

Data Story:

Adult Education: Improving Rhode Island's Workforce



Essential Question: What is Adult Education's role in helping Rhode Island's workforce compete more effectively?

Description:

This story examines the potential role of Adult Education in increasing the competitiveness of the workforce in RI, which continues to face one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation.

Data Sources: Rhode Island Department of Education

URL: <http://ridatahub.org/datastories/adult-education-and-ris-workforce>

Data Story: Adult Education: Improving Rhode Island's Workforce **RI DataHUB**

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A problem: RI is losing ground to out-of-state workers

The Providence Business News [states](#) that: "In the decade between the 2000 and 2010 censuses, the share of Rhode Island residents who work out of state has remained fairly constant, dropping from 14.3 percent in 2000 to 14.2 percent in 2010.

"However, the share of Rhode Island **jobs held by out-of-state residents climbed nearly 2 percentage points** over the same period, from 8.4 percent in 2000 to 10.3 percent in 2010."

What could be hampering the RI workforce's competitiveness for RI-based jobs? This story examines some issues underlying workforce development by looking through the data lens of the Rhode Island's Adult Education System.

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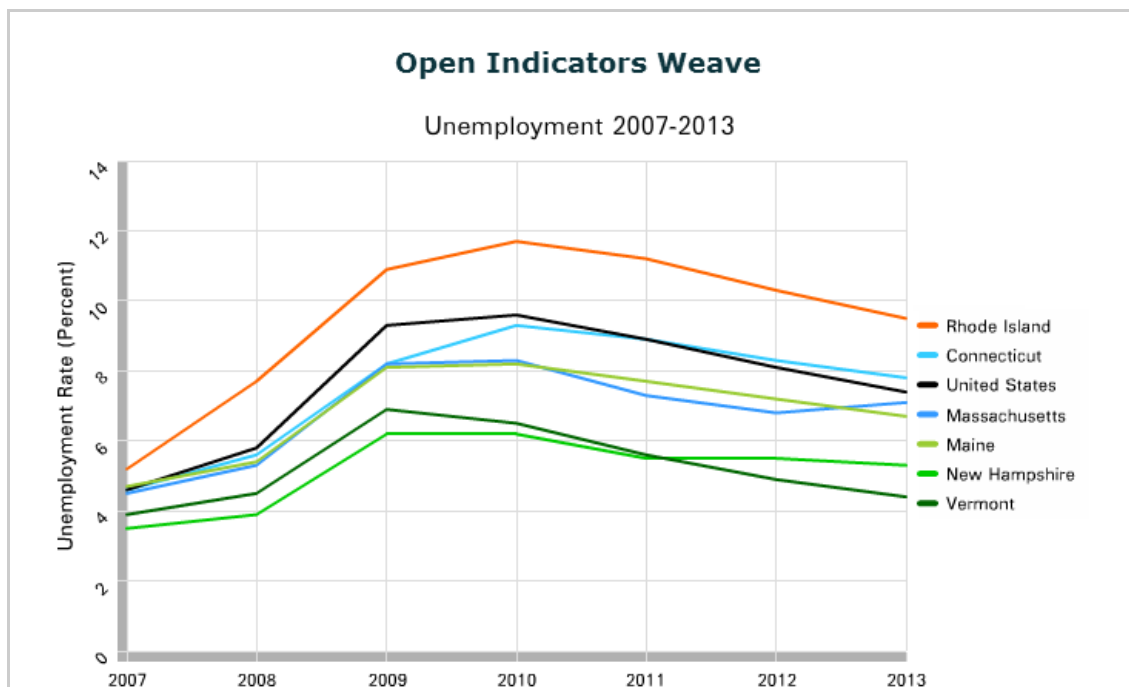
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Unemployment is a persistent problem in Rhode Island



During the recent recession, Rhode Island's unemployment rate has been among the highest in the nation, if not the highest.

The Providence Business News [reported](#) that from 2007 to 2012, Rhode Island lost 7.4% of its non-farm jobs, leaving 36,700 more people out of work than before the recession.

