



BASIC EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

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Photo courtesy of Seattle Central College.

Basic Skills for a Better Life

Basic Education for Adults (BEa) programs teach students foundational skills, like digital literacy, math and English language, so they can start on the path toward a high school diploma, a college credential and a well-paying job. Along the way, students also build valuable skills for employment in the 21st century, like critical thinking, navigating complex systems, and communication and problem solving across disciplines.

Serving a student population that is made up of 72% students of color and 62% women, we prioritize leading with racial equity and ensuring a culturally responsive approach across programming. The programs:

- Serve adults at least 16 years old who are building academic, English language, and workforce preparation skills.
- Can co-enroll students in college and high school completion, saving students, taxpayers, and employers time and money.

- Serve students who are incarcerated in preparation for their successful re-entry to their communities and the workforce upon release.

Adult education is a key mission area of Washington's community and technical college system and is mandated by state law.¹ All 34 community and technical colleges provide BEa programs, along with partnering community-based organizations.

An Urgent Need

The need for adult education is great and the stakes are high. An estimated 442,000 Washington adults hold less than a high school diploma or equivalent.² Meanwhile, the bar to get a living-wage job is getting higher. Nearly 70% of all projected job openings by 2029 will require at least some education beyond high school.³ Adult education bridges these gaps, creating pathways to college and careers for Washington's emerging workforce. People learn and improve skills they need to get good jobs and employers get the skilled workers they need to succeed.

Racial and Economic Justice

Historically, BEa programs in America were called "literacy" programs. The goal was for students to earn a high school diploma or equivalent. Today's programs set the bar higher. They are designed to move students to and through a high school-level of education and into certificates or degrees that will help them earn a living wage.

A leader in the field, Washington state's programs influenced the federal Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), which requires BEa programs that receive federal funds to move students into college and careers.

To advance racial and economic justice, Basic Education for Adults provides culturally responsive programming to close opportunity gaps and ensure all Washingtonians realize their potential as they launch on a supported college and career pathway to living-wage employment and strengthen the vitality of their communities. Our work is guided and informed by our commitment to: students' cultural capital, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and quality programming. Our success is measured by the success of our students.

Competency-based High School Education

In Washington state's adult high school diploma program, **High School Plus (HS+)**, students move through courses based on knowledge gained rather than just time spent in a classroom. Students move through courses as quickly as their competencies take them. In HS+, adults who need a high school diploma can get credits for what they've already learned in life and take classes to fill in the rest of the diploma requirements. Bypassing classes in subjects they already know means students can earn their diploma faster, quickly putting them on track to the next step in their education, and giving them confidence to succeed.

Teaching in Context

A growing number of students are enrolled in Washington's nationally renowned **Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST)** job-training programs.

I-BEST uses a team-teaching approach. One teacher provides job-training or academic instruction; the other teaches basic skills — like reading, writing and math — within the context of that instruction. Students earn credits that apply both to their area of study and to a high school diploma. As a result, students get through school and into living-wage jobs faster.

With I-BEST, students jump into job-training and academic programs, gaining basic skills and earning a high school diploma along the way.

For students who need to boost their English language and digital literacy skills, our colleges offer **Integrated Digital English Acceleration (I-DEA)**. This program uses an integrated approach to teach students English and digital literacy in preparation for college or the workforce.

I-DEA students participate in 31 week-long instructional modules on topics ranging from navigating the community and information literacy, to professional communication, job exploration and interview skills.

Both I-BEST and I-DEA teach students basic skills within a context that is relevant to their lives and career goals. Students “learn by doing.”

Financial Assistance

To remove financial barriers, student support professionals work closely with students to identify funding opportunities as they move into their college-level program of study. For students without a high school diploma, the “Ability to Benefit” option is key to securing federal and state financial aid like Pell Grants and the Washington College Grant.

Typically, students must have either a high school diploma or equivalent to qualify for financial aid. The Ability to Benefit provision of federal financial aid rules allows students who lack those credentials to prove they are capable of making progress in college. Students who co-enroll in I-BEST and HS+ can gain eligibility for these grants right away. By getting students into credit-bearing programs of study quickly, HS+ and I-BEST open the doors sooner to federal and state financial aid.

Upward Momentum

Community and technical colleges recognize that every credential should lead to bigger and better things. BEdA programs provide students with the skills, navigation, and funding to earn certificates and two-year degrees. The two-year degrees then lead directly into careers or into four-year degrees. Programs are connected in a continuous path upward.

Students who enroll in BEdA classes take an important step to a better future. Our colleges make sure that first step leads to a valuable educational journey — one that will give students life-changing skills to succeed as students, employees, parents and citizens.

Sources:

1. RCW 28B.50.020.3
2. “Washington State Encyclopedia of Education Data.” WSAC. <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/WSAC-Education-Data-Encyclopedia.pdf>
3. “Washington's Skilled and Educated Workforce 2021-22.” WSAC. <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-22-WashingtonsSkilledandEducatedWorkforceReport.pdf>