



Adult Education Matters

Alameda & Contra Costa County Adult Education



Education Grows The Economy

Adult schools fight budget cuts to improve California workforce

by Kendall Fields

For over a century, the California adult education system has improved the lives of thousands of residents through its programs — teaching English to immigrants so they can understand their child’s teacher, helping adults who need a “second chance” at earning a high school diploma or GED, and training workers for a new career so they can succeed.

But government budget cuts over the past two years have drastically impacted K12 based adult education. California Council for Adult Education President Christian Nelson says over 75 adult schools have closed and some districts have had 91 percent of their funding cut.

“If students are not being served, they won’t make it today and neither will the future economy.”

*Christian Nelson
President, California Council for Adult Education*

Nelson, who is also the Principal of Oakland Adult and Career Education, laments his school reducing its size from 28,000 students and 300 staff members to only 1,300 students and 30 staff members. He says adult schools are so important because there are nearly 5.7 million Californians who lack necessary skills to obtain employment and succeed in a career field. According to Nelson, more than 700,000 students per year attending over 225 adult schools throughout California learn these skills and obtain necessary certificates or diplomas in order to go on to higher education or get a job at a livable wage. “We are empowering people with job skills needed to grow the economy,” Nelson says, adding that the more people are prepared for work, the less likely it is they will be unemployed and relying on public assistance.

But how can adult schools continue to prepare Californians for the workforce with so little funding?

“California has not invested the way it should have,” Nelson says. “It’s not good for the economy to have so few people who are job ready. Adult schools play a major role in that, but they need to be around to do so.”

Nelson says literacy, GED, high school diploma and career certification programs offered at adult schools are crucial in times where the workforce is changing and becoming increasingly difficult to navigate. Nelson explains that most jobs involve technology and require strong skills in English, reading, writing, math and communication.

As baby boomers creep closer to retirement, replacement workers need to be prepared to fill their jobs. Adult schools aim to teach students new skills to find a better career and lead them on their path to success.



Most adult education students become workers and employers in California’s workforce, Nelson notes. As more adults are educated, not only will it improve the economy, but also the lives and educations of their children. “When the parents get a better education, their children get a better education and have better lives,” he says, recalling a mom who worked her way through adult school to get off public assistance and improve her family’s quality of life.

Because of these success stories, Nelson says, adult schools will remain resilient and continue to advocate for their students in an effort to sustain the state’s workforce. “If students are not being served, they won’t make it today and neither will the future economy.”

“We ... need to move thoughtfully with regard to Adult Education — another area that has seen significant cuts. I am concerned that severing the ties these programs have had with K-12 districts could diminish access for working parents and immigrant families. The adults served in these programs are often the parents of our K-12 students. These services have played a vital role in helping Californians learn English and receive the basic education they need to succeed in today’s world — and preserving them is important for communities across California and for the state as a whole.”



State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson in prepared remarks before the Senate Budget and Review Committee on February 28, 2013 in Sacramento

“My experience has shown the value of [adult education] classes to students is not to be underestimated. They are a highly motivated and eager-to-learn student population. They are all adults who have realized how invaluable education is and they are the best students in the world because they are there because they want to be there.”

Assemblywoman Susan Bonilla, 14th District, former adult education teacher, Mt. Diablo Unified School District

“Adult schools provide an array of services that are really important for building skills for the workforce in easily accessible locations. The absence of adult education would leave voids in communities that need access to affordable education and skill-building activities.”

Stephen Baiter, Executive Director, Workforce Development Board of Contra Costa County

“Over the years we have seen the undeniable impact of the opportunities that adult school offers to the disadvantaged communities that we serve. We have seen students, who didn’t have the opportunity to access higher education, start at adult school, transfer to college and then continue to pursue a master’s degree. Due to adult school, students are able to develop their assets and create a pathway to economic and emotional resilience for themselves, their families and communities.”

Cristina Hernandez, Division Director, Education and Workforce Development, Catholic Charities of the East Bay

“I started my journey with hopes of opening new doors. ... The



first door I walked through ... led me to Liberty Adult Education Center (LAEC). Many doors began opening the day I stepped into class, bringing my soft skills back to life and confidence in myself I thought I had lost. I graduated with three program certificates. I will be forever grateful that I took the chance, walked

through that door that led me to LAEC and look forward to many more doors in my journey. Don’t ever be afraid, you never know where that door leads until you turn that knob!”

Michelle Hartwell, student, Liberty Adult Education Center



Learning To Communicate

ESL courses help man succeed by Kendall Fields

In May of 1997, Henry Chen and his wife emigrated from China to the United States, hoping to live out the quintessential American dream. Chen was excited at the possibility of opportunities waiting for him in California. It wasn't until the couple boarded their nearly 16-hour flight that Chen realized their relocation may be more difficult than he anticipated. "It was lunch time and I was so hungry, but I didn't know how to order," Chen recalls. "I didn't know how to tell them what I wanted, so I just starved."

"Life is difficult if you don't know how to communicate. How do you succeed or move up if people can't understand you?"

Henry Chen
Owner, Beijing Bowl

As the Chens assimilated to life in the Bay Area, they continued to experience the drawbacks of not knowing English. Chen says he had to have someone read all of his mail to him, even to do something as simple as paying a bill. Chen remembers the frustration of only using hand motions to communicate or screaming out "thank you" when someone accidentally stepped on his foot. But his biggest concern was finding employment. "No one wants to hire someone who can't speak any

English," Chen says, adding when he finally did find a job, they were cooking positions at Chinese restaurants confined to the kitchens.

