



Adult Education: Expand Access to Meet the Needs of Workers and Employers

Pass: S-2437 (Seveney) and H-7637 (Cortvriend)

The statewide network of Adult Education programs administered by the RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) is the infrastructure that provides critical skills development services (literacy, numeracy, English language services, digital literacy) for thousands of underserved Rhode Islanders with foundational skills gaps. Adult Education participation puts lower skilled adults on pathways to family-sustaining wages and develops the skilled workforce that employers seek.

The state's need for access to foundational skills is profound:

- ***By 2025, at least 70 percent of jobs in Rhode Island*** will require some postsecondary education (degree, apprenticeship, industry-recognized credential, or license).
- **68,000 working-age adults** in Rhode Island do not have a high school credential
- **31,250 adult Rhode islanders** have limited English proficiency

RIDE-funded Adult Education programs located around the state provide academic skill development at or below high school level (including GED preparation), ESOL, workforce preparation, digital literacy skills development, workforce development and job training, GED testing and citizenship preparation.

These programs offer training for lower-skilled Rhode Islanders to prepare for or advance in jobs in industry sectors critical to the state's recovery, including health care and hospitality and other high-demand sectors. Most programs are grantees of both RIDE and the Governor's Workforce Board (GWB), and braid funding to support occupational training developed in response to employer need.

Like other education systems, Adult Education programs shifted to distance learning in March 2020, and stayed open, delivering remote programming, and supporting students while adapting to pandemic challenges over the past two years. RIDE has not supported programs with any federal COVID relief (CARES, ESSER or ARPA) funds. Moreover, funding for this critical network has been frozen for at least a dozen years, and the state investment is \$2M, just the amount necessary to draw down federal funds.

The bills will advance access to Adult Education in three ways:

1. Update categories of Adult Education services in RIGL 16-63-1 to include

- Digital literacy services
- Transition to college
- Integrated Education and Training models
- Learn and Earn models

2. Use \$11.2 million of ARPA funds for one-time investments to improve skills and employment opportunities for lower skilled adults

- Require RIDE/AE to develop a strategic plan that lays out an equity-informed roadmap for adult learner services, based on a needs assessment. (\$120,000).
- Establish “Learning, Intake and Assessment Centers” to address the varied needs of adults along the workforce development continuum by ‘meeting them where they are’ to connect to A job, a Better job or a Career (ABC). Centers would be run by Adult Education programs, and located in libraries, One Stops and AE programs. RIDE/AE would monitor and report on the efficacy of this model. \$800,000 for a one-time investment for infrastructure and staff development.
- Allocate \$950,000 to enhance digital literacy skills. Funds to be used as needed (and where no other funds are available) to improve providers’ capacity to teach digital literacy skills and for adults to be able to participate in training.
- Allocate \$3.6M of ARPA funds to double participation of adults in integrated education and training programs, a best-practice model. Number of participants would increase from 600 to 1200 at a cost of \$6,000/participant.
- Allocate \$5.76M to provide stipends to 1,200 participants in learn and earn programs so adults do not have to choose between working full-time at survival jobs or short-term participation in programs that will lead to better paid jobs. Estimated \$4,800/participant for stipend of \$15/hour for 16 weeks at 20 hours/week would enable adults to work part-time during training rather than having to forgo participation for full time work.

3. Increase funding for Adult Education programs by increasing general revenue investment

Adult Education is funded through federal sources (Workforce Investment Opportunities Act, TANF) and state sources (JDF and general revenue). Total funding for adult education has not increased since at least 2010, while CPI has increased by 27%. The bill proposes increasing the general revenue investment (currently \$2M.) to account for inflation – raising the general revenue amount by \$540,000.

To learn more, visit www.economicprogressri.org/RIWorkforceAlliance