



Testimony of Jack Jacobson  
President  
District of Columbia State Board of Education

before the

Council of the District of Columbia

Committee of the Whole  
and  
Committee on Education

**“The State of Adult Education and Adult Literacy Initiatives  
in the District”**

Thursday, September 24, 2015

12:30PM

Room 412

John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004



Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso and members of the Committee of the Whole and the Education Committee. My name is Jack Jacobson and I am President of the District of Columbia State Board of Education (SBOE). The State Board of Education provides policy leadership, support, advocacy, and oversight of public education with the mission to ensure that every student in the District of Columbia feels valued as a student, and graduates with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to become informed, competent, and contributing global citizens.

On behalf of the State Board, I would like to thank the Council for holding this hearing today, which will help us all obtain the information we need to explore the current landscape of adult education, and to assist us in exploring ways to better support these remarkable individuals.

Put simply, education, especially adult education, changes lives. Many of our adult learners have not taken the traditional educational path because they have faced significant personal barriers that have prevented them from following a traditional educational path. Their non-traditional educational experience means that they tend to earn less over their lifetime, leading to economic barriers that may become entrenched and generational. To overcome these circumstances and re-enter the educational arena, shows remarkable resilience and determination.

The State Board's leadership to provide adult learners both traditional and nontraditional educational pathways should be paramount as we develop policies governing all types of adult education opportunities. To meet the needs of as many of our residents as possible, broadness of educational opportunities is essential so that adult learners may shape their education to their individual circumstances.

As we've heard from many of the witnesses before you today, and in testimony before the State Board, many adult learners described the challenges they have had to face not having the credentials proving they have graduated from high school. These include struggles gaining access to meaningful employment and difficulties pursuing higher education opportunities. Most adult learners face extreme personal challenges that provide continuous barriers, which makes reengaging in their educational experience more difficult. Most adult learners work full-time jobs, have families with children, and find the rigors of the adult educational process very difficult to meet.

The administrators and teachers working in adult education centers testified about the demands and the challenges their students face, and the rigors of their academic

programs. While many states have sought easier high school equivalency exams, DC has adopted the newly revised GED, which is aligned with the same rigorous Common Core standards the State Board and OSSE have adopted - as those graduating using the traditional pathways. The GED is a demanding test that has proved difficult for both educators and students. At our next Working Session, State Board Members will have the opportunity to take the Common-Core-aligned GED to better understand its rigor and the knowledge necessary to pass the exam.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) believes there are seven major characteristics that most adult learners exhibit in full or in part:

- Have delayed enrollment into postsecondary education;
- Attend part time;
- Are financially independent of their parents;
- Work full-time while enrolled;
- Have dependents other than a spouse;
- Are a single parent; and
- Lack a standard high school diploma.

These barriers are not insurmountable, but they can seem so without appropriate support. Adult learners need access to programs that meet each of their unique needs. They need access to programs that offer flexibility while maintaining the necessary rigor to prepare them for meaningful careers. All learners need educators who understand their particular circumstances, and can provide proper support to help them succeed. Most importantly, they need an education that provides the type of credentials that allows them to access educational and career opportunities on par with individuals who complete a traditional educational program.

To modify a popular slogan, “Nothing stops a bullet like an education.” The State Board of Education is committed to removing barriers to education so that all students at all ages can earn the skills and knowledge they need to be happy and successful. We appreciate the Council holding this hearing today to highlight the challenges of our adult learners. We are steadfast in our desire to adopt policies that reduce the stigma around adult education, and ensure that this population is college and career ready. We will continue to be an active partner with the Council, Mayor, and other stakeholders on this important issue.

Thank you. I am available for any questions you might have.