In 1999, Chen decided something had to change — he wanted more opportunities. Chen started taking morning ESL classes at the Oakland Adult School, learning English in what little spare time he had. His wife even began taking classes in her spare time.

When Chen and his family moved to Castro Valley, Chen continued learning English at the Castro Valley Adult School. Aside from the classes fitting into his busy schedule, Chen says he was so thankful to have a really great teacher with a kind heart. Chen worked 11-hour shifts, seven days a week and his teacher at the school accommodated his schedule and helped him catch up in class so he could thrive.

"Life is difficult if you don't know how to communicate," Chen says. "How do you succeed or move up if people can't understand you?"

Today Chen has moved up. He stands behind the cash register taking orders in English and a little Spanish at Beijing Bowl, a Chinese restaurant he bought three years ago. About five feet away his wife is taking orders in English, too. Chen recently found out he was accepted into a government job in San Francisco — an opportunity that he says could never have happened without the ESL program. Chen says he will continue to take ESL classes at the Castro Valley school to further improve his English. "You have to study hard to make life better. If you don't go to school, you don't get anything."

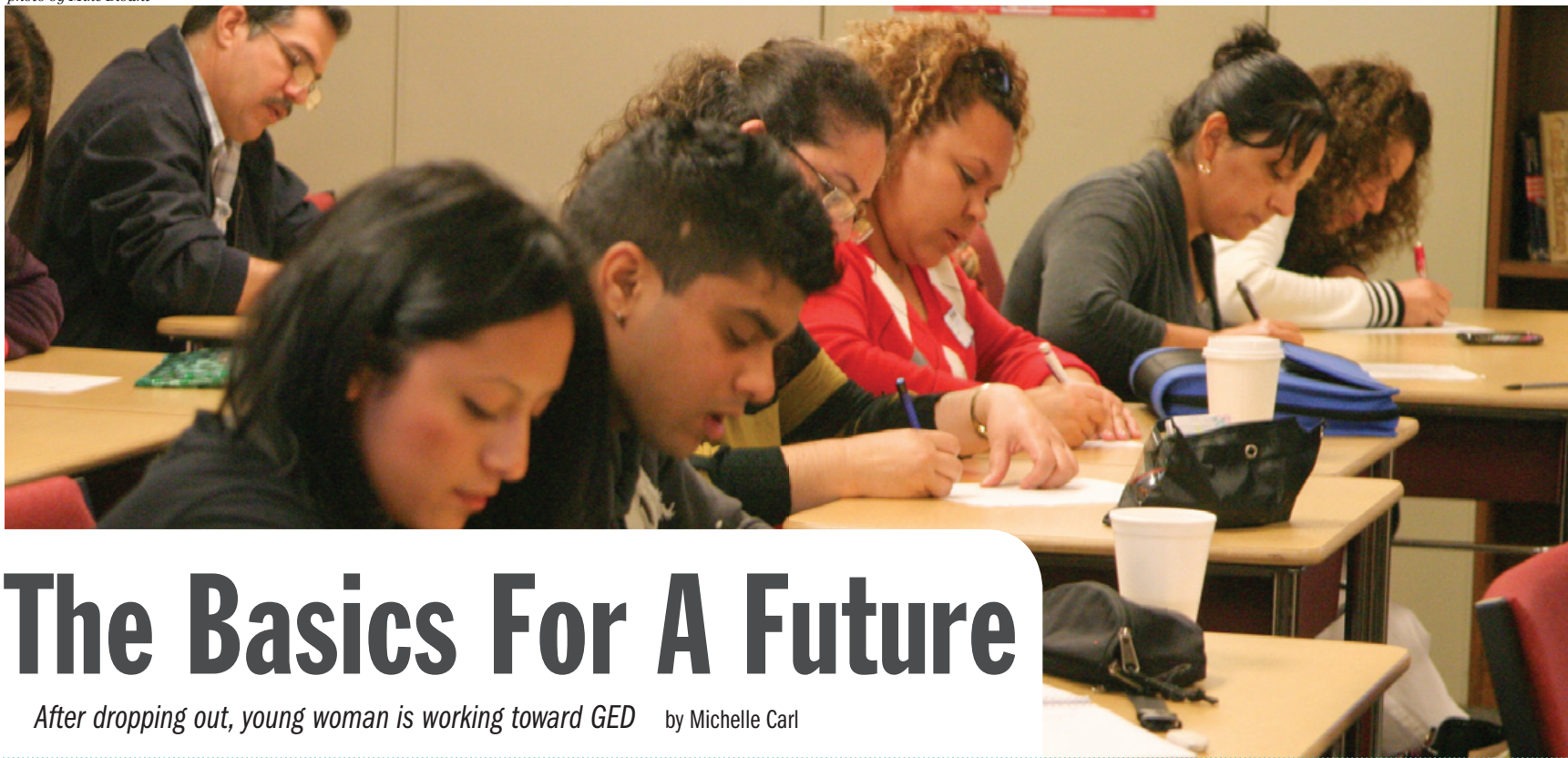
The origin of adult education by Kendall Fields

The adult education system has played an integral role in providing adult learners an opportunity to gain skills they need to be successful in California's workforce since the very first adult school started in the mid-19th century.

