

# If You do the Math, Adult Education Pays Off

*Silja Kallenbach*

Jared, Jessica, Kenneth, 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 in 2011 was \$14,524. Compare that to \$1,556 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 traditional secondary education than on Adult Basic Education (ABE). Yet, GED and alternative diploma programs 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

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much lower salaries than high school teachers, and limited or no benefits. Most GED programs cannot afford to offer, for example, science labs, 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 ac-



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

complish 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 GED graduates 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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