



Education for All



It's never too late to go
back to school. Sonoma
County Adult Education
Consortium offers
courses and support to
get you started today!

EXPLORE ADULT EDUCATION OFFERINGS, INCLUDING:

-  Career Technical Education (CTE) Courses
-  High School Equivalency Preparation and Testing
-  English as a Second Language
-  And More!

Building on a Strong Foundation

Regional adult education consortium bridges adult learners' needs and their dreams

BY MATT JOCKS

Students who enter the adult education system come from all directions. It only makes sense to have as many doors as possible for them to open a world of possibilities.

The Sonoma County Adult Education Consortium aims to do just that, covering the county's geographical expanse and adult learners' extensive needs. Students may be adults who need to earn their high school diploma or equivalency, who need help to master English, or who are looking to improve career skills.

Through the coordination of its members, the consortium seeks to provide more opportunities and greater efficiency.

"It's like a no-wrong-door philosophy," says Carol T. Waxman, principal of Petaluma Adult School. "If you come in at any point, you'll be able to get what you need and we can provide a warm handoff from one agency to another."

Adult education has been offered in Sonoma County for decades, but its rebirth in the form of the consortium was the result of hard times.

When the economic downturn hit in 2008, adult education bore the brunt of the resulting budget woes. Adult education was largely pared back to the essentials, which was helping adults get high school diplomas.

The passage in the state Legislature of Assembly Bill 86 in 2013 provided the funding to allow counties and school districts statewide to form consortia and expand the programs to meet the varied needs of adult learners. The major goal is to lead more people to better jobs with better wages.

In Sonoma County, that has meant more course offerings and more locations where people can access the classes they need.

"For a long time, people had one option — Petaluma [Adult School]," Waxman says. "We would see people enroll, but not persist because of the transportation barrier and the time it takes. People are juggling childcare issues and jobs. It's very difficult."

The formation of the consortium has helped address these accessibility barriers. Currently, the membership of the consortium includes four local school districts, as well as the Sonoma County Office of Education and Santa Rosa Junior College.

Offerings include classes to complete high school diploma requirements, classes to prepare for high school equivalency, English

"If you come in at any point, you'll be able to get what you need."

CAROL T. WAXMAN
Principal, Petaluma Adult School

as a Second Language, citizenship test preparation classes and short-term Career Technical Education, which includes apprenticeship opportunities. There is also AVANCE, a parent-child program primarily for Hispanic families that offers instruction in parenting skills with an eye toward enhancing the child's education.

All of this has been established in less than three years.

"It really is still forming," Waxman says.

As the consortium evolves, it will remain flexible, mixing and matching learning sites and offerings. In that way, that flexibility reflects the students the consortium serves.

"The population we serve is a little fragile in terms of their circumstances," Waxman says. "But these students are also very resilient."

"We had one student just graduate who has been in and out of adult ed since 2008," she continues. "It's work that could have been done in six months, but that wasn't her circumstance. But she kept at it."



> MEET THE CONSORTIUM

The members of the Sonoma County Adult Education Consortium work together to identify and meet the needs of the region's lifelong learners. Member agencies offer courses that help adults focus their education and get ahead in their careers.

Petaluma Adult School



Continue reading to learn about all the opportunities the members of the Sonoma County Adult Education Consortium have to offer!

Adult Education Provides Many Paths to Success

Create the road to your best future!



WHERE TO START

Each student is unique, with different needs and goals. The consortium offers an online clearinghouse – www.socoadulted.org – to assist students in finding the adult education programs that fit their path to success.

ADULT SCHOOLS ONLY

High School Diploma

Whether it's for college or career advancement, adults who did not graduate from high school can attain the units needed to earn a diploma.

Citizenship Courses

Students and community members who desire to become citizens can prepare for the exam through the Petaluma Adult School.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE ONLY

Career Technical Education

Santa Rosa Junior College offers more than 100 Career Technical Education certificates and degrees, covering a wide range of industry sectors and professions.

Associate Degree

With the academic skills learned, students can earn two-year associate degrees, helping lead the way to higher-paying jobs, paid apprenticeships or further education.

ADULT SCHOOLS

AND

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

ESL Courses

Adult schools offer English as a Second Language courses, preparing students with the communication skills needed for further education or employment.

High School Equivalency

Students can take classes to prepare for the GED or HiSET exams. The tests themselves are also offered at both Petaluma Adult School and Santa Rosa Junior College. Courses and tests are offered in English and Spanish.

