

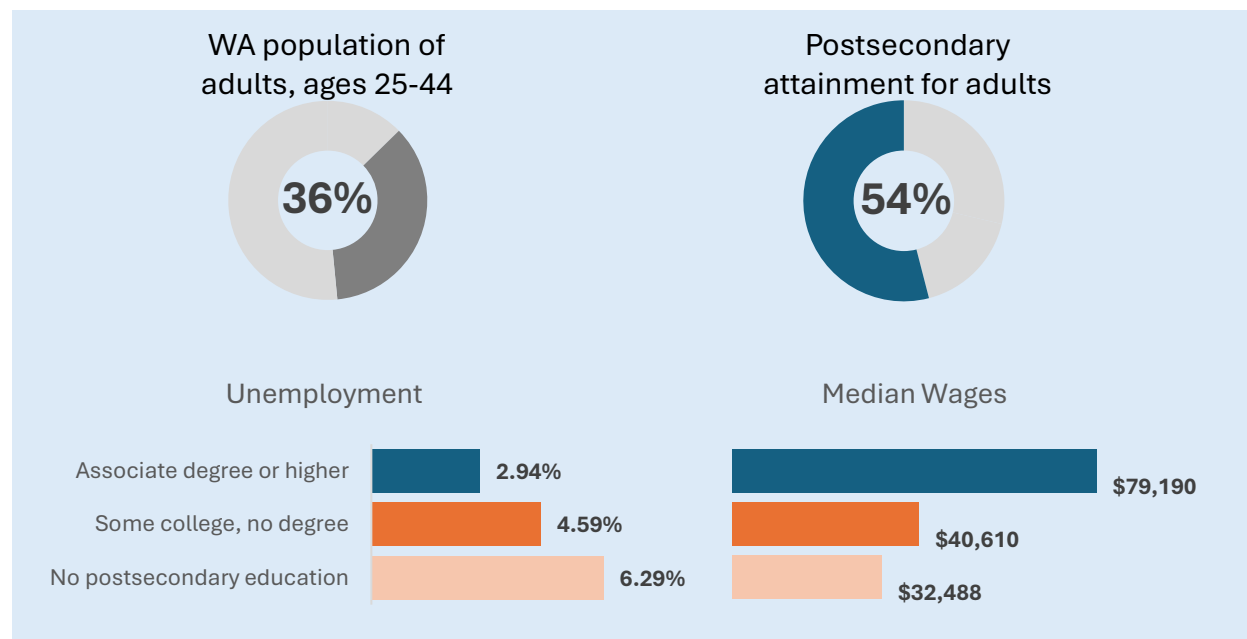
Who Are Washington's Adult Learners?

Report Snapshot



By Rebecca Byrne
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Washington is working to reach its postsecondary attainment goal, but many adults ages 25 to 44 are still not connected to education or training programs. These adults make up the majority of the state's workforce. The state's economy and workforce depend on more working-age adults earning education after high school. But adults' lives are complex. Many are balancing jobs, family responsibilities, and money challenges. This can make it difficult to find the right education programs and support services. Today, education after high school is often needed to get a job that pays a living wage. Employers also say they do not have enough skilled workers to meet their needs. Having more working-age adults with education or training after high school means a stronger and more resilient workforce. A more in-depth look at the state's adult learners can be found in the full report: [Who Are Washington's Adult Learners? \(2026\)](#).



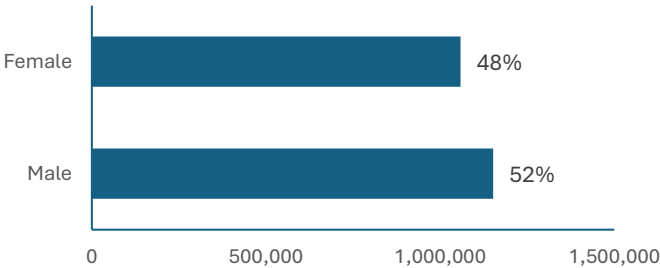
This snapshot shows the gender, race/ethnicity, family, occupational, and regions of Washington adults ages 25 to 44 who are not enrolled in postsecondary education. These adults are part of the working-age population but are not taking part in education after high school. It is important to understand who they are, the biggest barriers they face, and which groups are most likely to return to school. This information can help Washington reach its goal of having 70% of adults earn a postsecondary credential so more people have a path to improve their economic opportunities.

