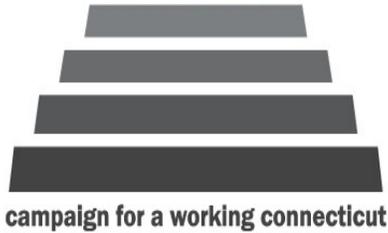


CWCT



Adult Literacy in Connecticut: How Contextualized Learning Can Bridge the Skills Gap

In today's society, basic literacy skills are essential to lead a productive and successful career in America's workforce. Although literacy has a lasting positive impact on the greater community, recent studies show that thirty million Americans currently do not possess the necessary skills to perform everyday literacy-related tasks.ⁱ Adults who lack adequate literacy skills may struggle to find meaningful employment and are more likely to live in poverty, become involved with the justice system and have higher health care costs.



Reports indicate that businesses across Connecticut need workers with basic proficiencies in reading and math, as well as transferable skills including problem-solving, team work, decision making and specific occupational skills. Additionally, approximately 66% of jobs created by 2018 will require some post-secondary education.^{iv} Therefore, lack of basic literacy skills creates a nearly impossible path to higher education, which in turn leads to difficulty in securing steady employment.



While 20% of the statewide population has not acquired the literacy skills necessary to succeed in the 21st century workforce, urban areas across Connecticut are the most impacted by the widening gap in adult literacy. Connecticut's urban centers, for example, maintain a 65 to 70% illiteracy rate among their populations.ⁱⁱ The literacy discrepancy in urban areas throughout the state may be attributed in part to language barriers. For instance, 47% of Hartford residents speak a language other than English at home and 21% identify as speaking English "less than very well".ⁱⁱⁱ



Over 26,000 individuals participate in existing supportive programs throughout Connecticut including Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Equivalency Diploma (GED) and English as a Second Language (ESL), which are overseen by the State Department of Education and are maintained with federal, state and local funding. Higher education institutions throughout the state also offer continuing education programs. While such existing programs offer assistance to adult learners, more needs to be done to close the widening skills gap throughout the state.



Educational experts have identified teaching in context, also known as contextualized learning, as an effective strategy to accelerate a student's path from education to employment. The purpose of these strategies is to help students learn or improve their basic skills while also teaching the technical skills to prepare them for employment.

Because investing in adult literacy is essential to the growth of Connecticut's workforce and economy, the Campaign for a Working Connecticut calls on the state to continue and expand its investments in innovative models to meet the needs of adult learners. Successful and promising initiatives such as contextualized learning and bridge programs should be expanded statewide to ensure all job seekers have the training and education needed to succeed.

The CWCT shares an aligned vision: to promote the state's economic competitiveness through the development of sustainable, effective workforce solutions to increase worker's skills and advance families to self-sufficiency. The CWCT works to accomplish this goal through a unique and diverse state-wide coalition, which includes education and training providers, workforce investment boards, advocates and chambers of commerce.

For more information about the Campaign for a Working CT,
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Visit the website at <http://www.cwealf.org/cwct/>

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Photo by James Martin, "Adult education is the practice of teaching and educating adults." Retrieved on December 8, 2014. Creative Commons Attribution 2.0-Generic.

¹ U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). *National assessment of adult literacy*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/naal/kf_demographics.asp

² Hartford Public Library. (2013). *Capital region adult literacy partnership*. Retrieved from http://www.urbanlibraries.org/capital-region-adult-literacy-partnership-innovation-344.php?page_id=96

³ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. (2012). *Elected social characteristics in the United States more information American community survey 1 year estimates*. Retrieved from: <http://factfinder2census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

⁴ The Basic Economic Security Tables for Connecticut, Wider Opportunities for Women, 2012.