Adult Basic Education

Classes are offered in English and mathematics to prepare students for college careers, building the foundational skills to take them to the next level.

Short-term Career Technical Education

Students can take a series of courses to earn short-term Career Technical Education certificates that can help land the job they desire. Most short-term CTE certificates also include industry-recognized certification.

SUCCESS!

Using the language and career skills gained through adult schools and community college, students can become more productive members of the community, start new careers, advance in their current ones, or pursue four-year degrees. Whichever step they take next, they will be on the path to success!



Perseverance Pays Off for Aspiring Teacher

Completing high school made it possible for this student to achieve her dreams

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ



Noemí Acosta earned her high school diploma thanks to adult education. With her sights set on a career in teaching, she currently tutors adults in the same high school equivalency program.
PHOTO BY OWEN KAHN

As a little girl growing up in Mexico, Noemí Acosta admired her teachers. “I was impressed by all the things they knew, all the things they taught us,” Acosta says. She remembers how at age 7, using chalk and a mini-blackboard, she taught the ABCs to neighborhood kids in a hallway of her home in Mexico.

“I decided early on to become a teacher,” she says.

Now 30 and a married mother of two children, Acosta’s dream of becoming a professional educator has twice been put on hold: first, due to her inability to afford college in Mexico and later, when her youngest was born.

After she completed college-prep classes in Mexico, Acosta faced a cruel reality: she could not pay her college tuition. So she became a cashier for a Mexican credit union, rising to loan officer during her five years with the bank.

In 2013, Acosta and her then-2-year-old daughter, Abril, immigrated to southern California, where Acosta’s husband, Jose, had arrived earlier. Noemí Acosta took English as a Second Language courses for five months, but dropped the classes after her son, Alberto, was born in 2014.

According to Danny Bever, who teaches adult education classes at Petaluma’s San Antonio High

School, students drop out of school “for many reasons ... and most of them have little to do with ability or motivation.” Often, he adds, “life gets in the way of good intentions.”

However, he says that adult education will always be there for those making new bids for diplomas.

In 2015, the family moved to Santa Rosa. Here, Acosta finally found the balance of affordability, access and good timing to pursue her passion. She returned to adult school at Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC), where she completed the high school equivalency program in two months.

She is currently a sophomore at SRJC, and receives financial aid to help cover the cost of her education.

She plans to eventually transfer to Sonoma State University and intends to be a teacher by 2022.

Acosta is grateful for the educational opportunities she’s had in California. Today, she tutors farm workers in SRJC’s high school equivalency program, where she earned her diploma. She relishes the job, but can’t stop dreaming about teaching.

“I want to be in front of the classroom,” Acosta says. “And I want the children to remember me with the same affection that I remember my teachers.”

“I want the children to remember me with the same affection that I remember my teachers.”

NOEMÍ ACOSTA
Adult education student and aspiring teacher



PATHS TO COMPLETING HIGH SCHOOL

Students in California benefit from the freedom to choose which test they will take to earn a high school equivalency certificate, with three options available:

- General Education Development (GED) test
- High School Equivalency Test (HiSET)
- Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC)

The GED is taken online, while the HiSET and TASC exams can be taken on a computer or with paper and pencil.

“Most of [our] students are choosing to take the HiSET because they are more comfortable

with paper and pencil,” says Carol T. Waxman, principal of Petaluma Adult School. She adds that many younger adult ed students are comfortable with test taking on the computer.

Returning students who need 50 or fewer credits to earn a high school equivalency certificate can pursue a traditional high school diploma – an option available at Petaluma Adult School. Fifty credits can typically be completed in two semesters.

Rising to the Challenge

Former ESL student reflects on her journey

BY MATT JOCKS



Leticia Rojas came to the United States unable to communicate in English. Today, she works primarily with Spanish-speaking families to develop connections between their children's schools and homes.
PHOTO BY OWEN KAHN

Learning English wasn't easy for Leticia Rojas. Finding the motivation for it was. When Rojas came to the United States from Mexico nearly 20 years ago, she intended for it to be a visit. But her husband had landed a good job and a place to explore soon became a place to live.

With no education in English, Rojas struggled in the new environment. When her daughter had conflicts at school, the struggle turned into determination.

"She was suffering bullying at her school," she says. "And I was having trouble communicating with her teacher."

