

Adult Education in Rhode Island, 2004-2015

Summary Brief

In 2004, Rhode Island Governor Donald Carcieri convened an Adult Literacy Taskforce¹ to develop recommendations that would advance the education of low-literacy adults in Rhode Island. This brief reviews developments in adult education in Rhode Island from 2004 to 2015 through the lens of the recommendations developed by the 2004 Taskforce.

State & Federal Funding for Adult Education

2004 Task Team 1: Budget

- State and federal funding for adult education programs has been consolidated at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) since 2005. In FY 2014-2015, 34 adult education programs in the state receive funding from RIDE to provide services. Not all adult education programs in the state receive funding from RIDE, and there are no statistics on non-RIDE funded programs.
- Annual grants to adult education programs rose from \$8.1M to \$10.5M from FY 2005-2006 to FY 2008-2009, then steadily declined to \$8.3M in 2014.^{2 3} See Figure 1.
- Cost per student varies by adult education program, averaging about \$1,500 per year in FY 2013-2014.^{4 5} This number is roughly one tenth of the annual cost per student in Rhode Island's K-12 education system.⁶
- Statewide performance on assessments of adult learning, measured by Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gains, has improved continuously since 2004. In FY 2013-2014, the cost per EFL gained was half what it was in FY 2005-2006.^{7 8}
- In 2014, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation requiring that the Board of Education develop a plan to provide fee waivers for low-income individuals who cannot afford the cost of taking the GED or other high school equivalency tests.⁹ Currently, the other primary high school equivalency instrument used in Rhode Island is the National External Diploma Program (NEDP).
- Student enrollment in RIDE-funded adult education programs averaged 6,300 per year from 2004 to 2014. In FY 2013-2014, student enrollment was 5,730, which is its lowest level in a decade.^{10 11}
- RIDE maintains a database where RIDE-funded adult education programs track individuals waiting for adult education services in the state. There were 1,504 people on this waiting list as of April 2015.¹²

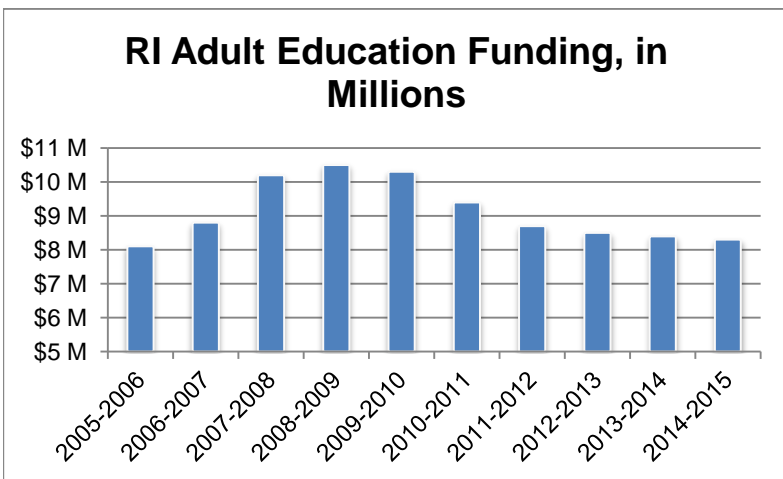


Figure 1. Total grants made by RIDE's Office of Adult Education to adult education programs, 2005 - 2015.

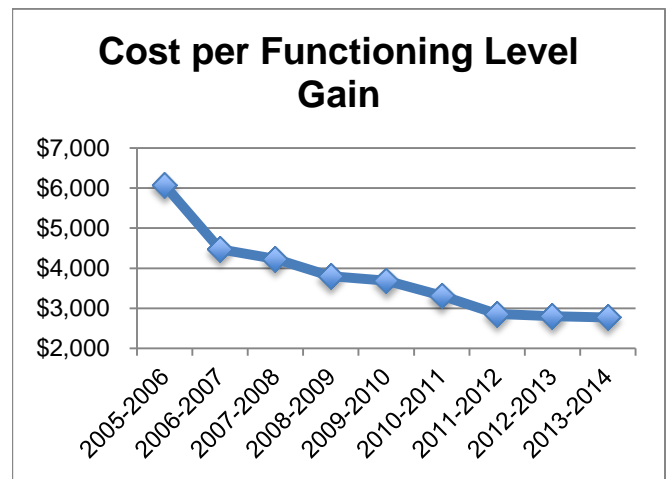


Figure 2. Cost per Educational Functioning Level gain, the standard measure of learning progress for adult learners, 2005 - 2014.

