

Nevada Adult Education: Participants' Wage and Education Trends



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Introduction

Nevada’s Adult Education (AE) system offers courses to help individuals pass high school equivalency exams, gain basic skills in reading, writing, math, and English literacy, and participate in occupational training (Nevada Department of Education [NDE], 2023). In this brief, we describe AE participants’ demographic characteristics, education attainment, and wage outcomes based on available data in the Nevada P–20 to Workforce Research Data System (NPWR).

Nevada has seven AE providers, including community colleges and other organizations (Nevada Student Portal, 2025). Exhibit 1 shows the distribution of students across these programs.

Exhibit 1. Percentage of the Population Served by Nevada Adult Education Providers

Characteristics	% Population Served
Las Vegas-Clark County Library District Adult Learning Program	25.5%
College of Southern Nevada	23.6%
Truckee Meadows Community College	17.7%
Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada	14.7%
Northern Nevada Literacy Council	8.6%
College and Career Readiness Program, Western Nevada College	5.7%
Great Basin College	4.4%

Note. Data are from the Nevada AE system. Percentages are rounded to 1 decimal point. For more information on each program, go to <https://studentportal.literacypro.com/nv/provider>.

Based on the subset of AE participants ($n = 2,316$) with complete AE and wage data, student outcomes appear promising. We describe these findings in more detail in the following section. However, several factors limit our ability to draw conclusions from these findings. The trends we describe may generalize only to a small group of participants due to several missing elements—data, variables, and a comparison group—in the NPWR. We believe there is tremendous potential to address these limitations and gain even deeper insights regarding the Nevada AE system. To support system improvements, we describe our experience using the data set in the appendix.

Nevada Adult Education Participants

In this section, we describe the population of AE participants in Nevada from the start of fiscal year (FY) 2018 through the third quarter of FY 2024.¹

KEY FINDINGS

- Nevada’s AE system served 24,786 individuals from 2017 Q3 to 2024 Q1. Most participants were Hispanic, and more than half were women.
- Almost half of the participants (47%) with records of attending K–12 education in Nevada were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.
- The percentage of participants who earned at least one educational functioning level (EFL) gain increased from 31.7% to 52.4% over time (2018–2024).

Participants’ Backgrounds

The Nevada AE system has the potential to serve many more Nevada residents. From the third quarter of 2017 through the first quarter of 2024, 24,786 individuals started an AE course in Nevada and most participants (88%) had exited.² More than half of the participants were women (61%) and a majority (68%) identified as Hispanic. See Exhibit 2 for more details on participants’ demographic characteristics.

Exhibit 2. Characteristics of Nevada Adult Education Participants, 2017 Q3–2024 Q1

Characteristics	% of Total Population
Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic, Any Race	68.3%
White, non-Hispanic	14.1%
Black, non-Hispanic	6.9%
Asian, non-Hispanic	8.8%
American Indian, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	1.0%
Mixed Race	1.0%
Women	61%

¹ These findings are based on data from the Nevada AE system.

² Some participants had more than one observation in the data set, and thus, more than one start or exit date. For the current analyses, we define the start date as the earliest start date and the exit date as the latest exit date available in the data.

Characteristics	% of Total Population
Age	
Median Age in Years	38.0 (range: 16–94)
16–24 Years Old	14.0%
25–44 Years Old	53.4%
45–64 Years Old	28.6%
65 Years or Older	4.0%
Median Days in Program From First Start Date to Last Exit Date	86 days
Earned at Least One EFL Gain	46.5%

Note. $N = 24,786$. Data are from the Nevada AE system. Percentages are rounded to 1 decimal point. Hispanic participants include all participants who identified as Hispanic, regardless of their other racial categories. Participants in the other racial group categories did not identify as Hispanic. Median days in the program are calculated only for those with exit dates. Some participants may have been exited automatically due to dropping out, so the median days may not represent the typical participant who completed their coursework.

