

https://www.theoaklandpress.com/opinion/column-our-recovery-must-include-adult-learners-in-educational-priorities-for-federal-relief-spending/article_bf01f3ae-dd00-11ea-b14d-ef261dd94b0d.html

Column: Our recovery must include adult learners in educational priorities for federal relief spending

By Ben Dowker and Matt Gillard Special to MediaNews Group
Aug 13, 2020



Photo courtesy of Flickr

Support local journalism.
With resurging positive coronavirus cases, including in hotspots here in Michigan, states are walking a fine line to ensure the safety of residents, reopen schools, and support families as they struggle to provide for their children and assist in their learning. The next coronavirus relief

SUBSCRIBE

Already a Subscriber? Log in

package is right now being debated in Washington and just how much support federal negotiators agree to send Michigan to bolster schools and families will have a critical impact on how our people emerge from this crisis.

Not to be overlooked in the conversation for helping K-12 education challenged by COVID health and safety concerns and new expenses for virtual learning are programs serving adult learners, such as the Huron Valley Adult Education program. Now more than ever, we must shore up these programs to strengthen family stability and economic security essential. To omit support for adult learners needing to build literacy skills and work on career attainment would be a mistake and missed opportunity for strengthening family earning potential at a crisis point in our history.

Huron Valley Adult Education serves the most at-risk and vulnerable adults -- many low-income and single parents -- in Oakland, Livingston and Genesee Counties with adult reading improvement, English as a Second Language classes, a certified Nurse Aide training program, and high school diploma, high school equivalency (GED) preparation classes, as well as the Pearson Vue testing center. School closures due to the pandemic have left students without the means to attend classes to continue building their literacy skills or work toward a diploma or GED. This adversely affects one's workforce marketability in which career track entry-level job openings require a post-secondary credential, degree, certificate or license. Federal funding to assist these individuals and families must be part of a relief package for our state if we are to keep our vulnerable families from being irreparably harmed.

Along with K-12 educational challenges, adult learners have likewise faced barriers accessing technology -- both the Internet and devices such as a computer, tablet, or Chromebook. Well-placed federal support to lift these barriers would help not only adult learners, but their children too as it's well known that parents' educational level and well-being directly impacts children's chances for a solid educational foundation and successful future.

The need for a robust response to Michigan's fiscal problems is clear. The pandemic has left us with a looming \$2 billion budget hole for the fiscal year starting October 1. The current year's budget also contained a serious shortfall of \$2.2 billion that was recently filled by a mixture of spending cuts, ^{Support local journalism.} Only 99 million federal coronavirus relief money, and \$350 million from the state's "rainy day" fund.

SUBSCRIBE

Already a Subscriber? [Log in](#)

Federal support for adult learners now would also help our people at a time when the state's own direct support to adult education has failed to return to pre-recession levels. Where we once saw state funding for adult education around \$80 million a year, today it's a third of that -- accompanied by a decline in enrollment and grade level completion. This is not good for our individual families or our state's ability to emerge from this world crisis.

Today our leaders have a moral imperative to make tough funding decisions that don't adversely impact the delivery of vital services to children and families and provide an equitable distribution of resources that sustain our residents. Let's make sure adult learners are part of the support for education that will get this right.

Ben Dowker is the Director of Adult and Alternative Programs for the Huron Valley Schools. Matt Gillard is the President/CEO of Michigan's Children, a multi-issue public policy nonprofit working in the best interest of children and families, particularly those facing the most challenges, across Michigan.

Want local news?

Sign up for our newsletter and stay informed

Enter your email to subscribe

SIGN UP



Only 99¢ for the first 3 months!

SPONSORED CONTENT

Kid Drawings That Exposed Family Secrets

By Ranker



Kids are known for saying the darndest things, but they also draw the darndest things too.

SUBSCRIBE

Already a Subscriber? [Log in](#)