Data source: [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, LAUS program.](#)

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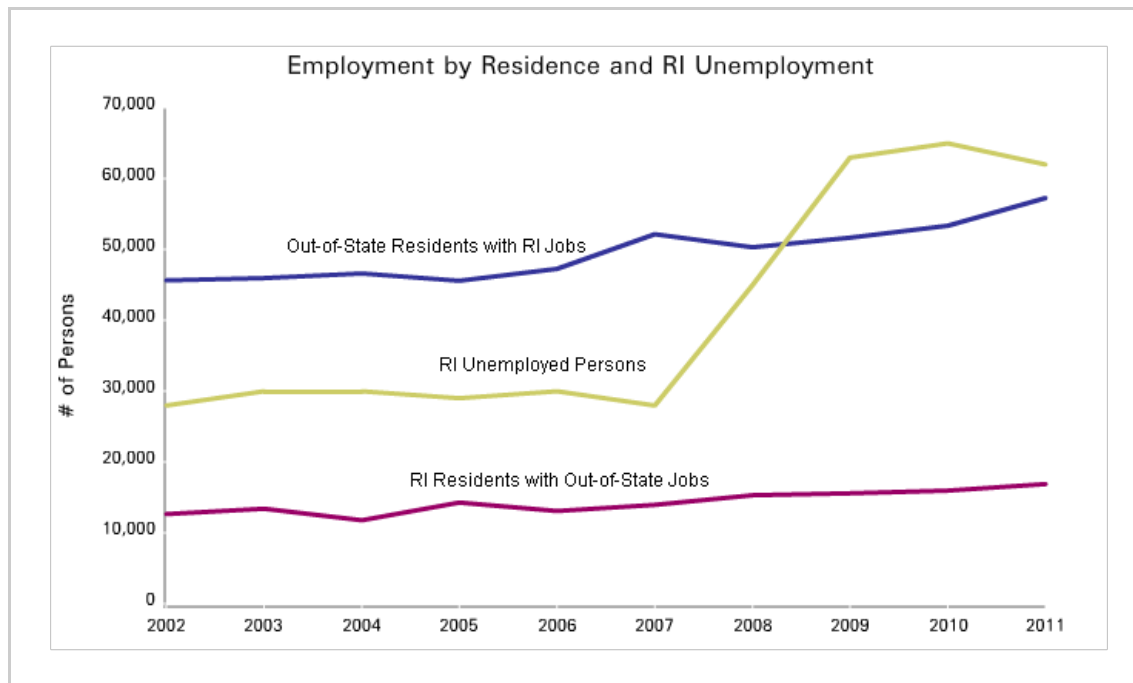
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Out-of-state residents occupy more jobs in RI



Despite continued high unemployment, the number of out-of-state residents working in RI jobs increased by 5,147 -- 9.9% -- from 2007 to 2011.

With the overall demand for labor down, nationally and locally, Rhode Island workers have a smaller piece of a smaller jobs pie.

The number of Rhode Islanders working out-of-state has also grown, but not nearly enough to offset high unemployment and the reduction in RI workers' share of in-state jobs.

Data sources: [U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program](#); [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, LAUS Program via the RI Department of Labor and Training, LMI Unit](#).