Most AE participants did not have records of attending K–12 public schools in Nevada from 2009 to 2024. To better understand the background of AE participants in Nevada, we linked participants’ adult education data with NDE records from 2009 to 2024. Only 9.3% of participants had at least 1 year of records from primary or secondary education in Nevada (2,302 participants).³ Many participant records may be missing because they left school prior to 2009. The median age of participants with missing K–12 data is 39 years (versus 23 years for those with K–12 data records), so they would have attended secondary education before 2009, which is the first year observed in the K–12 data.

Of participants, 8.6% had K–12 records from Grade 9 or higher. Of these, 47% were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 16% had limited English proficiency, and 13% had an individualized education plan.⁴ Because fewer than one tenth of the adult education population had secondary education data available, these statistics may not generalize to the entire adult education population. However, they do help provide some important context for this population. Additionally, it is surprising that very few Nevada students showed up in the AE system, because many do not graduate high school in the state ([more than 15,000 Nevada students did not graduate in 2022](#)) (NDE, n.d.b.). Although the Nevada Adult High School Diploma program served some state residents during this time (NDE, n.d.a.), the results suggest the AE system has the potential to serve many more Nevada residents.

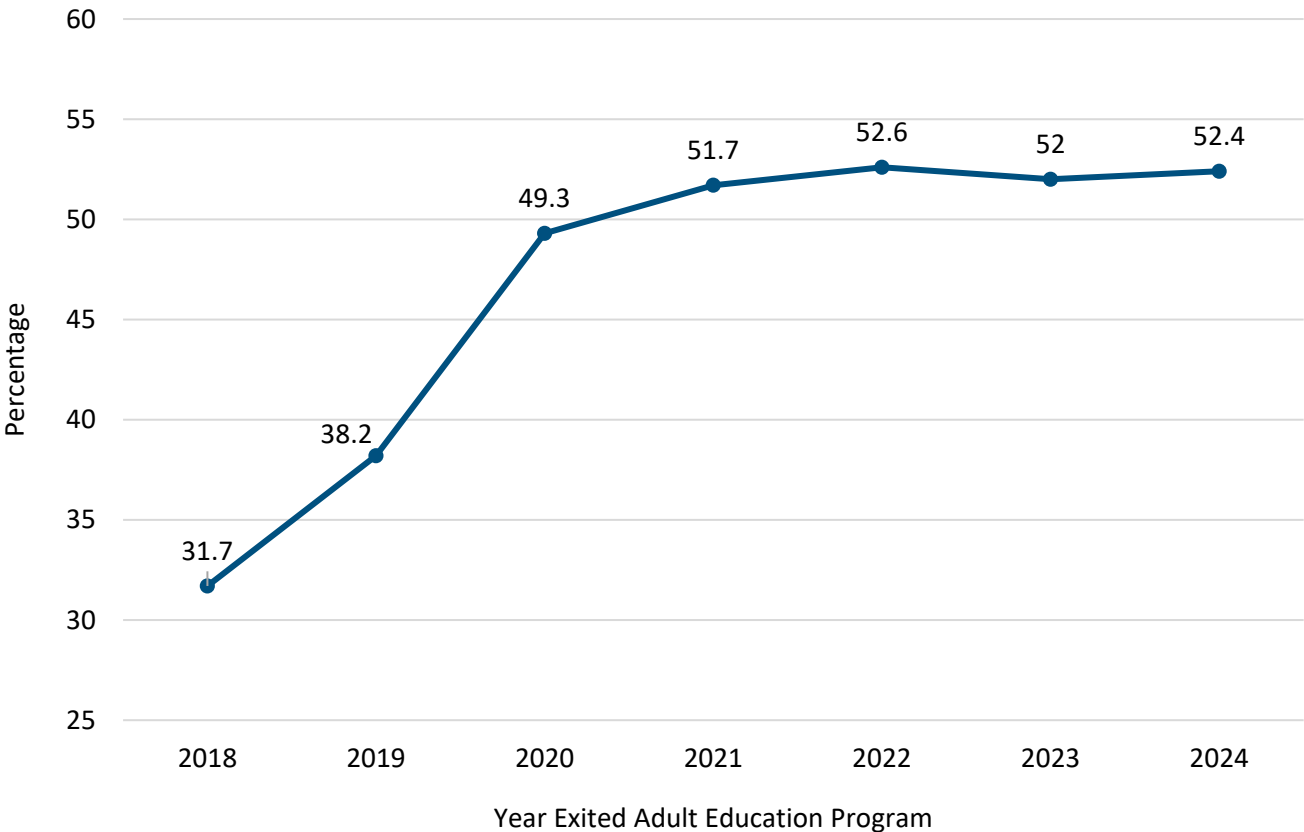
³ Some records may be missing for participants if they left school prior to 2009, whereas other records are likely missing for participants who attended school outside of Nevada.

