

# Frequently Asked Questions about Portland Adult Education

## What is Portland Adult Education?

Portland Adult Education provides classes to improve access to higher education, better jobs, and lifelong learning. Our program is divided into three different components: Academics, Job Skills, and Community Life. Classes are offered primarily in the West and Baxter Schools at convenient times from 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM. As a program of Portland Public Schools, we meet the high volume of demand and maximize use of public facilities by also holding classes in six other schools and five community buildings.

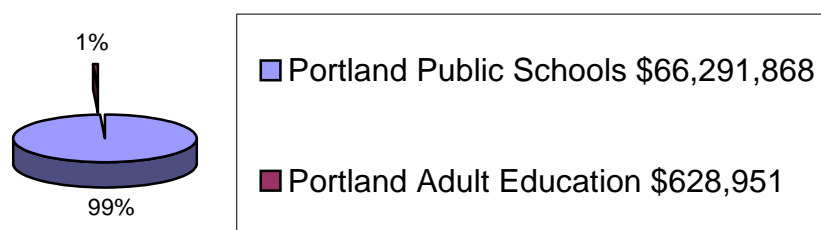
## Who are the students? Is adult education just for people who don't have a high school diploma?

Portland Adult Education is for any adult who needs essential skills or believes learning enriches life. More than 4,500 area adults attended classes during the 2007 school year. Our students come from all over Maine, the U.S., and the world (54 different nationalities represented last year), and range in age from 18 to 80+. While some students focus on completion of a high school diploma or GED, the majority of students take classes for basic literacy and numeracy, college preparation, job and retraining skills, new capacity development, and enrichment.

## How is PAE funded?

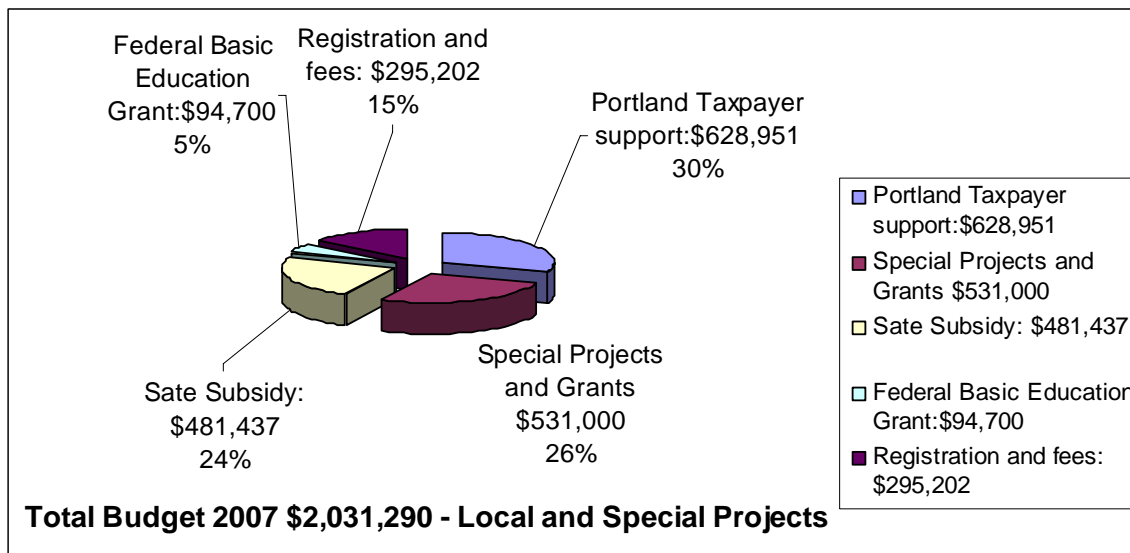
Portland taxpayers contribute to supporting Portland Adult Education, but PAE derives funding from a variety of sources. The program costs taxpayers less than one percent of the total Public School budget.

### Taxpayer Support



In addition to Portland tax revenues, funding sources vary among Adult Education's three different components. Whenever possible, students themselves support these classes by paying registration fees.

- In **Community Life** the registration fees cover the costs of instructors, materials, coordination, and marketing. The surplus is applied to the operational costs of the Job Skills and Academic programs.
- **Job Skills** registrations support part of the coordination and instructional costs. State subsidies and Portland Public Schools fund the remainder of the costs.
- Federal grants, the State of Maine, and Portland Public Schools contribute equally to make **Academic** registration fees low or free to students because these courses provide English literacy for refugees and high school courses for adults without secondary level credentials.



PAE has leveraged its diverse array of programming to win additional learning grants. These grant-funded projects total more than \$430,000, sustain themselves, and build the capacity of our community members and businesses. Examples of these grants and contracts include the following:

- Street Academy for 200 young adults who are homeless
- Citizenship preparation classes for 100 immigrants
- Basic literacy classes for 50 public housing residents
- Family literacy for 15 most-in-need families
- English literacy for 80 associates at Barber Foods
- Welding training for Cianbro
- Basic conversation skills for job-seeking immigrants receiving public assistance
- Job-seeking skills for mothers supported by TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).