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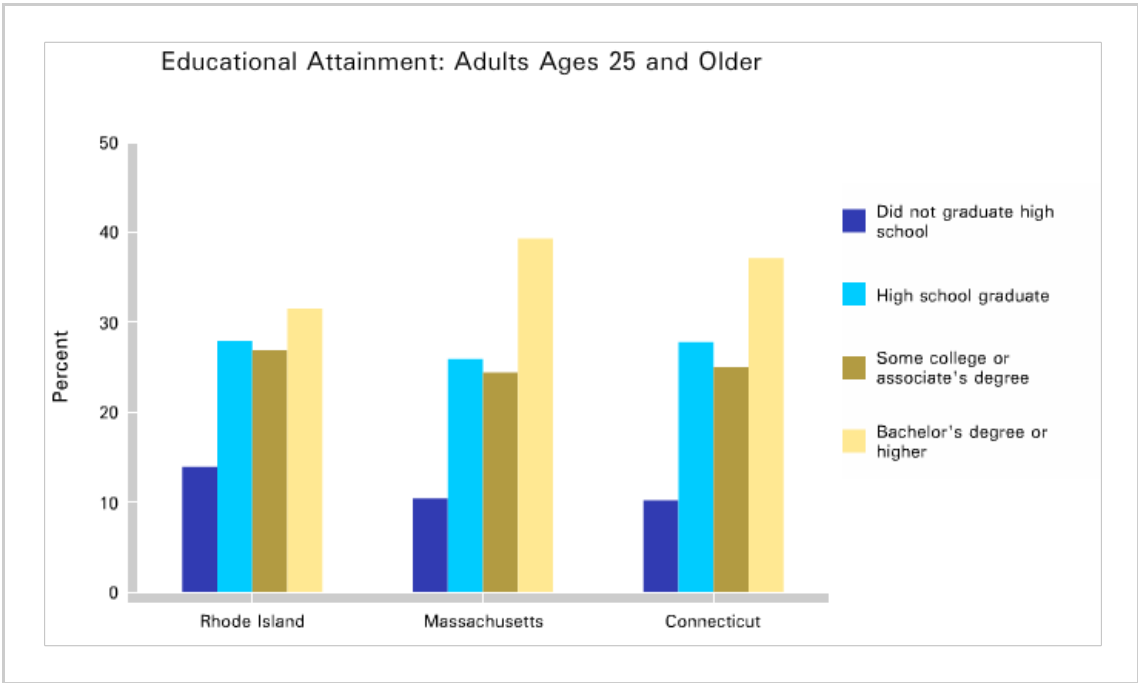
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Rhode Island's workforce is less educated than those in MA and CT



Compared with its neighbors, significantly fewer RI residents earned at least a Bachelors' degree. And significantly more lack a high-school diploma.

In total, 74,669 RI working-age adults (ages 18-64) have not graduated from high school and are not in school. Increasingly, employers require a high-school diploma, an equivalency diploma like a [GED](#), or a college degree to be considered for a job. Roughly 34,921 working-age adults have limited English skills, or none at all.

While data aren't specific enough to prove that low basic skills cause an increased unemployment rate, the data clearly show that many RI workers lack the skills that qualify them for even entry-level jobs.

Data source: US Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey [1-Year](#) and [5-Year](#) Estimates.

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An Overview of Rhode Island's Adult Education

Rhode Island's public Adult Education system is designed to ramp up the capacity of low-skilled and would-be workers. The system focuses on basic academic and workforce skills, including teaching English, preparing students for jobs and higher education.

By definition, Adult learners have any of these attributes:

- no high-school diploma;
- skills below 12th-grade level;
- limited English Language skills;
- are 16 years or older.

This story examines only those learners in one of the 34 programs publicly-funded through the [Rhode Island Department of Education](#). (Academic services are also offered by churches and other non-publicly-funded organizations about which data are unavailable.)

**Data source for all general information on RI's Adult Education system: RI Dept. of Education, Office of Multiple Pathways.*

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Low-skilled workers struggle to compete for gainful employment

In 2000 the US Department of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills ([SCANS](#)) surveyed employers in a range of workplaces to determine what skills students needed to become work-ready. Their report, [What Work Requires of Schools](#), identified what are now known as the SCANS skills, the tested and still-unchallenged gold standard of workplace readiness. These include basic skills, thinking skills, and workplace readiness, such as reliability, teamwork, and leadership.

But no readiness skill can overcome a weak foundation in the basic workplace skills:

reading, writing, math, and English-language proficiency.

Nationally, as in RI, Adult Education concentrates on these basic skills.

