

Adult Basic Education: A Tool for Economic Growth in Minnesota



Minnesota ABE is a major player in workforce education. It works proactively with Workforce Service Areas, Workforce Centers, MNSCU, DEED, and others to formulate creative solutions to the workforce needs of employers, including on-site ABE/ESL classes, the Essential Skills Certificate, and the Work Readiness Credential. The state ABE office established workforce education as a top priority five years ago, with a current emphasis on insuring successful transitions to post-secondary training and education.

Minnesota ABE: A High RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- **Minnesota ABE is strategic, lean, and outcome-based.** Over 85% of all funding supports direct instruction. The state has surpassed federal goals for each of the past several years. And the cost? \$610 per adult learner each year.
- The Minnesota Department of Education estimates ABE returns **3 to 5 times** the expenditure back to the state in cash and in savings. In a recent year, the increased income for GED and adult diploma graduates was estimated at **\$120 million, generating nearly \$10 million in taxes.**
- Dropouts in the late 90's earned an average of \$20,300; earners with some college brought home \$31,600. The gap has only increased since then. The average dropout earns \$7,000 less annually than the average high school or GED graduate.
- **As ABE students improve their skills and earnings, benefits accrue to the state, including higher tax revenues and more families that are economically stable.** The state burden for social services also declines.
- In 2007, Minnesota ABE granted over 7,100 GEDs (11% of all high school diplomas issued in the state). Nearly 6,300 adult learners reported gaining or bettering employment, and over 4,900 entered post-secondary education. Over 14,450 learners reported being able to better assist their children in school.
- Research shows that for prison inmates the link between high school equivalency and reduced recidivism is strong. If only 20% of incarcerated ABE learners in a given year did not return to prison as a result of ABE, this would **save the state of Minnesota approximately \$44 million annually in incarceration costs.**



What does ABE Accomplish?



Adult Basic Education (ABE) provides English language learning, basic reading and math skills, family literacy, GED (high school equivalency), pre-career training, and job preparation to over 75,000 Minnesota adults each year. **For many adult learners, the skills they master in ABE classes provide a doorway to post-secondary education, initial employment, promotion once employed, and re-training when jobs are lost.**

Minnesota ABE is a national leader in distance learning, developing a broad array of web-based learning tools. **This allows more adults to access training in an efficient manner, helping them achieve their educational and occupational goals.** The online *GEDi* program began this year. *Mindquest Academy* helps adult learners prepare for successful transition to higher education. The *Learner Web*, an innovative national project organizing diverse online resources in a coherent, accessible manner, went live this past October.

ABE is a major influence on K12 achievement. A recent survey by a suburban Twin Cities ABE program indicated that 77% of adult learners in their district have minor children living at home, with each family averaging 2.4 children. Parents with more education read to their children, help them with homework, and communicate effectively with teachers, helping build better K12 outcomes. The educational level of parents is the biggest influence on the educational outcomes of their children. However, public schools in Minnesota report that *“the number of parents whose lack of basic skills are barriers to the success of their children is growing, not declining.”*

During a recession...

During times of economic stress, ABE is crucial in helping unemployed adults improve basic skills needed for future employment. As recessions deepen, the number of Minnesotans accessing ABE increases. During the last economic downturn in 2002-04, the number of adults served through Minnesota ABE set new records, surpassing 81,000 each year (a 60% increase from four years earlier).

“We know individuals who receive at least one year of post-secondary education are far less likely to be poor than those who have not,” states the preliminary report of the *Legislative Commission to End Poverty in Minnesota by 2020*. A GED by itself will not insure economic success. **Short-term post-secondary training** for occupations such as certified nursing assistant, phlebotomist, commercial truck driver, boiler technician, Nutrition and Food Safety Specialist, Child Development Assistant, and the trades can help insure living wage jobs.

Minnesota ABE is in the midst of a focused three-year effort to help students transition effectively into such post-secondary education and training. ABE is committed to providing all adult learners with the communication skills, academic knowledge, and study habits that will enable them to successfully complete post-secondary training in fields leading to living wage jobs.

Minnesota ABE has spent the past several years retooling programs to tie them even more closely to **enhanced economic outcomes for individuals and families** – and the larger community. It is especially important that these services be preserved and strengthened during times of economic stress and recession.