In 1856, during California's early years of statehood, the San Francisco Board of Education sponsored the first recorded adult school. Adult students took evening classes in the basement of St. Mary's Cathedral. Many students were

immigrants from Ireland, Italy and China who were interested in learning elementary-level academic subjects, like English or math, and more technical job skills, like drafting or bookkeeping.

From its humble beginning in the church basement, California's adult education program grew to fit the needs of the increasing population and the ever-changing workforce.



The Basics For A Future

After dropping out, young woman is working toward GED by Michelle Carl

Latazija Washington didn't think she could be a mom and finish high school.

She was in 11th grade when she found out she was pregnant with her daughter, Chadsiddy.

"When I got pregnant with Chads, I was like, oh my God, how am I going to do this? How am I going to juggle having the baby and going to school?"

She ended up dropping out.

"It actually makes me feel like I'm doing something with my life, you know, accomplishing something, and that's a good thing."

Latazija Washington

Now 21 years old and unemployed, Washington finds support through her family, but ...

"It's not enough because without your high school diploma or GED you really can't find a job," she says. "I can't sit on my behind with a 3-year-old."

Knowing she still had a chance at a better future for her and her daughter, Washington enrolled at the Pittsburgh Adult Education Center.

"I was kind of nervous because, you know, stuff isn't how it used to be," she says. "High school how it is now is like college was [back then]. ... It's kind of hard, I'm a lot behind, but my teachers are very helpful and work with me one-on-one."

Washington needed to enroll in reading classes through the Adult Basic Education program to improve her skill level. Adult Basic Education (ABE) helps adults brush up on reading, math and other basic skills so they can be more successful in their pursuit of completing high school.

Washington is also completing her GED courses. She goes to school Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to noon. It's hard being a single mom, but she's proud that she's doing something.

"I'm taking it day by day ... there's more hard than easy days. But God won't put too much on you that you can't bear," she says. "It actually makes me feel like I'm doing something with my life, you know, accomplishing something, and that's a good thing."

Washington's goal is to complete her last two semesters at the adult school and then enroll in community college, where she'd like to take nursing and child development courses.

"I really want to work with kids, so I wouldn't mind being a nurse for kids in pediatrics," she says. "I would love to do that."

Thanks to getting her GED, Washington will have more options for her future.

"When I was young, I was very hard-headed. I didn't know too much about how serious the world is, you know, how money doesn't grow on trees," she says. "In high school I had the mind where I didn't care about anything, and now I'm older and I know I have to do it for me and my baby. I have a lot of responsibility, so I have to care."

Library program helps students achieve in school by Michelle Carl

For adults who never learned to read or write at a higher level, going back to get a high school diploma could be a challenge. How will they be able to study? Or understand what the teacher writes on the whiteboard?

"If their reading is not at the level that is going to allow them to progress and achieve that particular goal, that's where we come in," says Laura Seaholm, program manager for Project Second Chance.

Project Second Chance serves as the Contra Costa County Library Adult Literacy Program and

offers free, confidential, one-on-one basic literacy instruction to people who are over 16 years of age, out of school and conversant in English, in partnership with local adult schools.

Seaholm says Project Second Chance tutors meet with adult school students to work on literacy and help them succeed in the classroom. The program is also equipped to help adults with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia.

Since it began in 1984, Project Second Chance has helped more than 4,000 adults improve their reading, writing and spelling skills.

Breaking The Cycle

Adult education helps young man set a new course by Mike Blount

When Travon Willis was 26 years old, he says he felt compelled to go back to school. At the time, Willis was a high-school dropout with a wife and five children. He always had a job, but was barely getting by. Willis says it was almost as if he just accepted that it was his lot in life.

“Coming from an impoverished area with crime and drugs, it’s a battle and going back to school has empowered me to break the generational cycle and give back to the community.”

Travon Willis

Growing up in Oakland, his father passed away in prison when he was just 10 years old. His mother was addicted to drugs and unable to care for him, so Willis went to live with his grandmother. Soon, he started heading down the same path.

“I was always a pretty bright kid, but when I was in the ninth grade I started hanging out with the wrong crowd and doing drugs,” Willis says. “That summer, we decided to take an early summer and I never went back.”

Willis then got in an altercation and found himself in juvenile hall. But Willis got an opportunity to start over when one of the friends

he had dropped out of school with invited him to Atlanta to live with his mother for the summer. Willis was only supposed to stay for two months, but he ended up living there for eight years.

In a new city with a new outlook, Willis says he took advantage of the opportunity. He paid his own way and eventually got out on his own. He met his wife, fell in love and started a family. But Willis says something was still missing. Eventually, he and his wife made the decision to come back to California.

When they finally settled in after moving, Willis reached out to Fremont Adult School to find out what he needed to do to get a high school diploma. Even though he could have finished a GED much faster, he chose to finish getting his high school diploma. Willis says he wanted the real thing.

Willis got his high school diploma and went on to graduate Cum Laude from Patten University of Oakland in 2011, receiving a Bachelor of Arts in clinical psychology, with a minor in theology. Currently, he is pursuing his doctorate at John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill. But thinking about how far he has come is something that Willis says is almost unreal.

