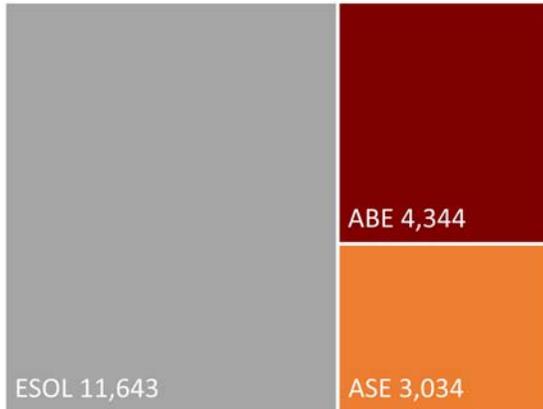


# COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT ADULT BASIC EDUCATION IN MASSACHUSETTS

## What is adult basic education (ABE)?

Massachusetts' adult basic education (ABE) system is a critical element of the Commonwealth's efforts to ensure that every resident has the education he or she needs to realize his or her full potential and to develop the type of workforce essential to a flourishing, innovative, and more equitable economy. Massachusetts' ABE system also contributes toward the achievement of a range of other public priorities, whether improved health outcomes, lower incarceration rates, or deeper civic engagement.



**Composition of enrollment in state-funded ABE programs in Massachusetts, FY 2016**

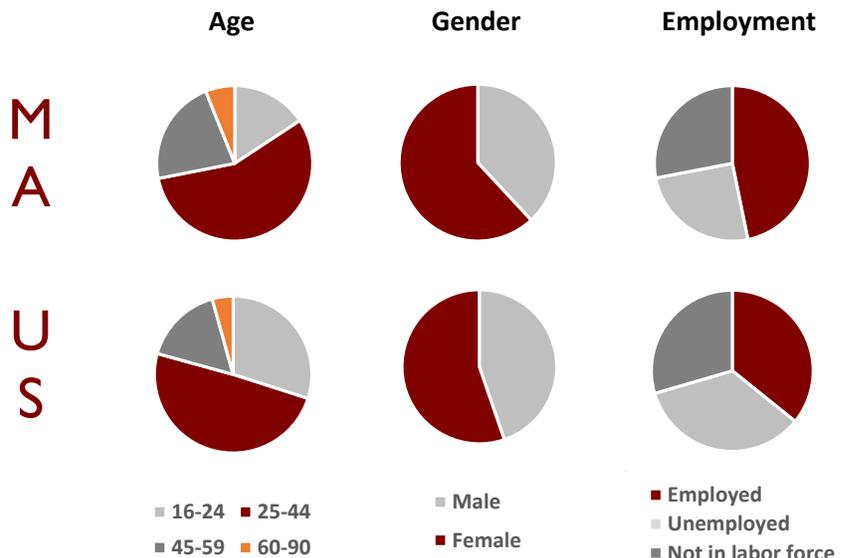
Source: US Department of Education, OCTAE

year 2016, 19,021 adult students were enrolled in state-funded adult basic education programs in Massachusetts, with just over 22 percent participating in adult basic education, 16 percent engaged in adult secondary education, and about 61 percent involved in ESOL.

More generally, adult basic education is an umbrella term that includes instructional services for adults over the age of 16 in one of three areas: **adult basic education**, that is, reading, writing, and math below the high school level; **adult secondary education**, leading to a high school equivalency credential, and; **English for Speakers of Other Languages** or ESOL. In addition to these core educational offerings, adult basic education programs provide a variety of related services, such as citizenship classes, employment and career readiness training, transitions to college, and family, financial, and health literacy assistance. In fiscal

## Who enrolls in ABE programs in Massachusetts?

The adults currently enrolled in state-funded ABE programs come from communities across the Commonwealth, determined to acquire the skills and the knowledge they need to build a better life for themselves and their families. The majority (56 percent) are between the ages of 25 and 44, though a significant fraction (22 percent) are somewhat older – between the ages of 45 and 59. Most adult students (62 percent) are women and a sizable share (18 percent) are single parents.



