aiwp

GED and ABE Programs Prepare Iowans for Higher Paying Careers

THE NEED: Iowans are not able to attain both GED and additional training programs, due to funding limitations.

THE SOLUTION: Provide support for GED programs at the state level, so federal funds can be spent to up-skill workers and provide them with jobs in high-demand occupations.

IOWA'S NEED FOR GED ATTAINMENT

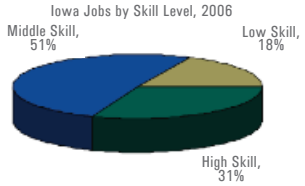
In recent years, the high school graduation rate has decreased in Iowa. In 2006, 90.8 percent of all high school students graduated with a regular diploma. The high school graduation rate dropped to 90.5 percent in 2007 and 88.7 percent in 2008. Graduation rates among minority students are much lower. In 2008, high school graduation rates dropped to 71.0 percent of African American students and 69.3 percent of Latino students.[i]

Iowa's decreasing high school graduation rates contribute to the number of adults with high school diplomas or GED equivalents. **In Iowa, approximately 165,039 of the 1,832,192 adults in the workforce have not completed high school or obtained a GED**. From July 2009 to November 2010, 14 percent of adults coming through membership services in workforce centers did not have a high school diploma or GED.[ii] However, recent manufacturing layoffs have seen higher numbers of people who need their GED. **For instance, during the John Morrell plant closing in Sioux City, 72.5 percent of workers who were laid off did not have a high school diploma or GED.** The need for GED programs has increased, since many manufacturing jobs are lost long-term, and workers must pursue additional training to find another job.

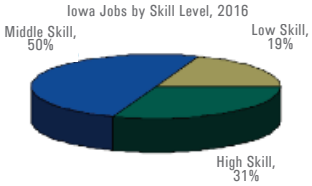
THE WIDENING WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION GAP

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that employers in all professional and trade categories need workers with a minimum high school education. Over a lifetime of earnings, an Iowa worker with less than a high school degree will earn **$1,078,097 by age 65,** which is **16 percent less** than a worker with a high school diploma or equivalent, who earns an average of **$1,291,955 by age 65,** and is almost **35 percent less** than an Iowa worker with an Associate's or Technical degree (**$1,643,602 by age 65**).[iii] Middle-skill jobs, which require more than a high-school education but less than a four-year degree, are critical to Iowa's health, infrastructure and economic growth. Unfortunately, key industries in the state such as health care, transportation, and construction are unable to find enough sufficiently trained workers to fill these jobs. Demand for these middle-skill jobs – many of which cannot be outsourced – is strong and will remain strong for years to come.[iv]

DEMAND FOR MIDDLE-SKILL JOBS IS STRONG, WILL REMAIN STRONG IN IOWA



Source: Iowa Workforce Development



Source: Iowa Workforce Development

Adult training for middle-skill jobs starts with the completion of General Education Diploma (GED) and Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs and expands to additional training as it is available. Workforce centers and community colleges work closely together to provide GED, ABE, and additional training opportunities, but often, participants exhaust their workforce service benefits in completing a GED and are unable to complete additional training. **When they are able to access programs, Iowans excel in them. In 2009, Iowa boasted a 99 percent pass rate, and 3,870 people gained their GED diplomas.**[v]

Ensuring that workers are prepared for the workplace will be essential to ensure that the United States remains globally competitive. In the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment report, the United States ranked 14th out of 34 countries in reading, 17th for science, and 25th for mathematics. Only eight countries had a lower graduation rate than the United States.[vi]

THE CURRENT STATE OF GED AND ABE PROGRAMS IN IOWA

Federal funding for GED and ABE programs in Iowa is not meeting the current need. Further, state level funding for GED and ABE programs does not exist. Many GED and ABE programs across Iowa are financially unable to provide instructors in a classroom environment. As a result, many GED and ABE classes are no longer available. Classroom instruction has been replaced with large group study sessions where

students review GED and ABE materials on their own and can only seek assistance when absolutely necessary. Successful adult learners in the programs must be highly self-motivated and must have the ability to learn independently. Students speaking English as a second language face additional barriers. Budget cuts are also impacting services to rural areas, as workforce regions have been forced to close rural offices. By providing funding for GED attainment, Iowa can utilize federal funding to up-skill workers for high-demand occupations.

INNOVATIVE BASIC EDUCATION AND SKILLS TRAINING – WASHINGTON'S I-BEST PROGRAM

The nation's most successful GED and ABE programs integrate adult education, English as a Second Language (ESL), and workforce training. Students obtain literacy and workplace skills, college credit, and vocational certificates all at the same time. One of these innovative programs, developed in the state of Washington, is called Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) and is now operating in 34 community and technical colleges across the state of Washington. I-BEST students receive dual credit, demonstrate more skills gains, and have clear pathways from entry-level jobs to higher skilled and better paying careers in high demand fields. Students in I-BEST programs earned five times more college credits and were 15 times more likely to complete a workforce education program than other ESL students with the same goals.[vii]

Workforce centers in Iowa have worked to integrate GED and ABE programs, and this option should be expanded further. Promising programs include:

- In Cedar Rapids, participants can earn a GED while attending training to become a CNA or welder. Of those who have completed the CNA program so far, 90 percent received the CNA certificate, and 80 percent received their GED. Thirty percent are attending college to further their education, and 100 percent are employed.
- In Burlington, GED classes are combined with training or work experience to enable the participant to gain additional skills.

CENTRAL IOWA RE-ENGAGEMENT CENTER

Through a federal stimulus grant and local funding support, Iowa Comprehensive Human Services opened a Re-engagement Center in Des Moines for people who have not yet attained a high school diploma or GED. The goal was to provide a non-threatening environment to meet clients where they are, meet needs that interfere with education, re-enroll them in high school when possible, and assist them with obtaining GEDs, credit recovery, and adult diplomas. **From August 2009 to November 2010, the Center has helped 147 people attain their GEDs,** 4 people return to high school and graduate, 79 people pass some of the five GED tests (who are still working to complete them all), and 17 people enroll in post-secondary education programs.

PROVIDE STATE SUPPORT FOR GED AND ABE PROGRAMS

To strengthen Iowa's economy and address Iowa's workforce shortage, a variety of solutions must be used to ensure that the state's workers are adequately trained to fill the jobs that are needed. GED and ABE programs provide the foundation adult learners need to continue on to vocational certificate programs, associate's degrees, and college. Without a high-school diploma or equivalent, the journey towards financial stability and success cannot be started. Innovative programs that integrate adult education, English literacy, and workforce skills will further enhance an adult learner's ability to succeed. ABE and GED programs provide the foundation future workers need to build a successful career. These fundamental programs must be supported to ensure the success of Iowa's future workers, and ultimately, the strength of the state's economy.

ABOUT AIWP

The Association of Iowa Workforce Partners (AIWP) is an assembly of direct workforce service providers. AIWP strives to enrich Iowa's economic development through the delivery of innovative workforce services. AIWP works to provide the link between people, communities and industry. AIWP was established in 2000 and currently has 17 member organizations. Current members include Workforce Investment Act providers, Iowa Workforce Development, and agencies serving special populations.

REFERENCES

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