



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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From Basic Skills to Good Jobs: Connecting DC's Adult Learners to Career Pathways

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One of the priorities of Mayor Gray's budget for next year is "encouraging economic and workforce development." Over the past few years, the District has invested in new initiatives to connect more DC residents to careers — from building a community college to creating a workforce intermediary to funding adult job training. Yet many District residents lack the basic reading, writing, math, English language, and digital literacy skills to take advantage of these programs. That's why the mayor and DC Council need to put an adult literacy strategy in place starting with the fiscal year 2015 budget, and a [new report](#) by DC Appleseed lays out specific recommendations for how to do that.

The urgency of the issue is clear. Economists project that in just four years, 72 percent of all jobs in DC will require some postsecondary education. Yet more than 60,000 residents lack a high school diploma or its equivalent. This skills disparity contributes to the District's gap between rich and poor, which is already one of the fourth highest among major U.S. cities. The unemployment and poverty rates of DC residents without a high school degree are six times those of residents with a bachelor's degree or more.

The DC Appleseed report, [From Basic Skills to Good Jobs: A Strategy for Connecting DC's Adult Learners to Career Pathways](#), recommends the District adopt a citywide initiative to ensure that every adult learner has access to a career pathway by 2020. A career pathway is a comprehensive approach that includes basic skills, postsecondary education, and sector-specific training that leads not only to a job but to a career. Research shows that this approach has been successful elsewhere.

Building a system that truly provides every adult learner with the opportunity to access a career pathway won't happen overnight. But if the District starts now, it could achieve this goal by 2020. Specifically, the report recommends DC government jumpstart this multi-year initiative by investing \$2.5 million in fiscal year 2015 in three major initiatives:

- A cross-agency task force to develop and implement a strategic plan for connecting basic skills programs to career pathways (\$175,000);
- An innovation fund to help the task force pilot, evaluate, and then plan to expand proven career pathway approaches (\$2 million);
- Increased support to provide assessments for adult learners who may have learning disabilities (\$340,000).

Investing in adult education doesn't just benefit adults. It also benefits the next generation. Helping parents build their skills also helps boost their children's success in school. Research shows a child's success in school is significantly impacted by their parents' education and their family's economic security.

Mayor Gray and the DC Council should make this funding a priority for fiscal year 2015. Doing so would help make DC a place where everyone can thrive and prosper.