**Demographic composition of ABE students in Massachusetts and the United States as a whole, FY 2016**

Source: US Department of Education, OCTAE



**MCAE: The Voice of Adult Education in Massachusetts**

For more on adult education in Massachusetts, including a list of sources for this fact sheet, please visit [www.mcae.net](http://www.mcae.net). 617.482.6223 • [info@mcae.net](mailto:info@mcae.net)

Importantly, almost half (46 percent) of all adult students in Massachusetts are currently employed, while another quarter are actively looking for work. As the figures above attest, compared to their counterparts across the United States, adult students in Massachusetts are generally older, are more likely to be female, and are more likely to hold a job.

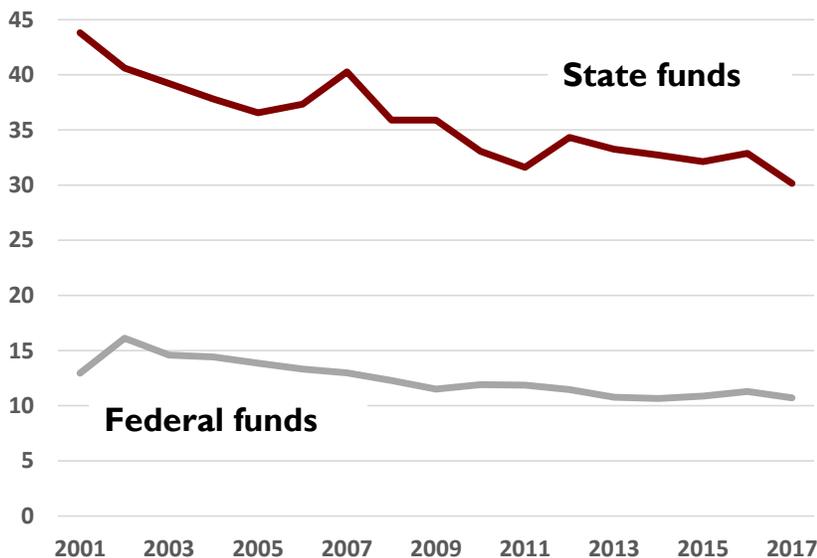
## How is ABE delivered in Massachusetts?

One of the great strengths of Massachusetts' ABE system is its diversity, as a wide array of entities are responsible for delivering such services. For instance, community-based organizations, local educational agencies, two- and four-year colleges, state and county correctional facilities, businesses, and labor unions all play a role in adult instruction in Massachusetts.

All told, state-funded adult education programs employ roughly 500 full-time administrators, counselors, paraprofessionals, and teachers across the Commonwealth and employ almost 1,040 personnel part-time. They also attract over 1,500 volunteers each year. Of the more than 300 full-time teachers in the adult education workforce, close to two-thirds are K-12, ABE, TESOL, or special education certified and nearly 80 percent have been in the field at least three years.

## How is ABE financed in Massachusetts?

Adult basic education in Massachusetts is financed through a combination of federal and state funds, though the latter comprises the vast majority of such resources. For instance, according to the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, for the 2014-2015 period, federal funds comprised roughly 25 percent of the



resources available for adult education in Massachusetts, while state funds constituted the remaining 75 percent. Federal funds are authorized under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, one element of the broader Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, but still must be appropriated by federal budget writers each year. Likewise, state funds are allocated via line item 7035-0002 as part of each year's general appropriations act (or GAA).

Importantly, both sources of funds have declined considerably in real terms since the early 2000s. As the graphic at left suggests, after adjusting for inflation, federal grants to Massachusetts for adult education purposes dropped more than 17 percent between 2001 and

### Federal and state adult basic education funding in Massachusetts, 2001 - 2017

All figures are in millions of constant 2019 dollars; years are federal fiscal years for federal funds and state fiscal years for state funds.

Source: MCAE calculations based on data from US Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Education, and Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center

2017, mirroring the overall decline in federal support for adult education during that time frame. Over the same span, state support for ABE fell 30 percent – from \$43.8 million in FY 2001 to \$30.3 million in FY 2017 (expressed in constant 2019 dollars).