⁴ Many had multiple years of data available from different grades. These statistics are based on the most recent year of data available. Those who only had records from Grade 8 or lower were excluded from this analysis.

Success in Adult Education

The percentage of participants who earned at least one educational functioning level (EFL) gain increased from 31.7% to 52.4% over time (2018–2024). Overall, almost half of the participants (46.5%) who started adult education between late 2017 and early 2024 earned at least one EFL gain (Exhibit 3). Adult education can help participants gain skills they may not have gained in secondary education. One way to mark progress toward gained skills in an adult education program is through an EFL gain, which indicates that participants (a) improved their scores on an National Reporting System–approved test, (b) achieved enough Carnegie Units or credits to move up a grade level within an adult high school program, or (c) enrolled in postsecondary education or training after exiting their program (NPWR, 2025).

Exhibit 3. Percentage of Adult Education Participants that Earned an Educational Functioning Level (EFL) Gain, by Exit Year



Note. N = 21,778.

Trends in Wages and Higher Education

In this section, we describe the wage and education trends of AE participants in Nevada. We examine participants' earnings before and after adult education; however, this is not an impact evaluation. Because we do not compare outcomes of AE participants to a group of comparable individuals who did not participate in adult education, we cannot definitively say whether adult education coursework or programming produced any wage or educational changes.

KEY FINDINGS

- Adult education participants experienced short- and long-term wage growth.
 - Adult education participants' wages grew by 11% from baseline to the first year after their exit.
 - » Short-term wage growth was higher for participants who earned at least one EFL gain during their program (13.9%) than those who did not (9.7%).
 - » Short-term wages increased for women and men and all racial subgroups.
 - Adult education participants' wages grew by 33% from baseline to the fifth year after their exit.
- By the fifth year after their exit, AE participants' hourly wage (\$22.90) exceeded the hourly wage of the average employee in Nevada (\$21.54) and the hourly wage needed to meet basic needs in a one-adult household in Nevada (\$22.46).
- Of all participants, 4.4% had enrolled at a postsecondary institution during or after they started adult education. Also, 1.3% of all participants completed a postsecondary certificate or degree.

Wage Trends

One goal of adult education is to give participants the skills they need to be successful in the labor force. Therefore, we examine participants' wages in the year before they enrolled in adult education and up to 5 years after exiting their program, using data from the Nevada AE system and the Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation (DETR).⁵

We only examined trends for participants with enough wage data to accurately estimate their annual wages.⁶ Only 3,748 participants had enough wage data to be included in the analytic samples. Exhibit 4 provides an overview of how we grouped participants based on their wage data availability.

⁵ There are some limitations of these data. The wage data were only available from FY 2017–2023, and we only have wage data for participants who participated in the formal Nevada workforce. Participants who worked outside of Nevada or participated in informal work may be missing from our analyses. Therefore, the trends we describe only generalize to a small group of participants.

