Background

This NRS Fast Facts presents the national picture and state highlights of participation rates by age in federally-funded adult education. The age groups as defined in the National Reporting System (NRS) are 16-18, 19-24, 25-44, 45-59, and 60 and older.

National Data

Most adult education participants are young. The vast majority (83 percent) of students in federally-funded adult education classes are below the age of 45 (see pie chart). Only 17 percent are over the age of 45, and about one-fourth of those individuals (4 percent of the total) are over the age of 60.

Ages of Adult Education Participants

Among the three adult education program areas, Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English Literacy (EL), the youngest participants are found in the ASE classes (see bar chart). About two-thirds (67 percent) of ASE participants are younger than 25 (see bar chart), with very few students (about 1 percent) aged 60 or older. Adult Basic Education (ABE) shows a similar pattern, with slightly more students falling into the 25-44 and older age groups.

English Literacy (EL), on the other hand, serves mostly middle-aged groups. EL had significantly fewer of the youngest students than the other two areas. Only 3 percent of EL student are 16-18 years old. A majority (57 percent) of EL students are in the middle age group (24-44 years old), which is a much greater percentage than for ABE or ASE.

When the age groups are broken out by race/ethnicity and gender (see line graph), the greatest subgroup served is the Hispanic or Latino, female, 25 to 44 year old group. Although these data are for PY 2004-05, the patterns have remained consistent over the past five years. Across most age groups, male and female, the greatest numbers of participants are Hispanic or Latino. In the 16-18 age group, however, there are more White participants, male and female, than any other race/ethnicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>16-18</th>
<th>19-24</th>
<th>25-44</th>
<th>45-59</th>
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<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>
Females and males show broad similar patterns of involvement except that there are more males in the two younger age groups and more females in the older age groups, particularly in the 25-44 year old range.

### State Highlights

About one quarter of states have adult education programs that consist of a majority of individuals under the age of 25. In PY 2004-05, thirteen states plus Puerto Rico reported that over 50 percent of their participants were below the age of 25. For example, 71 percent of Puerto Rico’s, 59 percent of Louisiana’s and Wyoming’s, and 56 percent of Vermont’s students were under 25 years old. All thirteen states are presented below with their percentage of students under 25 years old.

#### States with More Than 50% of Participants Aged 24 or Younger

- Puerto Rico: 71%
- Louisiana: 59%
- Wyoming: 59%
- Vermont: 56%
- Alabama: 54%
- Indiana: 53%

#### States with More Than 50% of Participants Aged 25-45

- Nevada: 57%
- Colorado: 53%
- Massachusetts: 53%
- Arizona: 53%  
- Washington: 53%
- Minnesota: 53%
- New Jersey: 52%
- Texas: 52%
- New York: 51%

Nine states, or about one-fifth of states, have programs that consist of a majority of students aged 25-44. Fifty-seven percent of student in Nevada, for example, are between the ages of 25 and 44.

No state had a majority of students in the 45 and older group. States with the highest percentages in this age group were South Carolina (27%) and Hawaii (25%).

### States with the Greatest Changes in Age Demographics

Some states saw significant changes in the ages of their student populations from PY 2000-01 through 2004-05. For example, Vermont, West Virginia, and Hawaii saw increases of 24, 12 and 11 percentage points, respectively, in the proportion of younger students (under age 25) over the three years. While other states, such as Colorado, Arizona, and Utah, saw declines in the proportion of these students by 25, 19, and 17 percentage points, respectively.

Not surprisingly, those states that showed the largest proportional gains in younger (under age 25) students, also showed some of the greatest declines in the proportion of older (over age 44) students. For example, Vermont and West Virginia showed reductions of 24 and 12 percentage points, respectively.

### Data Limitations

The 2000-01 data reflect the first year of NRS data collection. Improvements to the data collection process alone may account for increases or decreases in the data. For example, reducing duplicate counts may lower the reported number of participants, when in fact the actual number of participants did not change.

### Resources

- To learn more about the adult education and literacy programs of the USED, go to the Department’s Division of Adult Education and Literacy at: [http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultE d/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/index.html)
- To learn more about the National Reporting System, see the Web site at: [www.nrsweb.org](http://www.nrsweb.org).

### Contact Us

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