

Council of the District of Columbia

Public Hearing of the Committee of the Whole on Adult Workforce Education

November 20, 2025, 2:00 p.m.

Room 412 (Track B) of the John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Testimony of:

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Thank you, Chairperson Mendelson and members of the Committee, for inviting me to share approaches to adult education and workforce development that may hold promise for the District. My name is Stephanie Cronen, and I am a managing researcher at the American Institutes for Research[®] (AIR). AIR is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that generates evidence and applies data-driven solutions to expand opportunities and improve lives for all.

I would like to describe what we know from research about supporting three specialized types of adult education and workforce programming relevant to the districts' priorities and reflect on promising areas for scaling up in the District. These include

- high school credential preparation,
- postsecondary education or training preparation and transition, and
- integrated education and training and similar types of accelerated career pathway approaches.

These types of programming can be used alone or in combination.

First, we know that an important access point in a career pathway is attainment of a high school credential and the foundational knowledge and skills it reflects. High school credential preparation programs help over 90,000 adults complete their secondary education each year,¹

¹ Based on data reported to the National Reporting System for Adult Education [NRS] for program year 2023-24; see NRS (2024a).

which in turn has been shown to offer learners a significant advantage in entering and persisting in postsecondary education and training (Heller & Slungaard Mumma, 2019; Martin & Broadus, 2013). For example, one study found that earning a GED in Massachusetts increases the likelihood that adult education participants enroll in college by 33 to 56 percentage points and increases persistence in college for four or more quarters by 25 to 34 percentage points (Heller & Slungaard Mumma, 2019).

Second, offering postsecondary preparation programming and transition support—usually in combination with academic or occupational instruction—has been associated with significant learner progress in multiple studies (Borradaile et al., 2021). For example, in a well-known study of La Guardia Community College’s GED Bridge to Health and Business program, adult learners were three times as likely to enroll in community college as the comparison group and were more likely to persist (Martin & Broadus, 2013). This program embedded college- and career-readiness skills in an occupationally focused GED program with career advising delivered in a college setting. Some postsecondary bridge programs also offer articulated credits at local colleges.²

Finally, integrated education and training and similar career pathway programs are promising approaches for helping adult learners obtain occupational skills and credentials (Gardiner & Juras, 2019; Cronen, Salinger, et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2018). These types of programs—which are a central focus of the District’s career pathways partnership guide (DC Workforce Investment Council [WIC] & DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education [OSSE], 2018)—engage learners by providing foundational skills education within an occupational context that is aligned with a learner’s career goals. They also include some kind of workforce preparation activity, such as internships or college- and career-readiness skill building, and typically provide career advising and other support services. Several large-scale studies of integrated education and training have found significant impacts on learners’ postsecondary and occupational credential attainment in high-demand industries, but employment and earnings impacts have been more mixed.

Reflecting on promising programs to expand in the District, nearly all Adult Charter Schools already offer programs for attaining a high school credential, and the median pass rate among those attempting a high school equivalency is typically over 70 percent in those schools (Coffin

² For example, see Gardiner & Juras, (2019).

& Rubin, 2023). This is a promising foundation to build on and scale up given the number of adults in the District who do not have a high school credential.

Most District providers are also offering postsecondary bridge or career pathways programming, including integrated education and training programs in fields such as healthcare, construction, and IT (DC WIC & DC OSSE, 2018). This is consistent with the high-demand industries identified in the District’s most recent Unified State Plan.³ Given the District’s overall skill gains and credential rate reported for the last program year, this is a promising area for strengthening and expansion.⁴ It should be noted, however, that these types of programs have been reported by local and state programs across the country to be challenging to implement given their complex curricula and partnership requirements (Cronen, Diffenderffer, & Medway, 2021). For this reason, scaling up may require additional support for programs and their partners.

To inform the District’s expansion efforts, data on local implementation and promising practices would also be useful to collect and explore, enabling decision makers to address skill gaps, enhance economic mobility, and support career advancement. Leveraging evidence-based insights ensures that resources are allocated effectively to strengthen the workforce and promote economic resilience.

³ Available at <https://dcworks.dc.gov/publication/dc-wioa-unified-state-plan>.

⁴ Based on data reported to the NRS for program year 2023–24; see NRS (2024b).



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