⁶ We excluded any participants who exited adult education in 2022 Q2 or after because the wage data were unavailable for at least 4 consecutive quarters following their exit. Additionally, we excluded participants who did not have (a) complete wage data at baseline and at least 1 complete year of wage data in the first year after their exit, or (b) complete wage data in all years for which data were available following their exit.

To calculate participants’ annual baseline wages, we took the sum of their wages in the four quarters prior to the quarter they enrolled in adult education. To calculate participants’ follow-up wages, we summed their annual wages for each year after they exited their program, starting in the second quarter after their exit. All dollar values were adjusted for inflation to 2023 wages using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.).⁷

Exhibit 4. Wage Data Overview

Wage Analysis	Baseline Wage Data	Follow-up Wage Data	# Participants
Short-term Wage Trends	Complete	Complete for at least 1 year after exit	2,316
Long-term Wage Trends	Complete	Complete in all follow-up years	1,691
Post-only Wage Trends	Incomplete	Complete in all follow-up years	1,432

Note. N = 3,748. Includes data from the Nevada AE system (FY 2018–2022) and DETR (FY 2017–2023). To have complete wage data at baseline, participants must have wage data in all four quarters prior to starting adult education. To have 1 year of follow-up wages, participants must have wage data for four consecutive quarters following their exit from adult education, starting in the second quarter after their exit. To have complete follow-up wage data, participants must have wage data from all years for which data were available following their program exit. All participants in the “Long-term Wage Trends” analysis also are present in the “Short-term Wage Trends” analysis.