### **Do Portland taxpayers pay for non-residents to take classes?**

Portland taxpayers contribute roughly one third of the total costs for Portland Adult Education. That contribution of \$628,951 (.94%) to Portland Public School's budget

actually brings in \$1.29 million in additional state and federal revenues. In addition, by charging non-residents higher fees to take courses, we ensure that Portland taxpayers do not hold disproportionate responsibility for the regional opportunity we provide. Only 35% of the registrations are from non-Portland students, and these students make classes large enough to be productive and use resources efficiently.

### **Why offer vocational classes when residents can go to other training programs?**

We design our Job Skills classes to teach entry-level proficiencies needed by hundreds of adult residents who wish to enter the workforce, transition away from public assistance, or upgrade to a different job. Affordable alternatives at this level of instruction do not exist because these courses fall below the community college level. In our Office Skills, Certified Nursing Assistant, and Web Design certificate programs, we emphasize fields which represent growing sectors of the economy.

### **Do you really offer basket-weaving classes?**

Not currently, but we do offer Spanish, Self-Defense, American Sign Language, and Financial Aid Boot Camp classes. Our access to talented local instructors gives us flexibility to adapt to current interests in our Community Life program. These classes support themselves, bring adults into the buildings supported by their taxes, provide personal enrichment, and engage citizens in their community. Since 80% of Portland taxpayers do not have children in public schools, we are proud to offer a wide variety of inexpensive and appealing options to the lifelong learners in the city.

### **How does PAE decide which classes to offer?**

We respond to needs and interests expressed by businesses, groups, and individuals in choosing courses. In the Community Life program, PAE offers classes which will expand learning AND create enough revenue to cover costs. In the Academic program we select courses that enable students to fulfill their goals to acquire high school credentials, prepare for college, or enhance literacy skills for better employment opportunities. We meet with business partners to determine their current and anticipated employment needs so that we can identify appropriate courses for our Job Skills program. Federal guidelines about proper use of public facilities also influence course selection.

### **Why not hold classes only at night when kids are not in school?**

Not all jobs run from 9 AM to 5 PM. In 2007 more adults took classes during the day than the evening. We hold classes in the morning, afternoon, and evening to guarantee that working adults—no matter what shift they work—can take classes. We are also concerned about serving unemployed adults and parents with children in schools. All of these adults need to improve their skills to find better jobs, prepare for higher education, and model learning to their children.

### **Why do English language learners have to wait to get into classes?**

Since 2006 PAE has acknowledged that we do not have the financial resources, teachers, or space to offer a sufficient number of English classes to meet the demand. Instead, we have instituted an intake and waiting list process that ensures a shorter wait than students might find in other states. Our English classes tend to be very large, so we support teachers and students by providing 50 volunteer classroom aides. Literacy Volunteers of Portland also partners with us to find volunteer tutors for English language learners.

### **Does PAE give courses away?**

Federal and state funding enables us to provide English language instruction and required academic courses for adults seeking high school credentials. In the lower skill levels, we do not charge fees for these classes, but ask students to pay for books. When students demonstrate extreme financial need, they may also be eligible for fee waivers for books and courses, but only if they are Portland residents.

### **What about the bottom line? Why should adult education be funded by the K-12 school department?**

All over Maine adult education programs share facilities with public schools and rely upon financial support from the towns and cities they serve. Portland Adult Education is an inexpensive asset in our city. We educate adults at only 20% of the national average cost and represent less than 1% of Portland Public Schools' expenditures. PAE has the second lowest per person cost among adult education programs in the state of Maine, while having one of its most comprehensive programs.

### **Why is adult education an essential service?**

Every recent economic report suggests that Maine needs a more educated workforce, and providing that education is our mission. Typically, more than 4,500 adults attend classes each year. As Portland Public Schools' mission directs, these adults are "learning for their future". The registrations are equally divided among the Community Life, Academic, and Job Skills programs.

- Students in the **Community Life** classes are energetic members of our city who contribute to its economic and intellectual dynamism. Many are residents who do not have children in schools but wish to be lifelong learners and benefit from the public school system.
- The **Academic** program gives students the chance to become better workers, citizens, and family members. Last year 1,104 of the academic learners were refugees and immigrants developing their English and academic skills to improve their economic and social status. Another 450 learners are gaining the skills to earn their high school credential and/or prepare for college.
- Approximately 1,500 students are registered in our **Job Skills** courses and focus specifically on enhancing their employability. Some of these learners have never

been in the work force before; others are learning new skills to better position themselves in the ever-changing workplace.

The economic advantages of higher levels of education are more significant than ever. Studies estimate that a dropout will earn \$300,000 less than a high school graduate over a lifetime of full-time employment, while college graduates will earn \$1 million more than students without high school credentials. The city benefits when adult students move toward economic self-sufficiency and become taxpayers who share in supporting infrastructure and services in Portland. Learning is essential—and economical.