Structure of the Adult Education System

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2004 Task Team 2: System Elements, Objectives & Governance

- From 2005 to 2009, Rhode Island's Director of Adult Education was a direct report to the state's Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. Beginning in 2010, this role has been a non-management union position at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE).
- In 2005, Rhode Island's Office of Adult Education at RIDE employed 7.5 staff members. As of 2015, the same office employs 4.5 staff members, including the Administrator of Adult Basic Education and Chief GED Examiner and three specialists.
- The Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education under the Rhode Island Board of Education governs Rhode Island's adult education system. Adult education is included in the objectives of the RI Governor's Workforce Board's (GWB) 2016-2017 Biennial Employment and Training Plan,¹³ and the GWB includes an Adult Literacy Committee. However, this Committee carries no legal authority over the administration of the state's adult education system. Since the conclusion of the 2004 Governor's Adult Literacy Taskforce, there has been no statewide strategic plan or governance structure developed specific to adult education in Rhode Island.
- The U.S. Congress passed the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014 to authorize federal funding to states for adult education and workforce development. In preparation for full implementation of WIOA in July 2016, state agencies including RIDE, the state Department of Labor and Training (DLT) and the state Department of Human Services (DHS) are required to jointly develop and implement a state plan for meeting the expectations outlined in WIOA.¹⁴

Instructional Quality & Workforce Characteristics in Adult Education

2004 Task Team 3: Professional Development

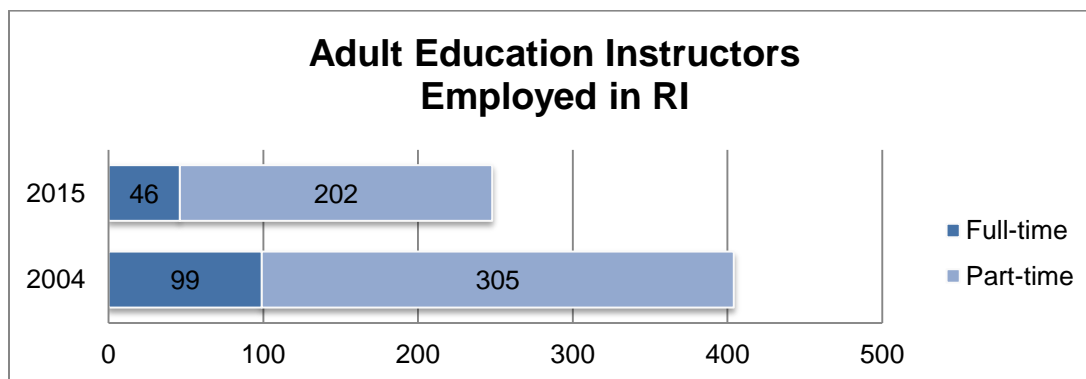


Figure 3. Number of full-time and part-time staff employed by adult education programs in 2004 and by 31 of 34 RIDE-funded adult education programs in 2015.^{15 16}

- In both 2004 and 2015, data indicate that the paid instructional workforce at adult education programs is primarily part-time.^{17 18}
- The Rhode Island Department of Education adopted a set of Adult Education Practitioner Standards for Instructors in 2012.¹⁹
- There is currently no state credentialing system for adult education instructors in Rhode Island.
- The Rhode Island Adult Education Professional Development Center (RIAEPDC) was established in 2007 as a centralized resource to provide professional development opportunities for the state's adult education professionals and support for statewide program improvement strategies.^{20 21}
- In April 2015, RIDE-funded adult education programs reported an hourly wage for non-volunteer instructors that range from \$11.50 to \$31.50, with an average of \$22.45. Part-time adult education instructors at the same programs work from 3.5 to 35 hours per week, with the average being 15.7 hours per week.²²

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- As of April 2015, estimated annual teacher turnover at the largest twelve RIDE-funded adult education programs averaged 20%.²³
- In 2015, there are an estimated 248 paid instructors working in RIDE-funded adult education programs.²⁴