“If I hadn’t gone back to school, I think my life would have always been an uphill battle because without an education, there’s not many options. ... I’m just really thankful for the adult education system. Coming from an impoverished area with crime and drugs, it’s a battle and going back to school has empowered me to break the generational cycle and give back to the community. I’m happy Fremont Adult School is in place and that I was able to go there.”



Photo courtesy of Travon Willis

Travon Willis says he is an example of how adult education can drastically change someone’s life for the better.

The cost of dropping out by Mike Blount

Statistics show that workers without a high school diploma earn significantly less in their lifetime than workers who do have a high school diploma. While education alone does not determine an individual’s earnings potential, workers with higher education are likely to have higher earnings in their lifetime.

The median income for young adults (ages 25-34) with a high school diploma who worked full time throughout the year in 2010 was \$29,900, while the median income for young adults without a high school diploma was \$21,000. (U.S. Census Bureau)

- Over a working lifetime (18-64), high school dropouts are estimated to earn \$400,000 less than those who graduated from high school. (U.S. Department of Education)
- High school dropouts are more than twice as likely to live in poverty. Dropouts experienced a poverty rate of 30.8 percent in 2012. (U.S. Department of Education)

Marisela Lopez and her daughter Jasmine learn about flowers together.

A Family Affair

Mother and daughter learn together through Family Literacy by Mike Blount

When Marisela Lopez immigrated to the United States from Mexico, she couldn't speak a word of English. She remembers feeling frustrated. She couldn't ask for help. She couldn't express herself. So one of the first things she did was start looking for a place she could learn. Her friends told her about Mt. Diablo Adult Education Family Literacy program, a program where she and her daughter could learn together in the classroom and at home.

"I had some friends I asked and they told me about the program," Lopez says. "I like it because I feel more comfortable because we are [often] in the same room together. My daughter also feels more comfortable because I am there with her."

"I feel more comfortable because we are in the same room together. My daughter also feels more comfortable because I am there."

Marisela Lopez

Being able to spend time with her daughter while learning especially appealed to Lopez, who wanted to take an active role in her two children's educations. She wanted to be able to communicate with their teachers, and things like filling out forms, making appointments and parent-teacher conferences were intimidating to her. Through this program, she was able to overcome these obstacles and take part in learning with her children.

Today, she says she feels confident having a conversation in English because of what she's learned. Lopez says the classes have made it easier for her to improve her English by asking for help.

The classes have also been a great bonding tool for her and her children. She and her daughters often help each other with pronunciation and spend time reading

together. Recently, Lopez and her daughter Jasmine learned about the different parts of a plant and sang songs to help them memorize those parts.

"It's so helpful to learn together," Lopez says. "Just the other day, my daughter read a story about Helen Keller and we were able to talk about the story together. I can have a full conversation now because of the things I learned in the program."

Lopez says she encourages mothers who don't speak English to take part in the program. To her, there is nothing more exciting than being able to spend time with her daughters and learn at the same time.

"I can't imagine what my life would be like without this opportunity," Lopez says. "I am just so thankful there is this amazing program."

Learning together for a brighter future

by Mike Blount

Family literacy programs are unique to adult education because they bring parents and children with low literacy skills together to improve speaking, reading and writing English in environments where they already are comfortable — the child's school and at home. Family literacy classes reach a segment of the community that may not

otherwise be reached by encouraging parents to improve their own literacy skills while practicing with their children as they are learning. Helping families improve their literacy skills together helps form a learning bond between parent and child while giving both the resources they need to succeed in life.



Photo courtesy of Martha Bamberger

Martha Bamberger got the skills to work in medical billing at Castro Valley Adult School.

Career training programs teach new skills for success

by Kendall Fields

Career training programs at adult schools offer students the chance to learn new skills that may help them improve their performance in a current profession or gain skills and certifications needed to start in a new field.

- Clinical Medical Assistant
- Pharmacy Technician
- EKG Technician
- Veterinary Assistant
- Personal Trainer
- Dental Assistant
- Administrative Dental Assistant
- Phlebotomy Technician
- Electronic Health Records Specialist
- Nursing Home Administrator
- Billing and Coding Specialist
- Accounting Specialist
- Accounting Assistant
- Administrative Assistant
- Advanced Microsoft Office Specialist
- Executive Administrative Assistant
- Electronic Medical Records Clerk (HIM)
- General Office Support Clerk
- Medical Office Receptionist
- Medical Records Coding and Billing Specialist
- Medical Secretary
- Medical Transcriptionist
- Microsoft Office Business Suite Specialist
- Floral Designer
- Welder
- School Secretary
- Restaurant Manager
- Notary of the Public
- Bookkeeper
- Systems Networker
- School Clerk
- Networking Customer Service Representative
- Administrative Assistant
- General Office Clerk
- Office Assistant
- Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)
- Surgical Technologist
- Sterile Processing Assistant

For more information on career training programs and to see what other programs are available, contact your local adult school or go online and view a course catalog.

Learning New Skills For A Better Job

Woman takes career training classes for a job switch by Kendall Fields

After working for the state of California for 25 years, Martha Bamberger feared a wave of layoffs in her administrative sector. But as she searched for another job, she realized she didn't have the skills necessary to compete in today's tough job market. It was daunting as she struggled to find a job, leaving Bamberger feeling defeated and hopeless.

"I had a good job, but I had to start all over again," Bamberger says. "The workforce is very difficult and looking for work is much harder."