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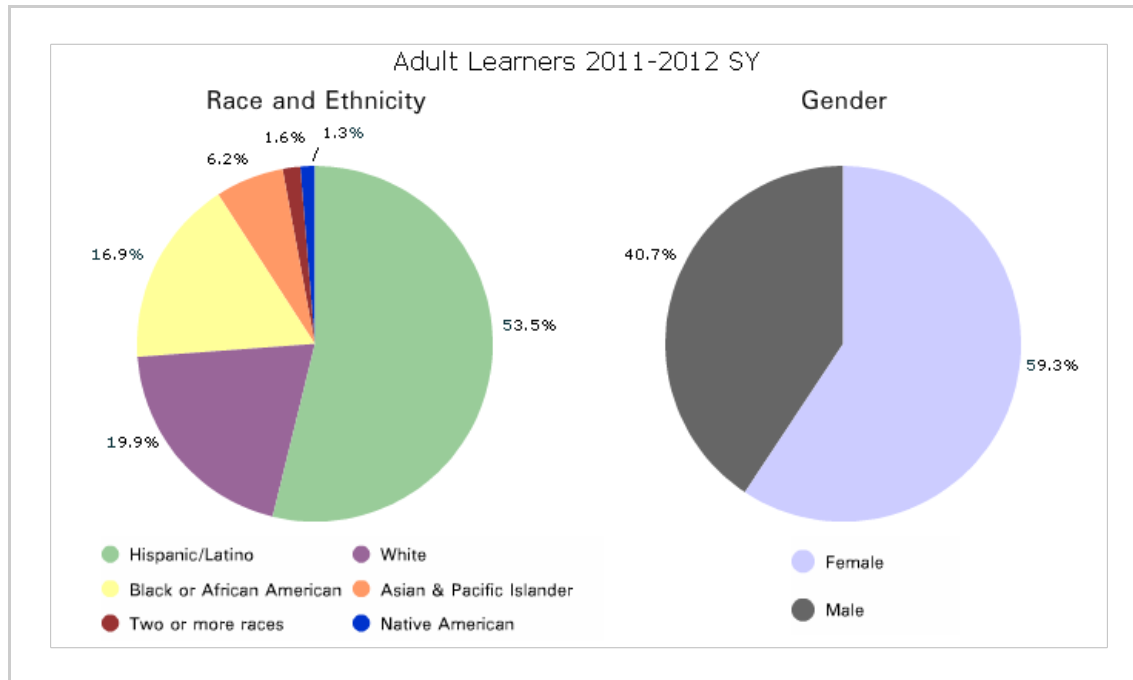
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Demographics of Rhode Island's Adult Learners



Adult learners are predominantly female and/or Hispanic.

[View chart of ages of adult learners](#)

Please note that in 2012, RI's General Assembly raised the compulsory attendance age from 16 to 18 years old for public school students. Youth can no longer officially withdraw from high school until 18 years old unless their high school arranges for them to complete a diploma through an alternative route. Adult Education helps students to pass the [GED test](#) so they can get [RI's High School Equivalency Diploma](#).

Data Note: All information on RI's adult learners is obtained from the RI Department of Education's CALIS database. Figures reflect the most recent data available (the 2011-2012 or 2012-2013 fiscal year as noted).

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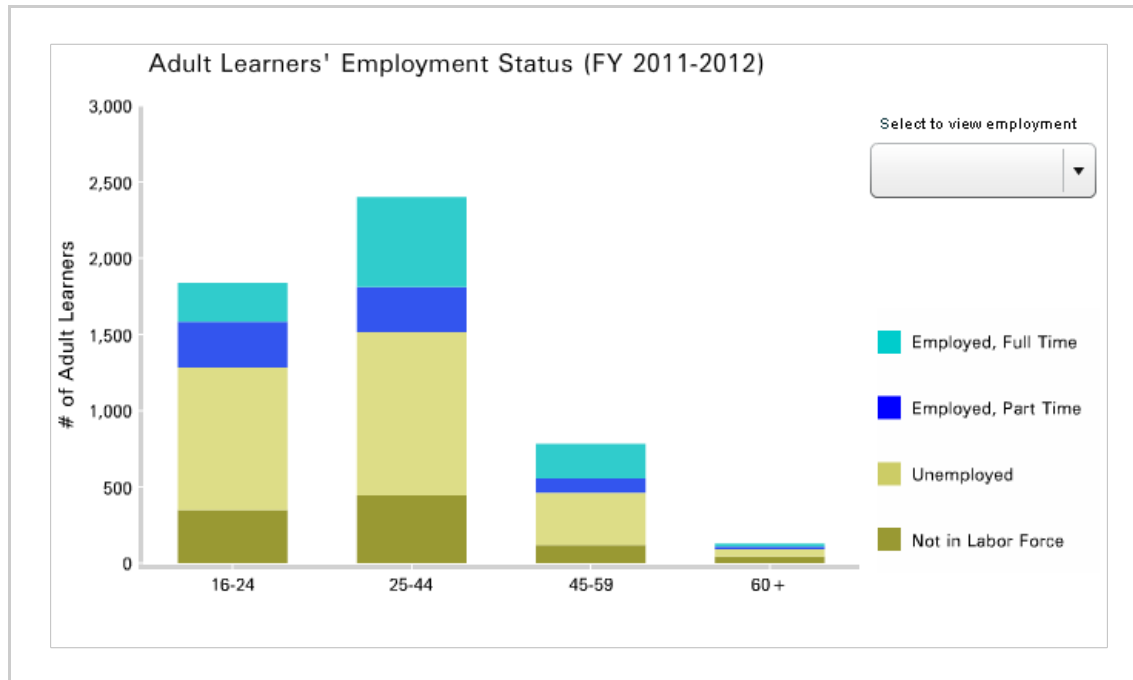
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35% of RI's adult learners are currently employed



