

# GED Programs: Separate and Unequal

## If You Do the Math, Adult Education Pays Off

*Silja Kallenbach*

Jared, Kenneth, Jessica, and Isamar are students at the GED Plus program in Boston. Each of them chose to leave the public high school they attended. As their comments indicate, they are “satisfied customers” of adult education.

Even though GED programs and high schools have the same goal of preparing students to receive their high school credential, GED programs receive a lot less money to do that. The average cost per student per year at a Boston public high school is \$13,838. Compare that to \$1,700 per student per year that GED programs in Massachusetts get on the average. Even adjusting for fewer hours of instruction in GED programs as compared to high school, Massachusetts invests over three times more on secondary education for in-school youth than on out-of-school youth and adults. Yet, they graduate students that public schools were not able to graduate.

Because GED programs get a lot less funding, most GED teachers are part-time and receive

much lower salaries than high school teachers, and limited or no benefits. Most GED programs cannot afford to offer, for example, science classes, college preparation, or much educational or career counseling. Of course, there are no physical education or arts classes,

or extracurricular activities. GED programs, like the students they work with, are used to stretching their limited funds. Although GED programs



*GED Plus students: Jared, Kenneth, Jessica, and Isamar. Photos by Silja Kallenbach.*

accomplish a lot with the money they receive, their students deserve better.

Adult students and our communities would benefit if adult education was the best it can be. On the average, a high school graduate (with no college) pays over \$4,000 in taxes whereas a high school drop-out uses over \$2,200 in public assistance annually. If adult education funding was increased to even just \$4,000 per student, the taxes paid by each GED graduate would cover the funding for each student in a year. After that, it's a net gain for the state, city or town, and the federal government. Perhaps we should go and teach math to legislators so they get it.

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*Silja Kallenbach is the director of the New England Literacy Resource Center.*

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In high school, it's a fashion show. All the kids talk about you and what you wear. Here at the GED program it's different, we can be ourselves. High schools and GED programs have the same goals, but here they help you get a job, find housing. Here they are more understanding of your life situation.

– Isamar



It's our choice to come here. Here they treat us way different than in high school; they treat us like adults.

– Jared



In high school, the classes were too big, 30 kids. It was too many people for me. I even stopped going to lunch. I could never concentrate on studying because there was so much going on.

– Jessica



Here the teachers sit with you one on one. If they see you're frustrated they come to help you. In high school, they just give you tests and they put more pressure on you. Some teachers didn't care. They did just what they were paid to do, no extra help. Some did care.

– Kenneth

### For Discussion

**How much less funding** do GED programs receive per student than high schools in Boston? What is it as a percentage?

**What do you think** about the difference in the level of funding that GED programs and high schools receive?

**How does your experience** in high school or middle school compare to your experience in adult education?

**What points can you make** to your Representative and Senator about the need for more funding for adult education?

**Look at the chart on page 45.** How does funding for education benefit the economy as compared to funding for the military?