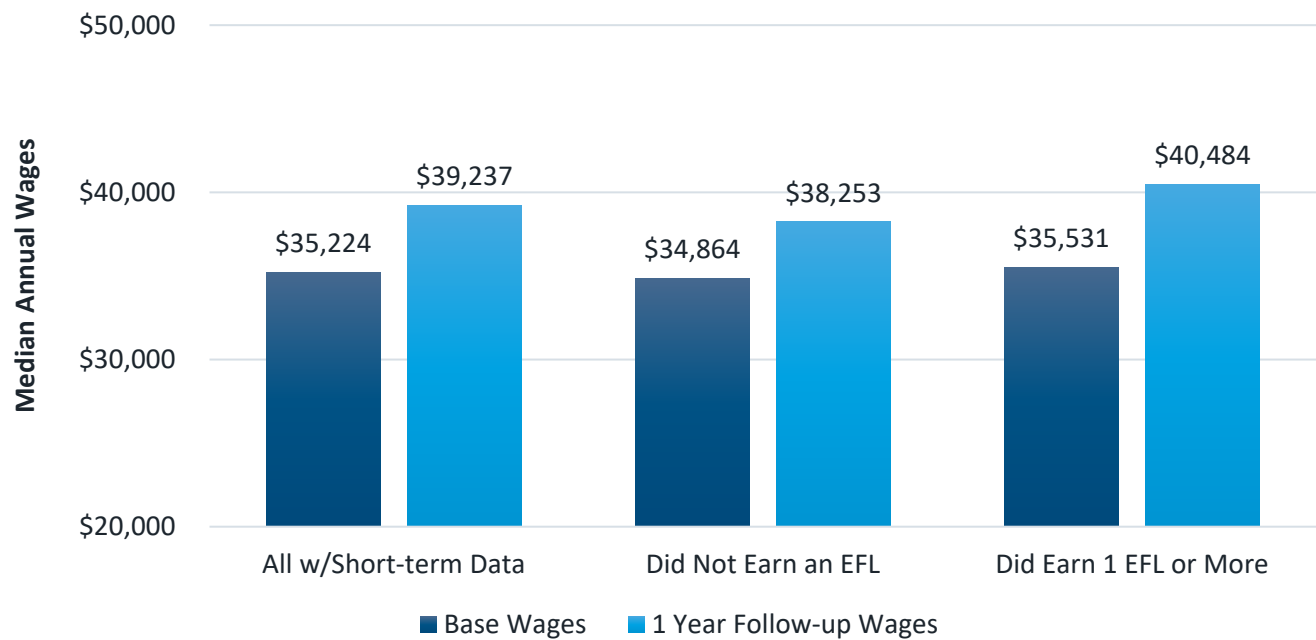
Short-term Wage Trends

Participants’ wages grew by 11% from baseline to the first year after their exit.⁸ Exhibits 5–7 show participants’ median annual wages at baseline and in the year following their exit for all participants with short-term wage data, by participants’ EFL gains, their gender, and their race. Key insights include:

- Wage growth was higher for participants who earned at least one EFL gain during their program (13.9%) than those who did not (9.7%).
- Both women’s and men’s wages grew from pre- to post-adult education, although women’s wages are lower.
- Short-term wages increased for all racial groups in the first year following participants’ program exit. However, there is variation in baseline and 1-year follow-up wages across subgroups and in the rate of wage growth. Notably, the sample size of some racial groups is very small, and it may be inappropriate to draw conclusions about racial differences in wages and wage growth based on such small sample sizes.

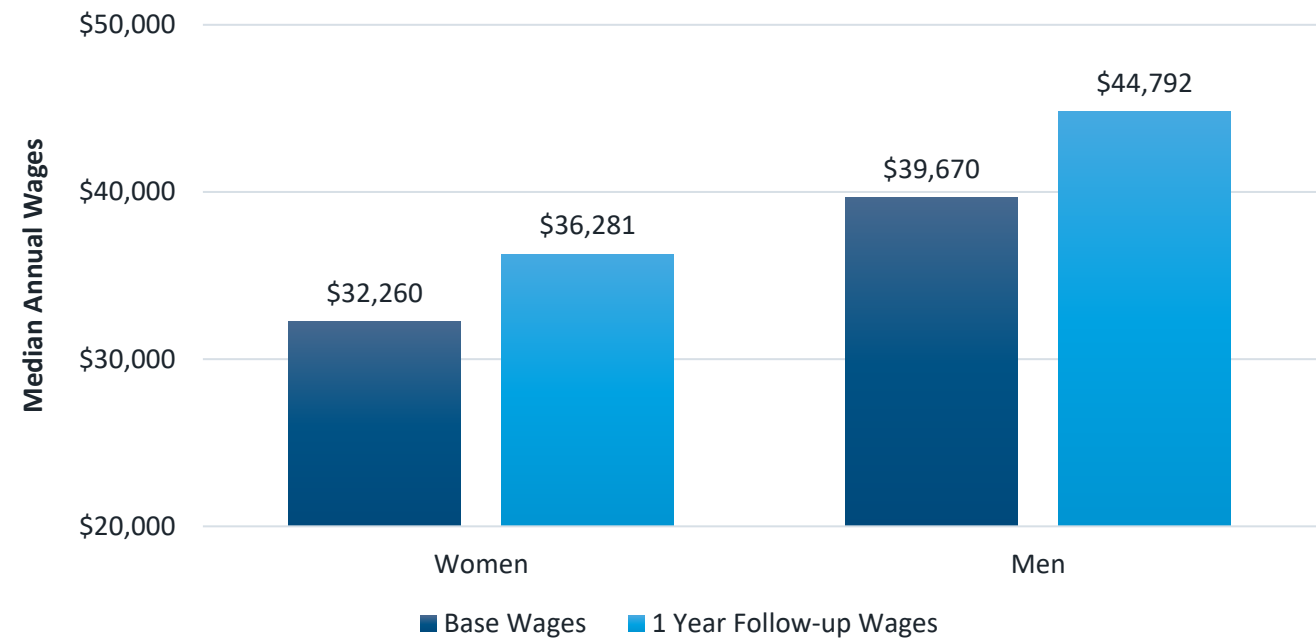
⁷ We used the CPI for “All items in the U.S. city average, urban wage earners and clerical workers, not seasonally adjusted.”
⁸ This statistic is based on 2,316 participants who had complete baseline and follow-up wage data for at least 1 year after they exited their program.