Fully 82% of our adult learners are actively seeking employment or are working -- full or part-time.

By definition, "unemployed" means the worker is actively looking for a job. Only 18% of RI's adult learners are actually disengaged from the workforce, neither employed nor seeking employment.

Likely, many employers do not know that some of their employees are trying to improve their basic skills, on top of juggling work and personal obligations. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that many employers are not aware of the Adult Education system at all, not to mention its effectiveness at enhancing their workers' skills (see page 13).

[View chart of ages of adult learners](#)

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An Overview of Adult Education's Skill Levels

Broadly, Adult Education includes:

Adult Basic Education (ABE) -- academic skills covered in K-12 grades 1 through 8.

Adult Secondary Education (ASE) -- academic skills covered in grades 9 through 12. Many of these learners still need a credential, such as a **GED. They may be participating in Adult Education's "Transition to College" program (to reduce resources expended on college-based remediation), or industry-specific contextualized instruction in healthcare, food services, hospitality and construction.**

English as a Second Language (ESL) -- for adults learning English. ("ESL" is a federal definition; in fact, many learners speak several languages already.)

Adult Education's measure of success is proof, by post-test, of the learner's having advanced by at least one Educational Functional Level (EFL), equivalent to two K-12 grades. (College remedial classes do not certify their effectiveness with a post-test.)

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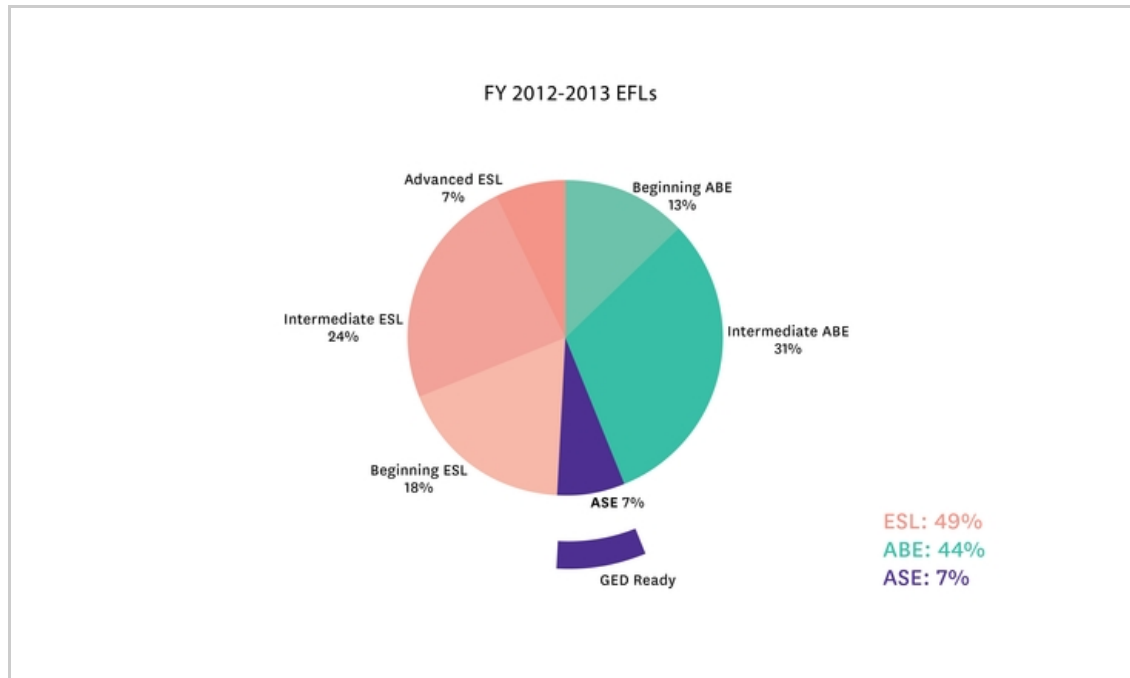
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Test Results/Educational Functioning Levels (EFLs)



About half of RI's adult learners are in ESL programs. Fully 93% of them have 8th-grade skills or lower, and are therefore not ready to take the GED.