In the midst of her struggle, 50-year-old Bamberger realized she wanted to change career fields. She decided to enroll in the adult education program at Castro Valley Adult School to learn about medical billing and administrative insurance work in hopes of increasing her job prospects.

"I had a good job, but I had to start all over again. The workforce is very difficult and looking for work is much harder."

Martha Bamberger

The US Army veteran worked for 10 months to receive two certificates — one in medical billing and one in medical administration.

Bamberger says she had a good experience at the adult school because the homework was relevant and the hands-on training really prepared her for her next career.

She credits her teacher for helping her through the certification process and being available whenever she needed support. Bamberger's teacher even encouraged her as she achieved good grades.

And Bamberger's skills weren't the only things improving. Excelling in her classes coupled with her growing knowledge helped to build up Bamberger's self-esteem. "Besides experience, I needed to go back to school and I felt better about myself," Bamberger says.

The new skills Bamberger acquired made it easier for her to get a job, increasing her marketability as an employee and allowing her to compete at a more specialized level.

Bamberger is now working as a medical biller, contracted for a workers compensation doctor in the Bay Area.

"I was lucky to get this job," Bamberger says. "I would say that without going back to school it would be harder. I would have very few [and] limited alternatives to find a job."

The adult school gave her the foundation to be successful in her new career and the knowledge she needed to have the confidence to look for a job in a tough economy. Today, Bamberger is continuing her training at the doctor's office. Though she is thankful for this opportunity, she hopes this first step in her career, along with her certification, helps her get another job somewhere else.

More than anything, Bamberger says the adult school made it possible for her to have a better career — it all comes down to a chance at a better life and an opportunity to be self-sufficient.

Offering A Second Chance

Rehabilitation program teaches job skills to formerly incarcerated individuals by Mike Blount

Lynn Mackey knows formerly incarcerated adults face multiple challenges when re-entering society — the largest barrier being most of them have limited skills and low academic levels that prevent them from finding gainful employment. As Director of Student Programs at the Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCCOE), Mackey oversees two rehabilitation programs that aim to teach these adults the skills they need to be self-sufficient, while also giving them the confidence they need as they transition back into society.

“I think it is important to have a variety of programs so that incarcerated students are getting programs that they actually need, not just what is available.”

Lynn Mackey

The Contra Costa Adult School, which is based in three county jails in Contra Costa County, is a partnership between the CCCOE and the Sheriff’s Department. Mackey says they also run a statewide contract through the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and students enrolled in these programs can take courses in literacy, get their GED or high school diploma, take refresher math and English courses, or take ESL classes.

“I think it is important to have a variety of programs so that incarcerated students are getting programs that they actually need, not just what is available,” Mackey

says. “Programs are effective when they are applied appropriately based on the needs of the students.”

Another course, Deciding, Educating, Understanding, Counseling and Evaluation (DEUCE) helps students tackle substance abuse, as well as general life skills like anger management, personal relationships and transitions. Vocational training is also offered, as well as helping students make contacts and build bonds within the communities they will be re-entering to ease their transition.

Even though the program is voluntary, last year the Contra Costa Adult School program served more than 3,000 students and Mackey has seen the positive effects of the programs firsthand. She lives in the community where she works and often has former students come up and thank her for teaching in the jails years before.

Students like Stacie Gaskin, who is serving eight months for commercial burglary, are able to start making a plan to change their lives and better themselves in the process. Gaskin recently completed the 60-day DEUCE program. “I was tired of the life I was living, but I didn’t know how to change,” says Gaskin. “I’ve learned how to schedule my life and maintain my sobriety. I’m no longer in denial about my addiction.”

Mackey added the impact goes far beyond the individual. It ripples throughout the community.

“Reducing recidivism and helping someone change their life so that they become a productive member of society has a large impact on society financially — there is a large cost saving when you don’t incarcerate — plus helping students get clean and sober and helping them develop skills that lead to employment, helps benefit our society by increasing tax revenues that add to the quality of life in our communities.”

Photo courtesy of Lynn Mackey



Lynn Mackey is the Director of Student Programs at the Contra Costa County Office of Education.

Connecting skills to jobs by Michelle Carl

When job seekers visit one of the Eastbay Works One Stop Career Centers in Alameda or Contra Costa counties, they might be referred to a local adult school if in need of basic academic skills development, a high school diploma or GED, English language skills, computer skills or more.

In fact, in many Career Centers, there are adult education staff ready to assist.

“[Adult schools] are essential to building more skills in our labor market,” says Stephen Baiter, Executive Director of Workforce Development Board of Contra Costa County.

After gaining additional skills, many adult school graduates are in the position to apply for jobs in a high-demand sector of employment, such as health care. And to find those jobs, many graduates with fully loaded resumes head back to the career centers so they can put those new skills to work.

The Confidence To Keep On Learning

Jose's dreams didn't stop at getting his high school diploma by Michelle Carl

Whenever his friends or his mom tried to encourage him to finish high school, Jose Rueben Plascencia gave a standard response. "I could do it any time."

Plascencia was making OK money and enjoying life raising two daughters with his childhood sweetheart. The couple started their family when they were both in high school, and Plascencia decided he didn't need to get his diploma — he needed to provide for his household.

"[When you're young] you think you can take the world by the horns," says Plascencia, now 44. "As you get older you figure out it's not that easy."

