



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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STARTING WITH THE BASICS: Using the 2015 Budget to Invest in Adult Literacy

By Ed Lazere

The District is an incredibly expensive place to live – becoming more so every year – and yet [wages have fallen](#) for DC residents who don't have a post-secondary degree. This means that the key to enabling residents to thrive in the city is to help them develop job skills. But for many adults, the lack of basic literacy prevents them not only from finding a good job but even from participating in a training program.

That is why the DC Fiscal Policy Institute, as part of the DC Adult and Family Literacy Coalition, will be testifying today to support targeted investments in adult literacy programs in the city's fiscal year 2015 budget. In particular, we encourage the District to integrate literacy services into programs that help residents plan for a job and career – a “career pathways” framework. This approach makes basic skills training more relevant and motivates participants to succeed. And according to a recent report from [DC Appleseed](#), it leads to higher rates of GED completion and transition to college than other literacy programs.



Source: Academy of Hope

The budget request, built in part on the DC Appleseed report recommendations, would put the District on the path over the next five years to offering career-oriented basic skills services to every adult who wants them.

- Maintaining a \$4 million partnership started this year between the Department of Employment Services, the Division of Adult and Family Education within the Office of the State Superintendent for Education, and the Department of Human Services. The partnership provides for adult literacy services for job-seeking DC residents.
- Creating a new taskforce to develop a vision for connecting basic skills programs to career pathways, to set citywide priorities, and to identify ways to align the District's education, workforce, and human services programs. The taskforce could be convened by the Workforce Investment Council. The cost would be \$175,000.
- Seeding a new “innovation fund” with \$1 million to pilot various approaches to providing literacy services in a career pathways context.

The District has a strong economy and is creating new jobs every year. Our city's leaders should make sure that as many of those jobs go to DC residents as possible. And that means starting with the basics for many residents.

DCFPI's testimony can be found [here](#).