Prior to enrolling in Adult Education courses, applicants take a pre-test to determine their educational functioning level or EFL. The graph above shows the entrance-level skills of the 6,061 adult learners who enrolled in fiscal year 2012-2013.

Please note that even dedicated low-skilled workers can take 4 or 5 years to master the skills required for a GED -- and that even GED skills don't meet the requirements of Accuplacer, the placement exam that serves as gatekeeper to credit-bearing courses in higher education.

Click anywhere on the chart to open a full-resolution version.

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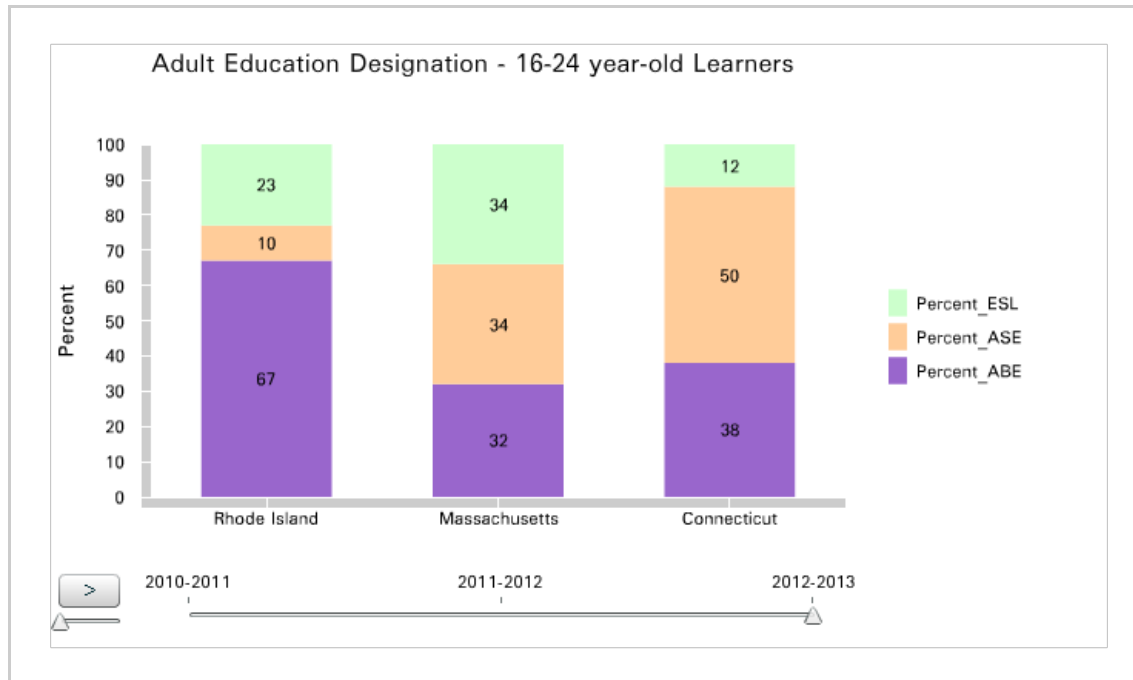
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RI's youngest workers are at a competitive disadvantage



The youngest participants in RI's workforce need basic skills at almost twice the rate of its neighbors.

Using the time slider, note that RI's young people's enrollment in ABE, the K-8 skills, has increased in recent years. This lack of preparation often burdens young workers with a disadvantage that persists for years.

The Legislator's Resource Book [reports](#) that students in both CT and MA emerge from their high schools with stronger 8th grade skills, significantly reducing their need for basic skills and hastening the time frame for getting to college or workforce readiness. Their Rhode Island peers have far more catching up to do.

All states, including RI, MA and CT, use the same set of standardized tests, which are part of the National Reporting System of Adult Education (NRS).