Differences in postsecondary attainment by demographic groups

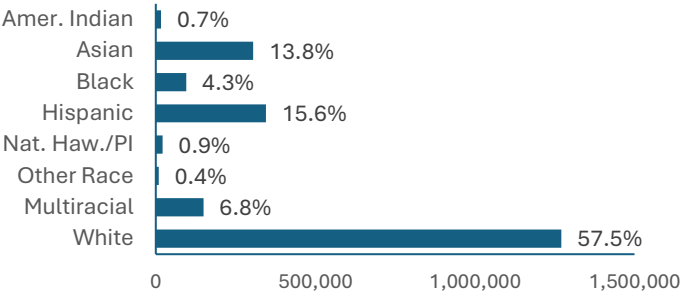
Gender and race/ethnicity help show how educational attainment differs across the adult population. They also show where people still do not have the same opportunities. When some people face more hurdles to completing credentials, it affects more than their own economic opportunities. It also affects the state's workforce. Closing the gaps strengthens families, communities, and the state economy.



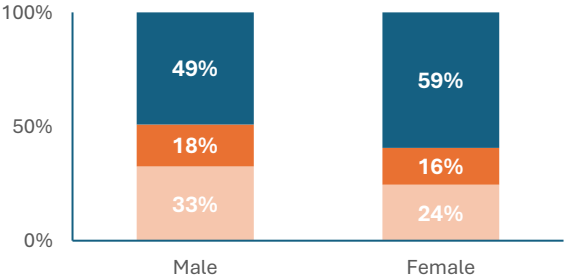
Men make up a larger share of adults ages 25 to 44 who are not enrolled.



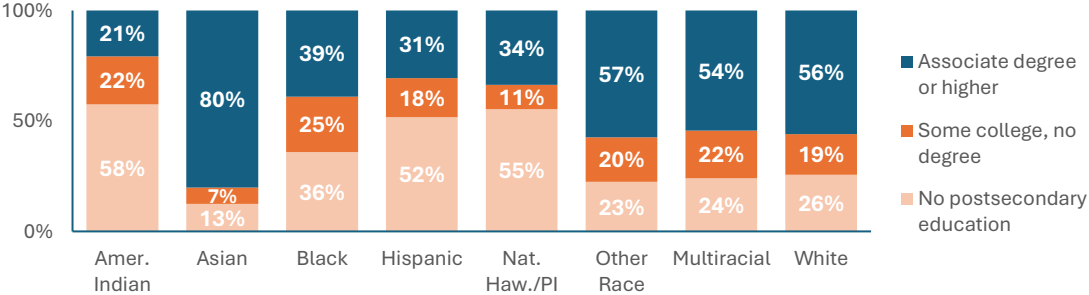
White, Hispanic, and Asian adults make up the largest shares of Washington's working-age population.



Women are more likely to have an associate degree or higher.



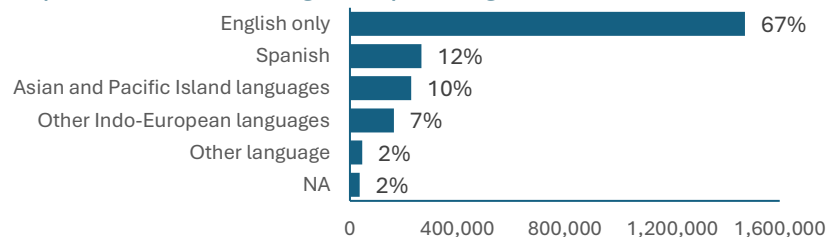
Underrepresented minority groups have lower shares of postsecondary attainment compared to Asian or White adults.



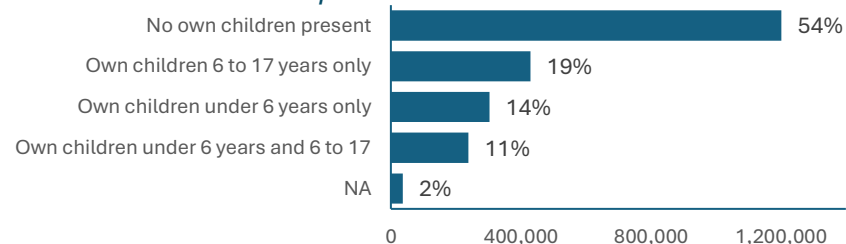
Differences in postsecondary attainment by household characteristics

Household patterns can help show which adults face more barriers to postsecondary attainment. The language people speak at home, and family responsibilities affect their ability to start or finish education after high school. Looking at education levels for adults with and without children can show which groups can see more success with added support. Looking at household language can also show how access to information and services affects education and job opportunities. Understanding these barriers can help the state plan outreach and support services that meet the needs of different cultures and languages backgrounds.