Adult Education Program Quality 2004 Task Team 4

- A Working Group convened by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) developed a model of Performance-Based Funding for adult education programs in the state. The funding formula grades programs on a curve each year, creating the potential for significant annual variations in funding for each program.^{25 26} RIDE used this formula to determine program funding from FY 2011-2012 to FY 2014-2015.
- Students attending adult education programs need more digital literacy skills than ever to participate in the economy and society.²⁷ Nationwide, adult education lags behind K-12 and higher education in technology infrastructure and teaching practices.²⁸
- RIDE adopted a monitoring tool for funded adult education programs that is based on the Program Quality Indicators for RI Adult Basic Education recommended by the 2004 Governor's Adult Literacy Taskforce. The Office of Adult Education uses this tool in reviews of RIDE-funded adult education programs.²⁹
- Efforts have been made to form networks of adult education providers in order to coordinate on behalf of learners and share information and best practices.^{30 31}
- The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) funded a statewide student leadership organization and statewide student satisfaction survey from 2009 to 2015.³²

Adult Education Student Outcomes 2004 Task Team 5: Participant Assessment

- Since 2004, RIDE-funded adult education programs have reported an increase in positive student outcomes, both in terms of total number of positive outcomes and number of positive outcomes as a percentage of all students served. Nationally, Rhode Island moved from the lowest performance quartile to the highest quartile among all state adult education systems between 2005 and 2014.³³
- Following National Reporting System Requirements, RIDE mandates that all RIDE-funded adult education programs administer student assessments in order to evaluate learning. As of April 2015, the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) is the dominant assessment of student literacy gains in Rhode Island,³⁴ but this may change in the coming years as the state aligns with the new College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education.³⁵
- RIDE contracted with an independent company to build a statewide data Management Information System (MIS) for adult education programs. This system, called the Comprehensive Adult Literacy Information System (CALIS) was first implemented in 2006. Users of the system report challenges with user interface, report generation and efficiency.³⁶
- In 2006, RIDE adopted the Rhode Island Adult Education Program Quality Content Standards.³⁷ As of 2015, these standards are being replaced by the National College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education, developed by the U.S. Department of Education based on the Common Core State Standards.³⁸
- In 2013, Rhode Island was awarded a one-time, federal incentive grant in recognition of having exceeding state performance targets for adult education and training for adults. The Rhode Island Department of Education used its share of this funding to purchase technology and invest in statewide planning and increased professional development on technology use for adult education programs.³⁹

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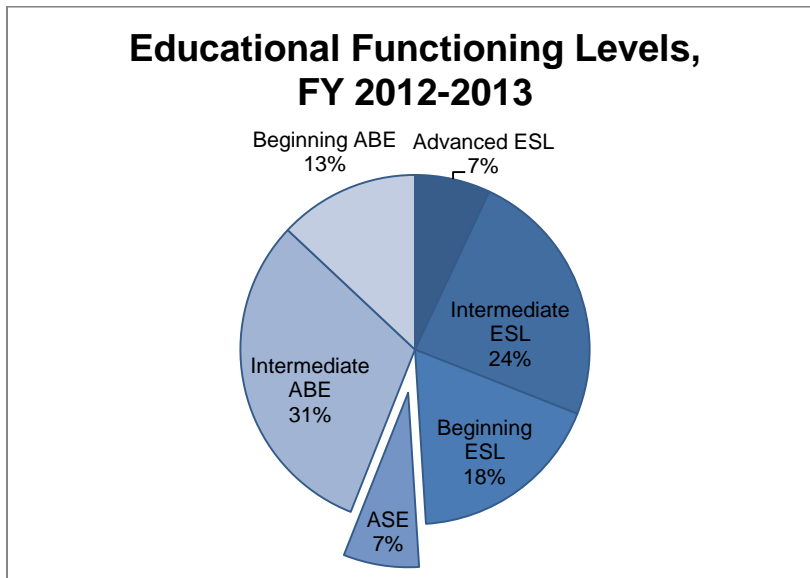


Figure 4. Skill levels of students in RIDE-funded adult education programs, FY 2012-2013. Students who test into ASE (Adult Secondary Education, 9th – 12th grade) are ready to study for a high school equivalency.⁴⁰

- As of 2014, 93% of students attending RIDE-funded adult education programs were assessed to be functioning below a high school level (Adult Secondary Education or ASE) in literacy or numeracy. Most students in adult education will therefore require multiple years of study before they are prepared to earn a high school credential.⁴¹
- Rhode Island youth (16-24 years of age) attending RIDE-funded adult education programs demonstrate lower literacy and numeracy skills (see Figure 4) than their peers in Massachusetts and Connecticut.⁴²
- The rigor and digital literacy requirements of the GED® test changed in January 2014. In Rhode Island, as in other states, the number of GED completions peaked in 2013 because students were eager to complete their GED under the older version of the test, but immediately after they decreased by 90%. Nationally, states on average report a 69% decrease in the number of GED completions.^{43 44}

Endnotes

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