See links below for further information about the K-12 experience of RI young adults in the Adult Education system:

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URL: <http://ridatahub.org/datastories/adult-education-and-ris-workforce/11/>

Characteristics

RI DataHUB

Standardized Test Scores

Data sources: National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, Legislator's Resource Books, 2012, 2013, 2014; Rhode Island Department of Education.

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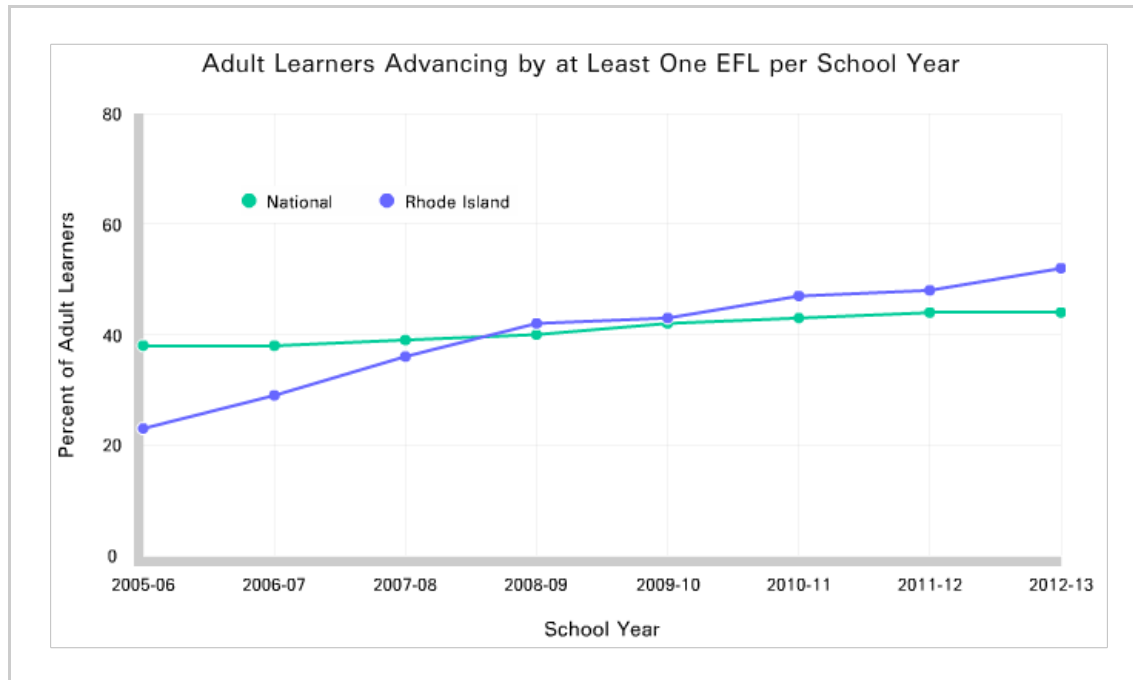
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RI's Adult Education system has improved performance on post-tests



As compared with the rest of the nation, RI's Adult Education programs have more than doubled the rate at which their learners have increased their EFLs, since 2005.

Adult Education programs measure performance by the percentage of students who improve by at least one EFL within a fiscal year. Using that measure over time, RI's Adult Education system demonstrates considerable effectiveness at increasing the skills of its learners.

More specifically, within three months of exiting the program during the 2012-13 year:

- of the 927 learners who originally enrolled to advance their GED preparation, 825 (89%) passed the GED itself;
- about a third who originally enrolled to become eligible for employment got jobs;
- and 29% ramping up their skills to enter higher education were admitted to higher education or training.

Remember that for many of these learners, achieving these goals can take years.

Data Source: US Dept. of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education, National Reporting

System: "Educational Gains and Attendance by Educational Functioning Level 2005-2013" ~ "Printed on 01/19/2015 at 07:58:55 PM | Related indicators for this page are available in the Appendix of this pdf." **RI DataHUB**

Follow-up Outcome Achievement: [Adult Education and RI's Workforce/12/](#)