Rojas began English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at Petaluma Adult School. Since completing the program, she has become one of its success stories. Today, she teaches parents and children in the AVANCE Parent-Child Education Program, offered through the Sonoma County Adult Education Consortium. This program helps primarily Spanish-speaking families develop ties between home and their children's school.

"I am so happy to be able to help all these people," she says. "I am so thankful to the director of the ESL program. This gave me the opportunity to help other people."

For Rojas, the motivation was her three children. Others bring their own stories and reasons to the program.

"Some want to be able to help their children in school," says Vicki Mayster, an

adult instructor at Petaluma Adult School for nine years. "Some are grandparents who just want to be able to communicate with their grandkids."

Others, says Mayster, need the skills to enter or advance in the workplace, or to pursue a path to citizenship. Some need it simply to communicate better with doctors or others they encounter.

Because of that, ESL instruction includes life skills, such as responding to health emergencies.

Although Spanish is the leading primary language for ESL students, it's far from the only one. Mayster estimates she has encountered close to 20 languages, including Creole and multiple indigenous languages.

Diversity itself is part of the class. Most of the students from other countries have not encountered this level of diversity, and discussions move beyond the language to things like holidays and other customs.

"It makes for a very rich learning environment," Mayster says. "I think, in this country, if you can navigate other cultures, you will be successful."

And sometimes, that road starts at home.

Rojas' journey has not only brought her from student to teacher, but has allowed her to see her eldest daughter Faviola graduate from college, her daughter Evelyn graduate from high school and son Jose prepare for his senior year.

"It's incredible," Rojas says. "All those years passed."

"In this country, if you can navigate other cultures, you will be successful."

VICKI MAYSTER
Adult instructor, Petaluma Adult School



AVANCE: HELPING FAMILIES MAKE CONNECTIONS

When it comes to strengthening their bond, sometimes families need someone to help. That someone could be a dinosaur.

As Karla Lounibos, educator with the AVANCE Parent-Child Education Program at Petaluma School, watches a child and parent on the floor playing with dinosaurs, she sees more than fun time – it's an essential moment in the growth of the family.

"When the children are playing with parents, they are on equal terms," Lounibos says. "That's when you see a real connection."

AVANCE is geared toward families with infants and toddlers. AVANCE teachers work primarily with Spanish-

speaking families to support healthy child development and communication between families and schools.

Play is a central part, and one component is for parents to make their own toys. Instruction is also given in basics of health and hygiene, as well as tools to help the children learn. Further support comes from monthly home visits conducted by AVANCE instructors.

"Parents are the most important teachers for their children," Lounibos says. "So many children now spend their time with their iPhone or computer and the connection with the parent is missing. We try to prevent that."





The Road to Self-Improvement

Career Technical Education helps adult learners grow

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Guided by a code of distinction, with the help of adult education, Evaristo Lopez is bound for a promising future. The former lieutenant in the Mexican Air Force follows the Japanese concept of continuous self-improvement.

Born in Oaxaca, Mexico, Lopez moved at age 14 to Mexico City, where he studied martial arts while in high school. In those classes, his self-defense instructor imparted that wisdom upon Lopez.

"If you do something excellent today, you must do something better tomorrow," says Lopez, now 49 and living in Santa Rosa.

Using this tenet, the tireless construction worker has excelled in short-term Career Technical Education (CTE) classes offered by members of the Sonoma County Adult Education Consortium.

"I'm taking these classes solely as a personal objective," Lopez says. "I don't know if I'll go to college later, but right now it's just part of my continuous self-improvement."

Launched last year, the consortium's CTE programs offer tuition-free classes for local adults who fall into two categories: Those seeking to advance their career skills and those who want to pursue a new career in fields such as business, the hospitality sector and other professions.

Lopez has taken eight CTE classes, three of which have been taught by Marlyn Garcia, his favorite teacher. Having taken Garcia's classes in

small business development and basic computer skills, Lopez says he knows he's getting quality education.

"[Professor Garcia] is always well-prepared for her lectures," he says. "Her classes are never boring."

Garcia, for her part, has been just as impressed with her student.

"Evaristo is always in class and is always ... asking questions," she says. "He puts a lot of effort [into his studies]."

This summer Garcia will teach Basic Computer Skills, Level 3, with space again reserved for Lopez, who says he owes CTE a debt of gratitude.

At 17 Lopez entered an Air Force military academy in Jalisco state, graduating four years later. He then served four years in the Air Force, proudly wearing his uniform. He immigrated to California in 2001 and took ESL classes in San Jose for over a year before moving to Santa Rosa.