It was a struggle raising a family at such a young age. Plascencia worked at a golf course, then a warehouse. Sometimes he worked three jobs at a time to make ends meet. The couple eventually divorced after 13 years of marriage.

When he was laid off from a job, it was yet another sign he was going nowhere. He battled depression and alcoholism.

His mother kept mentioning going back to school.

"You start getting that sense of self worth and feel like you can take on anything."

Jose Rueben Plascencia

"I always told her: 'I could do it any time.' So my mom said, 'If you can do it anytime, do it now.'"

Once he got remarried and had his first son, Jose Jr., he started to reflect on the kind of example he wanted to set for him. It was the final push he needed to enroll



Photo courtesy of Jose Plascencia

in San Leandro Adult School.

"I went into it with enthusiasm, but it wasn't easy. I took it day by day," he says. "The only way to get out of that hole was to get a diploma."

On top of being back in school, his second wife was supporting the family by working at a nut processing facility and he had little Jose to look after every morning.

After a year of courses, Plascencia took the California Exit Exam and received his diploma in 2009 — making his mother very proud and giving him the confidence to pursue even more education.

"You start getting that sense of self worth and feel like you can take on anything," he says. "It's the first step in learning — once you have confidence, the mind opens up."

Since he wasn't really comfortable with computers, adult school staff urged Plascencia to take Career Technical Education courses on computers. Now he has his computers certificate.

As a condition of the enrollment, Plascencia participated in another program, Even Start, which has adult school students volunteering in their child's classroom.

"All the kids loved me because I'm a big kid — I'm a big kid at heart," he says. "They used to call me 'Papa Jose.'"

Jose's ultimate career goal is to be certified as a translator and start his own translation service. For now, he's working at a distribution warehouse for Frito Lay, enjoying his 3-year-old daughter, Jessica, and serving as PTA president at his son's school.

"I see a little bit of pride in [my son's] eyes when he says, 'Do you have a [PTA] meeting today, Dad?'" he says. "[Having an education] makes me at ease as a parent. ... I'm more comfortable about the future."

Plascencia's experience has helped convince his current wife to attend ESL classes at the adult school, so she can get her high school diploma, just like he did.

"When you get older you realize it's not so much failing — if you don't try, you automatically fail," Plascencia says. "There's a 100 percent guarantee you will fail if you don't try."

A bridge to higher education by Michelle Carl

Non-native speakers interested in early childhood careers have a unique path to higher education with Project ACCESS (Advancing Child Care Education and Student Success).

Developed by Catholic Charities of the East Bay in partnership with local adult schools, Project ACCESS helps ESL adults work toward a career in early childhood education while strengthening their English skills. The program has received statewide recognition as a successful model.

Pre-college classes through adult education prepare students to enroll in Diablo Valley or Contra Costa college. Once there, students take "linked" early childhood education courses and ESL classes that help them understand assignments, study for tests and improve their writing. At the end of the

program, students have 12 units of early childhood education, giving them access to child care and preschool jobs that require college credits.

Project ACCESS not only improves the quality of child care workers but improves students' own parenting skills, as many Project ACCESS participants have their own children.

Those who have completed the program go on to open their own daycare centers or continue their college education.

"[Once they get to college] a whole new world opens up for them with so many possibilities of what they can do and where they can go," says Beth Lenahan, an adult education ESL teacher with Project ACCESS. "It's exciting to see them blossom."

A Renewed Sense Of Optimism

Adult school helps man achieve GED by Kendall Fields

In 2010, James O'Keefe rang the little bell that sits on teacher Christine Paynton's desk, which meant he had gotten his GED and changed his life.

For 35-year-old O'Keefe this moment marked the beginning of new opportunities and a chance to attain his dream of working as a contractor.

"I owe my education to Miss Christine, my other teachers and the adult school. They believed in me, and now I know knowledge is everything."

James O'Keefe

O'Keefe dropped out of high school when he was a teenager, running around with a bad crowd. After getting into trouble with authorities, O'Keefe's parents sent the 16-year-old to live in rural Idaho. When O'Keefe returned to the Bay Area years later, he settled for a job that didn't require him to have a GED. "I was excited about the money, but I didn't love what I was doing. I just knew it was one of the few places that would hire someone without an education."

After nearly 15 years in a job he felt wasn't rewarding, O'Keefe researched ways to get a GED and discovered Mt. Diablo Adult Education's GED program.

"I always wanted to do something with my hands," he says, "but I didn't have the education."

When he came to Mt. Diablo, O'Keefe had

already failed the GED test three times. "Miss Christine helped make sure I stayed on track. She encouraged me to do better and made me feel like I could do anything."

Paynton has taught in the adult education system for 20 years, working full time at Mt. Diablo for the last six. She remembers when O'Keefe came to her class in 2009 eager to get an education, but lacking confidence in his ability to learn. She says O'Keefe's biggest struggle was math, which he definitely needed to work in construction. "I just told him that we'd get through it. He could learn it, and I got the curriculum to his level and started to build up his skills and made him feel validated." Paynton says O'Keefe's determination helped him pass the six-part GED test.

With renewed optimism after earning his GED, O'Keefe continued his education to get algebra credits so he could join a union. Paynton told O'Keefe about an apprenticeship class at a local college and he completed the program with high grades. He then went on to a carpenters' training facility and earned a variety of certificates for carpentry and other trades. He is now registered at the Union Hall for Carpentry to get "on-the-job" experience until he finds a college program that would help him fulfill his dream of becoming a general contractor.