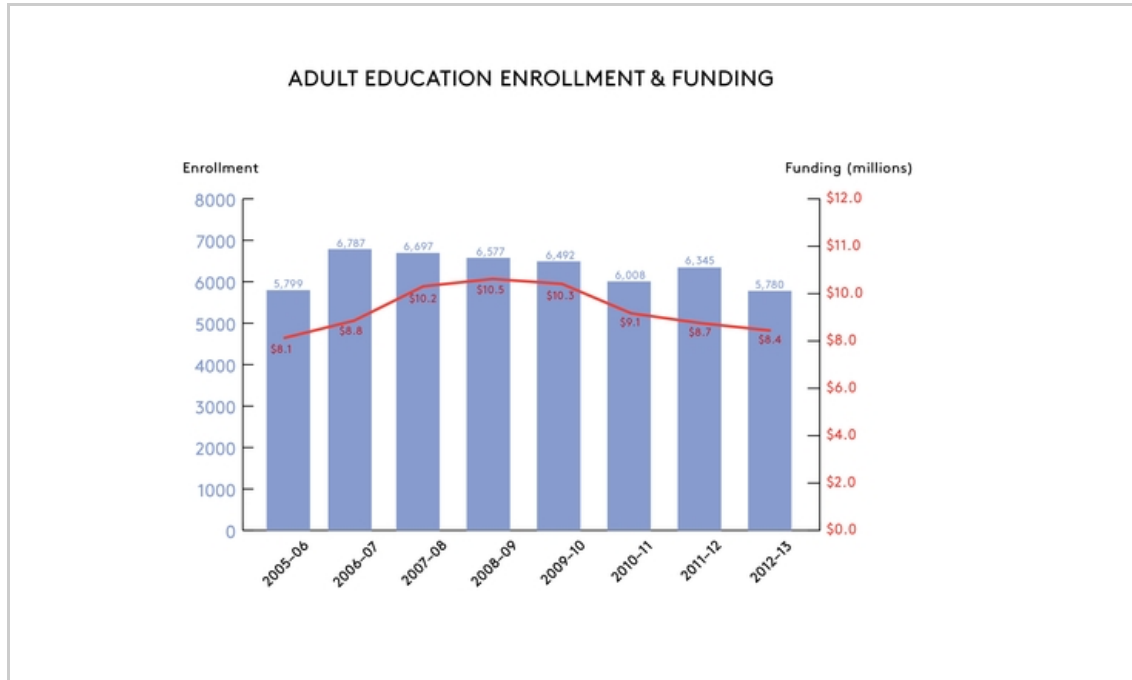
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Supporting Adult Education for a Stronger Economy



At an average cost of \$1,500 per learner per year, meeting the demands of the adults currently on the waiting lists would cost about 2 million dollars per year.

State funding reductions to RI's Adult Education system reduced by 1,000 the number of students served per year from its peak enrollment in fiscal year 2006-2007. As of the 2014 Legislative session, Adult Education has been cut an additional \$300,000. Furthermore, the 2014-15 budget includes no money to support a new mandate to waive fees associated with the GED test for individuals who prove financial hardship.

Over 1,300 adults are currently on waiting lists. Thousands more who lack high school diplomas could benefit from these programs.

Click anywhere on the chart to open a full-resolution version.

Data source (for funding figures): RI Department of Education, Office of Multiple Pathways.

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Take-aways and Recommendations:

- **Adult Education is measured and shows positive results. And it is a more cost-effective path to move to higher education than remedial/non-credit bearing courses at colleges.**
- **Even underfunded, RI's Adult Education system is functioning well and improving -- for the learners it's able to serve. But meeting demand is impossible without adequate funding.**
- **The "skills gap" in RI is real, but the gap primarily has to do with a lack of basic skills.**
- **Demand for Adult Basic Education would be lower if the state's K-12 public schools could ensure that many more of their students had strong foundational skills grades 1-8.**
- **The characteristics of the large cohort of young people in ABE require further study.**

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APPENDIX

Adult Education: Improving Rhode Island's Workforce

story link: <http://ridatahub.org/datastories/adult-education-and-ris-workforce>

Data Sources



Rhode Island Department of Education
<http://www.ride.ri.gov/>

Related Terms

INDICATORS

KEYWORDS

Education

Tags

Adult Education, Education Demographics, Education

Related Data Stories



[Educating for a Stronger Workforce](http://ridatahub.org/datastories/educating-for-a-stronger-workforce/1/)

<http://ridatahub.org/datastories/educating-for-a-stronger-workforce/1/>