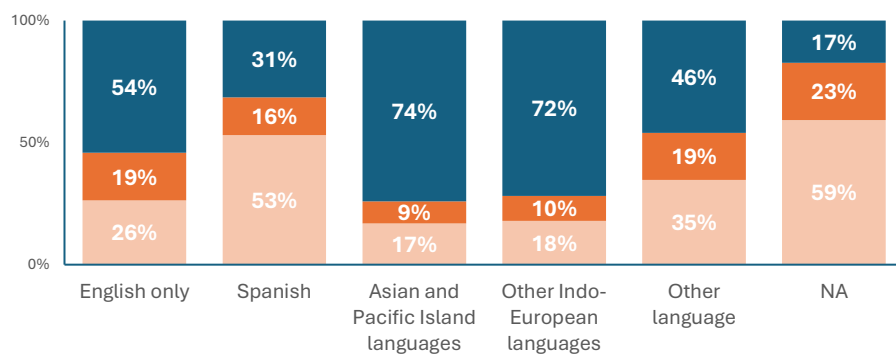
Spanish-speaking households represent the second largest group of adults after English-speaking households.



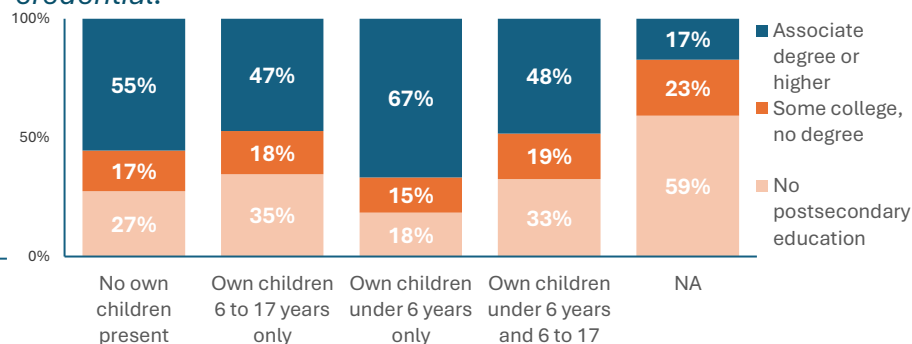
44% of adults ages 25 to 44 who are not enrolled have their own children present in the household.



Adults in Spanish-speaking households are less likely to have an associate degree or higher.



In general, adults with children present in the household are less likely to have a postsecondary credential.