If Lopez enrolls in college, he will pursue a degree in something akin to genetic engineering — fitting for someone good with numbers, which he is.

His dream: to run his own dairy farm/cattle ranch.

"It's never too late to go back to school," Lopez says, clearly glad he made that choice.



GET AHEAD IN AN EXCITING FIELD!

The schools that make up Sonoma County Adult Education Consortium offer short-term Career Technical Education (CTE) courses that will allow students to launch a new career! For those who want to gain English literacy skills at the same time, the schools offer integrated CTE classes so students can double-up on their learning!

Integrated CTE courses

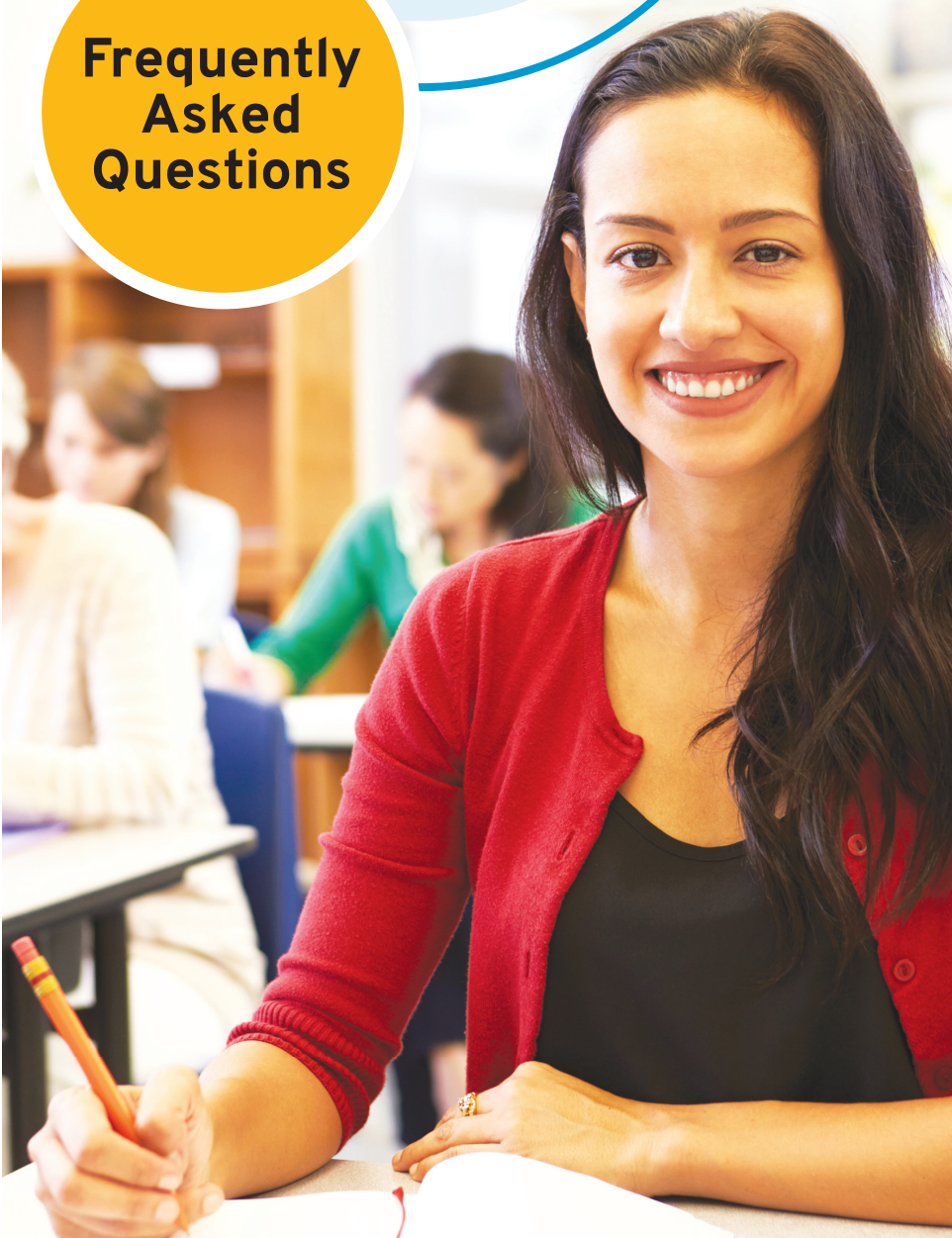
- Construction and Building Trades
- Landscaping
- Computer Basics

Non-integrated CTE courses

- Restaurant Services
- Restaurant Operations
- Hospitality
- Customer Service
- Small Business Startup
- Small Business Management
- Personal Finance
- Workforce Preparation
- Foster Parent Preparation

How Adult Ed Helps YOU Get Ahead!

