



SHOP TALK #23: Facts about the Economic Power of Education

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Unemployment rates are at a historically all time low here in Texas (hovering around 4%), but a study of the sub-sects of this rate reveals some tremendous differences. For example, the unemployment rate for those with a college degree or higher is 2.1%; for those with an associate's degree it is 3.9%; for high school grads with no college it is 5.0%; and amongst those with less than a high school diploma, unemployment is 7.8%. (Schultz, Agurban e-zine, May 27, 2008).

For adult educators, the sub-sect percentages come as no surprise. Those served in adult education are more likely to be under educated but nevertheless employed or looking for employment. What the percentages don't reveal is that while many adult learners without high school diplomas work, their employment is often one (or two) low paying jobs to support themselves and their families, many times without benefits.

According to the Texas state demographer, Carl Eshenberg, Texas has a \$4.5 billion tax deficit associated with those without gainful employment. So putting folks to work benefits not only the individuals and their families but the entire community as well as the tax base.

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) has released *Adult Learning in Focus: National and State-by-State Data* (2008).

Highlights for the nation include:

- In 35 states (including Texas), more than 60 percent of adults don't have an associate's degree or higher.
- More than 26 million adults lack a high school diploma; more than 32 million haven't attended college and earn less than a living wage; and more than 8 million haven't attended college and speak little or no English.

In Texas, of 14,675,486 working-age adults (18 to 64 years of age), **10,451,678** have not completed college degrees (associate's or higher) – representing **71.2** percent of all working-age adults in Texas. Of these:

- 2,910,586 have not completed high school or the equivalent
- 4,141,026 have completed high school but have not entered post secondary education
- 3,400,066 have completed some college but have no degree
- 1,276,982 speak little or no English
- 3,347,211 are living in families whose combined incomes are less than a living wage (twice the level of poverty)

Data prepared by CAEL and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, with support from the Lumina Foundation for Education. Visit www.cael.org/adultlearninginfocus.htm for the full report and access to detailed state-by-state data.

SHOP TALK is a series sponsored by Texas LEARNS to highlight promising practices and address issues, concerns, and questions related to meeting the adult education needs of Texas' emerging, incumbent, and displaced workers. For additional information or to request that a particular topic be addressed, contact Barbara Tondre at btondre@earthlink.net