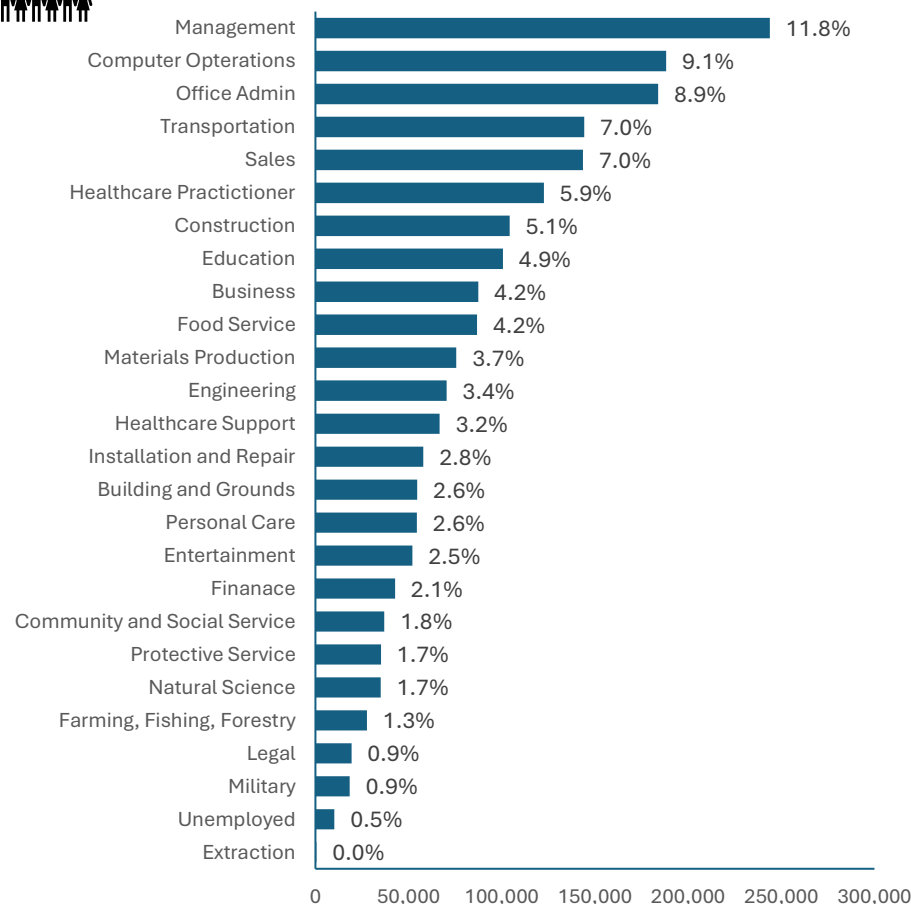


Differences in postsecondary attainment by occupation

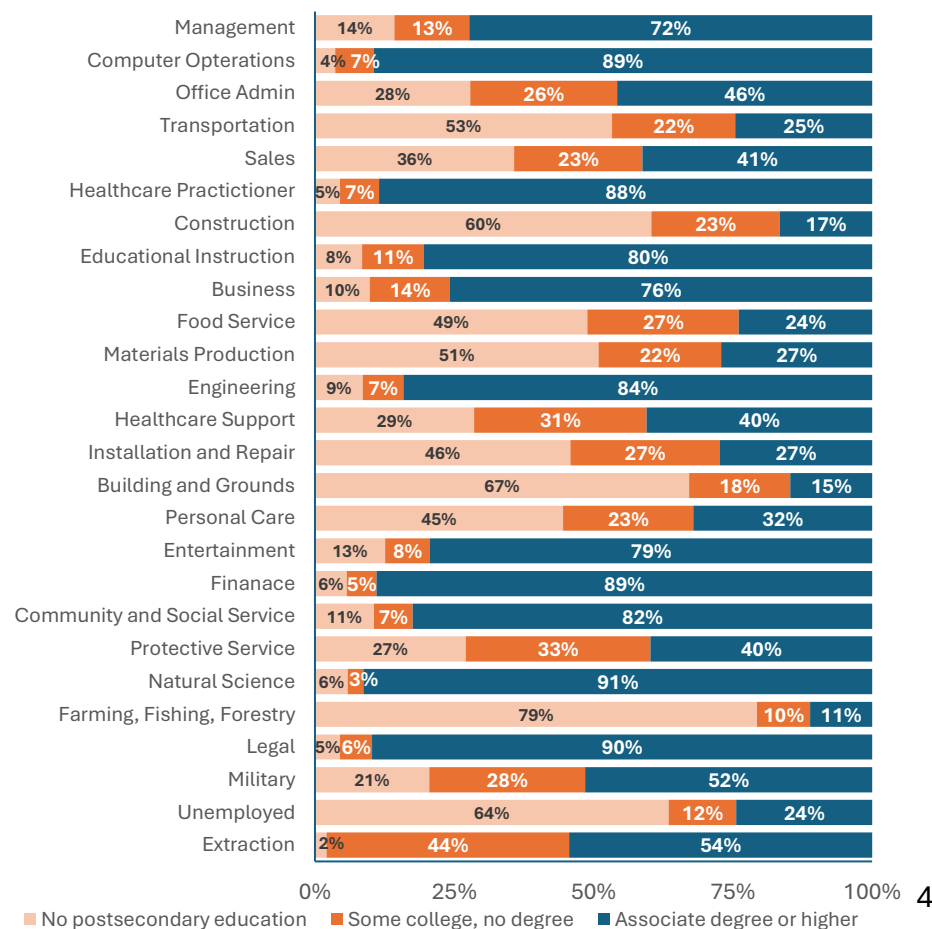
Many of the fastest-growing jobs require higher levels of postsecondary attainment. People with more education or training after high school are more likely to qualify for these jobs. These jobs often pay more and offer better opportunities for growth. Adults with a credential are more likely to work in fast-growing fields. Adults without a credential are more likely to work in jobs that are growing more slowly. Increasing postsecondary attainment can help more Washingtonians prepare for jobs that are in demand. It can also support a stronger and more inclusive workforce.