Frequently Asked Questions



BY MATT JOCKS

The Sonoma County Adult Education Consortium helps students reach a variety of goals. Here, common questions about adult education are answered.

How do consortium members work together to help students?

All of the districts that provide academic services to the community engage in regular planning sessions to set schedules for each term and decide which provider will cover specific aspects of the programs. For example, Petaluma Adult School provides the ESL teacher and Sonoma County Office of Education provides the CTE teacher for our computer course in Petaluma.

Have the needs of adult learners changed over the years? How do consortium members meet those needs?

Technology is the biggest change for our adult learners. We now rely on multiple devices to meet the demands of everyday communication. From enrolling children in school, to advertising, to accessing medical records, people need to understand how to interface with technology. Our most popular courses cover basic computer skills. These courses act as a launch board into ESL, foundational academic skills and career training. We also use technology to support students outside the classroom, and enrich instruction inside the classroom.

How do the benefits of your work here go beyond the students to the community at large?

At the very basic level we are providing a trained workforce to support our local economy and a way for our students to increase employability and salaries. Many of our students are taking classes so that they can learn English and foundational academic skills to help their children. This increases parent engagement inside and outside the classroom, provides role models for early childhood education, and supports

academic success for students in grades K-12. In addition, many of our students did not think they were capable of getting a high school diploma or college degree, but after learning how to be a student and successfully completing courses in adult education, our students expand their learning opportunities at SRJC and beyond.

What changes are you seeing in the student population?

We are seeing an uptick in students. Our graduation numbers have about doubled in recent years. We see students come for different reasons. Some want to get into the military and recruiters bring them here. Some employers require high school diplomas. When the unemployment rate goes up, we tend to see more students.

Our citizenship class enrollment in January was doubled from before. A lot of people who have been residents for years decided they would like to become voting citizens.

What does the future of the consortium look like?

Petaluma Adult School Principal Carol T. Waxman sees the consortium strengthening as programs grow. "We are focused on building more wraparound services, as well as implementing courses where we can integrate basic skills with employment training. We're piloting a plan that takes a team-teaching approach, where we have instructors teaching basic skills alongside industry-certified instructors working on the career skills," she says.

In terms of wraparound services, our outreach specialists will provide transitional planning support for students. We want the students to know what their next steps are, and be on track when we check in with them by text or phone call. It's about connection-building to support student success.

Your Future Awaits!

Get started on a new educational journey today



Whether you dream of launching a career you're passionate about, helping your children with their schoolwork or pursuing a high school education, the members of the Sonoma County Adult Education Consortium can help get you there!

Adult education offerings include:

- > **Foundational education**
- > **Career training**
- > **Citizenship & ESL courses**
- > **Diploma and high school equivalency courses**

... and more!

Take the first step toward your future today! Explore adult education programs at www.socoadulted.org

Why is adult education important in your community?



"Adult education is the pathway for many underprivileged adults to work their way to the middle class. It provides essential tools and skillsets for these individuals to pursue career and technical education, as well as higher education."

—President Frank Chong,
Santa Rosa Junior College



"Adult education gives students the opportunity to return to school when they didn't believe that they could. Students who complete adult education courses feel proud, and about half of them decide to take more classes. It is so rewarding to observe the students' improvement from day one to the last day of classes."

—Marilyn Garcia, adult education
teacher



"The expansion of adult education in Sonoma County is a benefit for both our community members and our businesses. It is the first stop for job training and provides a much-needed pipeline of trained workers for local employers."

—James Gore, District 4 Supervisor,
Sonoma County Board of
Supervisors



"Before I took the computer class I was afraid to even touch a computer. I have been able to apply all the skills I learned in my job. Now I know how to send and reply to an email, create events on my calendar and use Word."

—German Zamudio, student,
completed Basic Computer Skills
Level 1 & 2



"Adult education classes are a great entrypoint for students to develop industry-based skills, or test the water for a new career. They provide a bridge into our credit CTE certificate and degree programs."

—Jerry Miller, Senior Dean,
Career Technical Education &
Economic Development, Santa Rosa
Junior College