

◀ Adult Education ▶

What is adult education?

- Adult education includes all educational opportunities available to adults other than those specifically leading to a college or university degree.
- More than 2 million Californians take adult education classes each year, making adult education an essential part of California's educational system. In this state where life and job changes are the norm, adult education allows adults to enter or re-enter the workplace and to play more meaningful roles in a rapidly changing society.
- The current adult education system is desperately underfunded and cannot meet the needs of Californians who rely on it as their sole source of education.
- As a result of the unique role adult education plays, teachers of adults face issues that differ greatly from teachers of children or young adults. These issues are commonly misunderstood and often neglected.

Who are adult educators?

- Adult educators are teaching professionals who meet California teacher certification criteria. Many are required to hold advanced degrees.
- Adult educators possess specific teaching skills necessary to teach adults. They have developed certain sensitivities and techniques different from those needed to teach children. For example, teaching a 50-year-old to read is very different than teaching a 6-year-old to read.
- K-12 and community college districts throughout the state employ adult educators. Career teachers form the core staff of successful adult programs; other adult teachers come from professional and vocational backgrounds.

Who takes adult classes and what subjects are offered?

- Students who take adult classes reflect California's diverse communities. They range, in age, from 18 to over 80; in education, from no formal schooling to postgraduate degrees; in ability, from highly talented to severely disabled; in socioeconomic background, from homeless to wealthy; and, in ethnicity, from native-born to immigrant.
- Adult educators teach classes in the following mandated adult education categories: Adults With Disabilities, Elementary and Secondary Basic Skills, Older Adults, English as a Second Language (ESL), Vocational Training, Health and Safety, as well as Citizenship, Parenting, and Home Economics. In addition, some adult programs may offer self-supporting fee-based classes in subjects outside these areas.
- Through the mandated categories, adult students have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma or a GED; to learn vocational skills in fields such as business, computers, nursing, security, and custodial services; and, for many immigrants, to learn English and attain citizenship.
- The learning conditions for adult students and the working conditions for adult educators may not be those of a typical classroom. Adult classes are taught wherever there is a critical community need and a space to teach — college classrooms and adult education centers, church basements, homeless shelters, jails, senior homes, secured facilities and K-12 classrooms in the evenings. There may be no chalkboards or books in these classrooms, let alone VCRs or other electronic equipment.
- Adult educators frequently help prepare their students for the next steps in their lives or careers by collaborating with employers and various agencies.

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What are the issues of adult educators?

Respect for adult education

■ Hundreds of thousands of adults, who may or may not have a high school diploma or aspire to a college degree, need the education offered in adult classes. For many Californians, adult education is the gateway to gaining employment, pursuing higher education and fulfilling essential life goals.

■ Adult education also plays a significant role in improving learning and educational quality in many California families. Adult students are often the parents and grandparents of students in California's schools and colleges. Their children or grandchildren typically perform better in school because of the positive role modeling and the educationally supportive atmosphere in the home.

Adult education needs to be respected as an integral part of California's education system.

Equitable funding for all adult education in California

■ Approximately 1.5 million students are enrolled in mandated adult classes administered by K–12 districts. These classes are funded by the state based on the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) generated by student attendance. The state funds adult ADA at a rate about half that of K–12 ADA. By law, adult education funds and K–12 funds must be kept separate.

■ More than 600,000 adults are enrolled in noncredit community college programs. Noncredit classes include offerings such as adult basic education, information technology, high school diploma, GED, ESL, and vocational classes. By comparison, credit classes are those traditional classes such as English 101, which award full college credit. These college classes are funded by the state based on Full-Time Equivalent Students (FTES). Similar to the K–12 setting, the state funds noncredit FTES at a rate about half that of credit FTES. There is no legal requirement that credit and noncredit funding be kept separate.

The state needs a single increased funding formula that addresses the needs of adult students in both systems.

Equitable compensation for all adult educators

■ As a result of the low levels of adult funding, adult educators in K–12 districts may be paid much less than teachers who teach children, and noncredit teachers are often paid much less than their colleagues who teach credit courses.

■ Many adult educators are forced to work in multiple districts to survive financially because their positions are part-time and often temporary. In both settings, adult educators often work without any employer-paid medical benefits.

The salaries and benefits of adult educators must be made comparable to those of teachers in K–12 programs and community college credit programs.

What is the CFT Adult Education Commission?

■ Members of CFT's Adult Education Commission are appointed from AFT local unions throughout the state. The Commission includes both K–12 adult educators and community college noncredit educators. It has co-chairs, one from a K–12 district and one from a college district.

■ The Commission discusses issues of concern to adult education, makes recommendations to CFT governance bodies, officers, and staff, and promotes adult education and adult educators.

What do CFT and the Adult Education Commission provide?

- A reliable support network.
- Accurate information and an effective statewide system of dissemination.
- A discussion forum for topics of concern.
- Lobbyists advocating for adult education in the state Legislature.
- Information on the CFT Web site.
- Workshops on adult education issues.
- Access to attorneys knowledgeable in adult education issues.
- Representation on state committees and before state legislative bodies.

CFT ADULT EDUCATION COMMISSION

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