The top occupation categories by share of occupation include management, computer operations, office administration, transportation, and sales.



Adults working in management and computer operations are more likely than others to have an associate degree or higher.

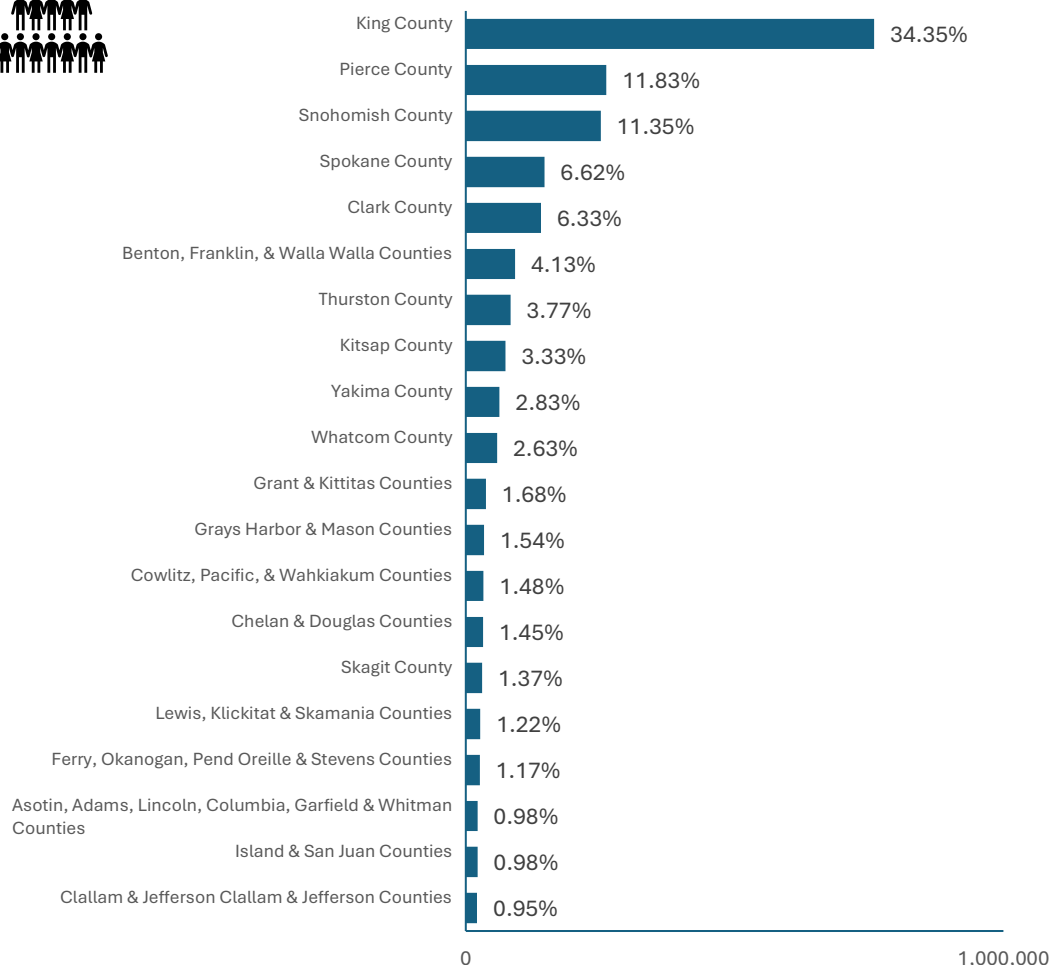


Differences in postsecondary attainment by region

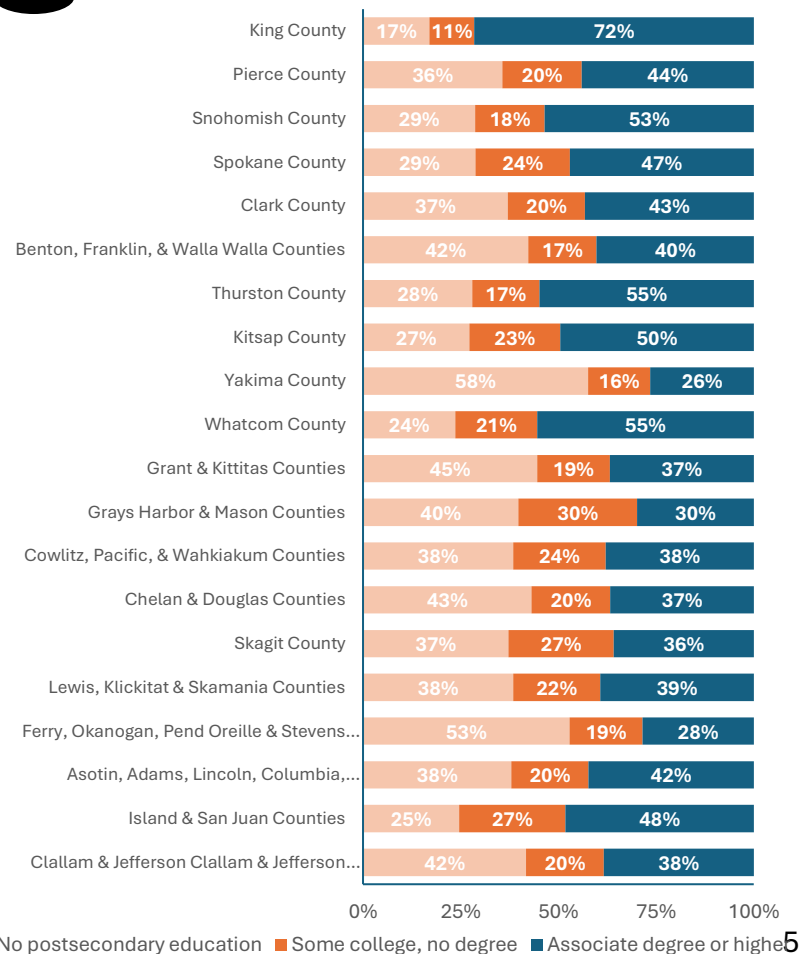
Looking at postsecondary attainment by region shows how education and workforce readiness vary across the state. Urban regions have more adults with postsecondary attainment. Rural regions often have lower attainment levels. People in rural areas may have fewer colleges or training programs nearby. They may also have to travel farther to attend school or training. Regions with lower attainment may have fewer skilled workers. This can make it harder for businesses to grow and can affect the local economy. Differences in postsecondary attainment can also affect income, employment, and the need for public benefits across the state.



King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties have the largest populations of adults without current enrollment.



Rural regions show lower shares of adults with postsecondary credentials than urban areas.



Closing postsecondary attainment gaps in Washington

National and state research shows that some adults are more likely to return to postsecondary education when they get the right support. This is especially true for adults who completed some college but did not earn a degree. But timing matters. Recent stop-outs, those who left an education program without a degree in the last year, are more likely to return with targeted outreach. Simple reenrollment steps and lower fees can help more adults enroll again and earn credentials. Research like this, along with the profiles in this snapshot, can help identify where adult learners need the most support. Using this information can help improve access to opportunities for people across communities, households, and regions.

Evidence from Research to Help Address Gaps in Postsecondary Attainment

- ❖ **Recent stop-outs** (those who last enrolled four to five academic terms prior to the start of an academic year) have higher reenrollment and completion rates than adults who have been out of postsecondary education longer.
- ❖ **Reduce administrative and financial barriers to re-enrollment.** Simple reenrollment processes and reduced fees can help more students come back and complete credentials.
- ❖ **Award credentials based on completed credits, even without reenrollment.** Policies that recognize previously earned credits can increase credential completion among stopped-out students. About one in four SCNC credential earners completed a credential without reenrolling, suggesting the impact of policies that reduce administrative barriers and award credentials retroactively.
- ❖ **Targeted, and personalized outreach and dedicated coaching** can further boost reenrollment and completion rates.

The full report [Who Are Washington's Adult Learners?](#) with sources is available on Washington Student Achievement Council's website.