORKS Act. This fresh approach to workforce development is what the country needs now, and with bipartisan cosponsors, it’s exactly the kind of legislation that a divided Congress can get behind.”

“The Adult Education WORKS Act will give more opportunities to adult learners, strengthening our nation’s economy and increasing our global competitiveness. COABE is greatly appreciative of Senator Jack Reed and Senator Todd Young’s engagement with the adult education field to develop this bill and is proud to announce its strong support of the bill.” said **Sharon Bonney, CEO of the Coalition for Adult Basic Education** (COABE).

“The Adult Education WORKS Act will reinforce the fabric of American society by increasing access to education in foundational literacy, numeracy, and digital skills for the millions of adults who need them,” said **Executive Director of the National Coalition for Literacy, Deborah Kennedy**. “By promoting greater coordination between adult education and workforce development programs, supporting increased professionalization of the adult education field, and providing for college and career navigators who can guide adults in pursuing further education and viable career paths, the Act will build on the proven strengths of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act while expanding access to educational opportunity for a larger proportion of the adults who can benefit from it.”

“TESOL International Association, on behalf of its members who proudly serve the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession, supports Senators Reed and Young’s Adult Education WORKS Act, as it strengthens and expands access to adult education services through WIOA,” said **Jeff Hutcheson, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy for TESOL**. “With increased funding, support for the adult education profession, and incorporation of digital and information literacy for adult education, this Act will improve the lives and opportunities for millions of adult learners, [one-third of whom](#) are participating in English language acquisition programs.”