O'Keefe says his life has completely changed since he earned his GED. His certificate is framed at his father's house and he feels optimistic about the future and proud of himself. "I don't feel limited anymore. The sky is the limit and I'm excited about my future." He still keeps in touch with Paynton. "I owe my education to Miss Christine, my other teachers and the adult school. They believed in me, and now I know knowledge is everything."

Photo courtesy of Mt. Diablo Adult Education

James O'Keefe (right) credits his instructor Christine Paynton (left) with his success. O'Keefe earned his GED in 2010.



Community partners by Kendall Fields

These are just some of the community agencies adult schools partner with to support students:

- Eastbay Works One Stop Career Centers
- Contra Costa and Alameda County Workforce Development Boards (WDB)
- Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce
- Project Second Chance (Contra Costa Libraries literacy-support program)
- Diablo Valley Literacy Council
- First Five Contra Costa Commission
- Catholic Charities of the East Bay (CCEB)
- Employment Human Services Department (EHSD)
- State of California Department of Rehabilitation

Q & A

with Joanne Durkee

by Mike Blount

Joanne Durkee has a lifelong passion for adult education. Since beginning her career 32 years ago working with individual community members, Durkee now oversees the adult education program for Mt. Diablo Unified School District and is the State Legislative Chair for the California Council for Adult Education. Durkee says she has seen the positive impact that adult education can have on individuals, families and the community and she's committed to continuing the tradition of helping those who are looking to further their education and improve their quality of life.

Why did you decide to work in adult education?

I think the reason it's worked for me for so long is because it's aligned with my core values around the holistic approach to serving people — that it really does take a multitude of agencies and people working collectively toward a common goal to have an impact in the community, and that was what I was all about when I started out. My bachelor's degree is in social work, but I had the opportunity to come into the school district through the Community School Project working out of an elementary school serving the community, which happened to be under adult education. That was my introduction to this very important work and I was able to then add credentials and a master's degree in education so I could play a greater role in adult education in our community.

"It really does take a multitude of agencies and people working collectively toward a common goal to have an impact in the community, and that was what I was all about when I started out."

*Joanne Durkee
Director of Adult Education at Mt. Diablo Unified School District*



Photo courtesy of Joanne Durkee

What are the benefits of adult education?

We really tailor ourselves to community needs. We're a critical workforce development entity in our community and people need to be able to learn how to speak, read and write English in order to become employed. They need a high school diploma and they need short-term secondary training to get into the workforce or go on to higher education.

How have budget cuts affected adult education programs and the impact they have on communities?

The estimate is [statewide] we're probably serving less than half the students we were serving ... and at risk of [further budget cuts]. Many schools are on the brink of shutting down completely. Due to state and local budget reductions, Mt. Diablo Adult Education has prioritized English as a second language/family literacy, adult basic education, high school diploma/GED, and career technical education. We also work closely with our school district in providing many needed parent education classes, to support our district families.

We've always had strong partnerships throughout the history of our agency and some of the great partnerships we've developed is with Workforce Development Board and the Welfare to Work program of Contra Costa County. They look to us because we're very nimble and we can quickly put together classes or programs to meet their clients' needs.

We also are very adept at working with learners who did not have a great experience in school and helping them find employment in the area in which they are going to be successful and happy.

Is there a particular success story you think of when you think about your history with adult education?

To me, what best exemplifies our value is a mother who is an immigrant and needs to improve her English, but her comfort level is to take the first step by taking a class at her child's school. We teach the parent and possibly also their preschooler, while their school age child is being educated in the elementary school. It's called family literacy. We're showing them how to support their child's learning by teaching them to read with them at home and how to conference with their child's teacher. If you're a second-language learner, the idea of sitting down with your child's teacher can be terrifying. But we help them with all these things even up to the point they may want to volunteer in their child's classroom.

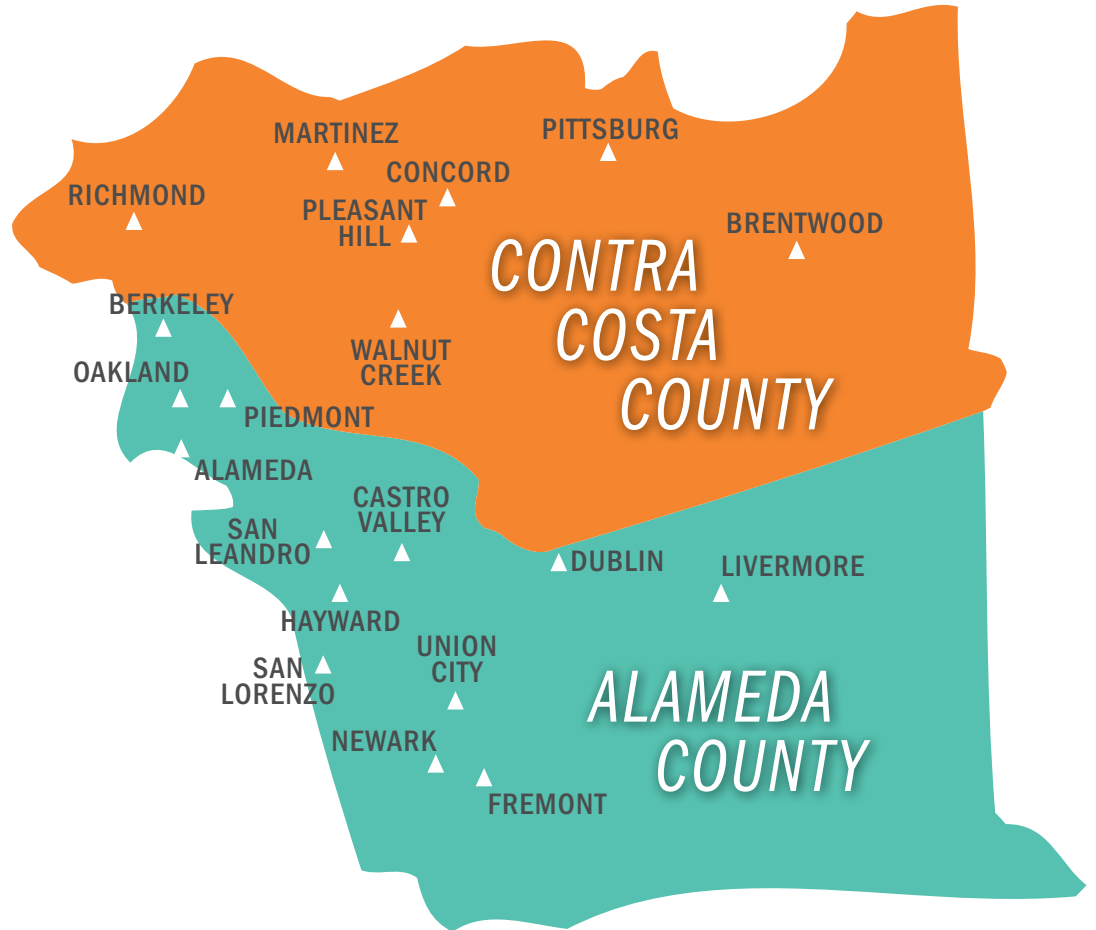
Over time, this parent gains enough confidence to move on to the main adult school campus, to take advantage of more ESL, High School Diploma/GED and Career Technical Education. We have seen students make this transition, including going on to the local community college and employment.

This is why adult education needs to stay connected to K12 school districts — it's about access for those most in need of the educational opportunities we provide!

Adult Schools Serve Communities

There are many adult schools located throughout Alameda and Contra Costa counties in easy-to-access locations. Many are situated at neighborhood school sites, where adult students may already drop off their kids for school. Having adult schools at the neighborhood level also means students do not face as many transportation barriers in getting to school.

Contact a local adult school to learn more about its programs!



Acalanes Adult Center

1963 Tice Valley Blvd.
Walnut Creek, CA 94595
(925) 280-3980 x8001
www.acalanes.k12.ca.us/adulted



Alameda Adult School

1900 3rd St.
Alameda, CA 94501
(510) 522-3858
www.alameda-adult-school.org



Berkeley Adult School

1701 San Pablo Ave.
Berkeley, CA 94702
(510) 644-6130
bas.berkeley.net



Castro Valley Adult & Career Education

4430 Alma Ave.
Castro Valley, CA 94546
(510) 886-1000
www.cvadult.org



Dublin Adult Education

6901 York Drive
Dublin, CA 94568
(925) 828-2551
www.dublin.k12.ca.us/domain/32



Fremont Adult & Continuing Education

4700 Calaveras Ave.
Fremont, CA 94538
(510) 793-6465
www.face.edu



Hayward Adult School

22100 Princeton St.
Hayward, CA 94541
(510) 293-8595
www.has.edu



Liberty UHSD Community Education Center

929 Second St.
Brentwood, CA 94513
(925) 634-2565
www.libertyadulted.org/contact.html



Livermore Adult Community Education

1401 Almond Ave.
Livermore, CA 94550
(925) 606-4722
www.livermoreadulted.org/



Martinez Adult Education

600 F St.
Martinez, CA 94553
(925) 228-3276
martinez.k12.ca.us/schools/mae



Mt. Diablo Adult Education

1266 San Carlos Ave.
Concord CA 94518
(925) 685-7340
www.mdusd.k12.ca.us/adulted/



New Haven Adult School

600 G St.
Union City, CA 94587
(510) 489-2185
adsweb.nhusd.k12.ca.us/



Newark Adult Education Center

35753 Cedar Blvd.
Newark, CA 94560
(510) 818-3700
www.macgregor-nusd-ca.schoolloop.com



Oakland Adult School

2607 Myrtle St.
Oakland, CA 94607
(510) 273-2300
<http://www.ousd.k12.ca.us/oace>



Piedmont Adult School

800 Magnolia Ave.
Piedmont, CA 94611
(510) 594-2655
www.piedmontadultschool.org



Pittsburg Adult Education Center

1151 Stoneman Ave.
Pittsburg, CA 94565
(925) 473-4460
www.pittsburg.k12.ca.us/paec



San Leandro Adult School

2255 Bancroft Ave.
San Leandro, CA 94577
(510) 618-4420
www.sanleandroadultschool.org/



San Lorenzo Adult School

820 Bockman Road
San Lorenzo, CA 94580
(510) 317-4200
adult-slzusd-ca.schoolloop.com/



West Contra Costa Adult Education

6028 Ralston Ave.
Richmond, CA 94805
(510) 215-4666
www.wccae.info/