Exhibit 5. Short-term Wage Trends by Educational Functioning Level (EFL) Gain



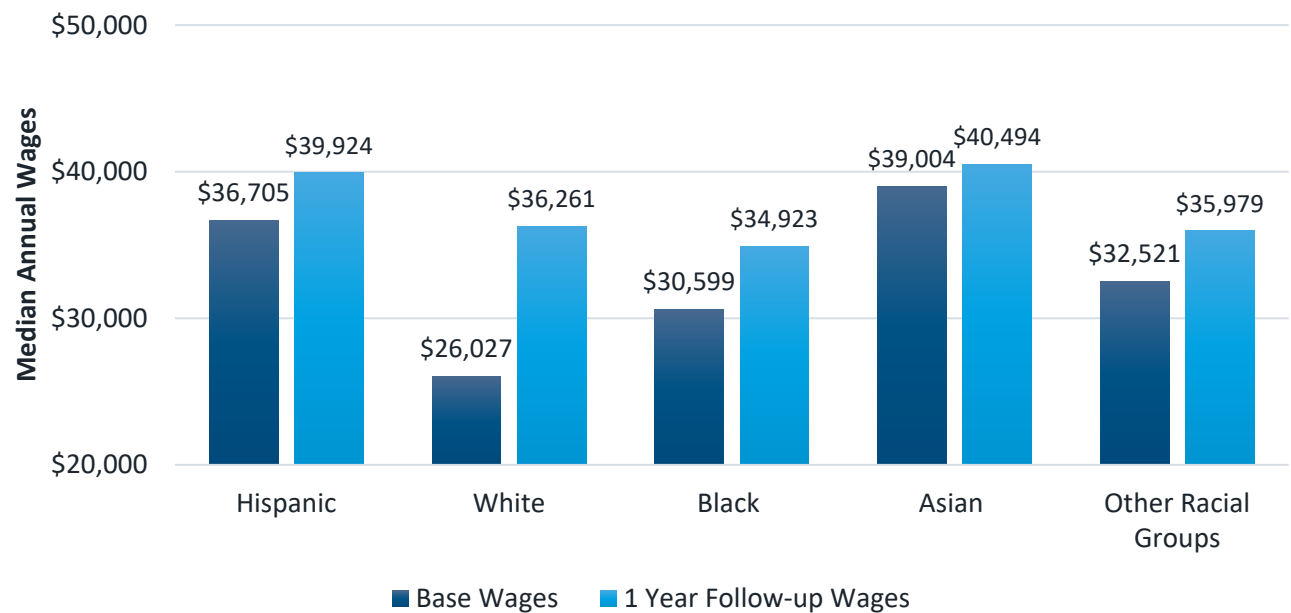
Note. N = 2,316. Includes data from the Nevada AE system (FY 2018–2022) and DETR (FY 2017–2023). Wages were adjusted for inflation to 2023 wages using CPI. Of all participants, 928 earned at least one EFL gain and 1,388 did not.

Exhibit 6. Short-term Wage Trends by Gender



Note. N = 2,316. Includes data from the Nevada AE system (FY 2018–2022) and DETR (FY 2017–2023). Wages were adjusted for inflation to 2023 wages using CPI. There were 1,328 female participants and 988 male participants.

Exhibit 7. Short-term Wage Trends by Race



Note. N = 2,316. Includes data from the Nevada AE system (FY 2018–2022) and DETR (FY 2017–2023). Wages were adjusted for inflation to 2023 wages using CPI. There were 1,621 Hispanic participants, 316 White participants, 175 Black participants, 165 Asian participants, and 39 participants who identified as mixed race or in other racial groups, including American Indian, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander.

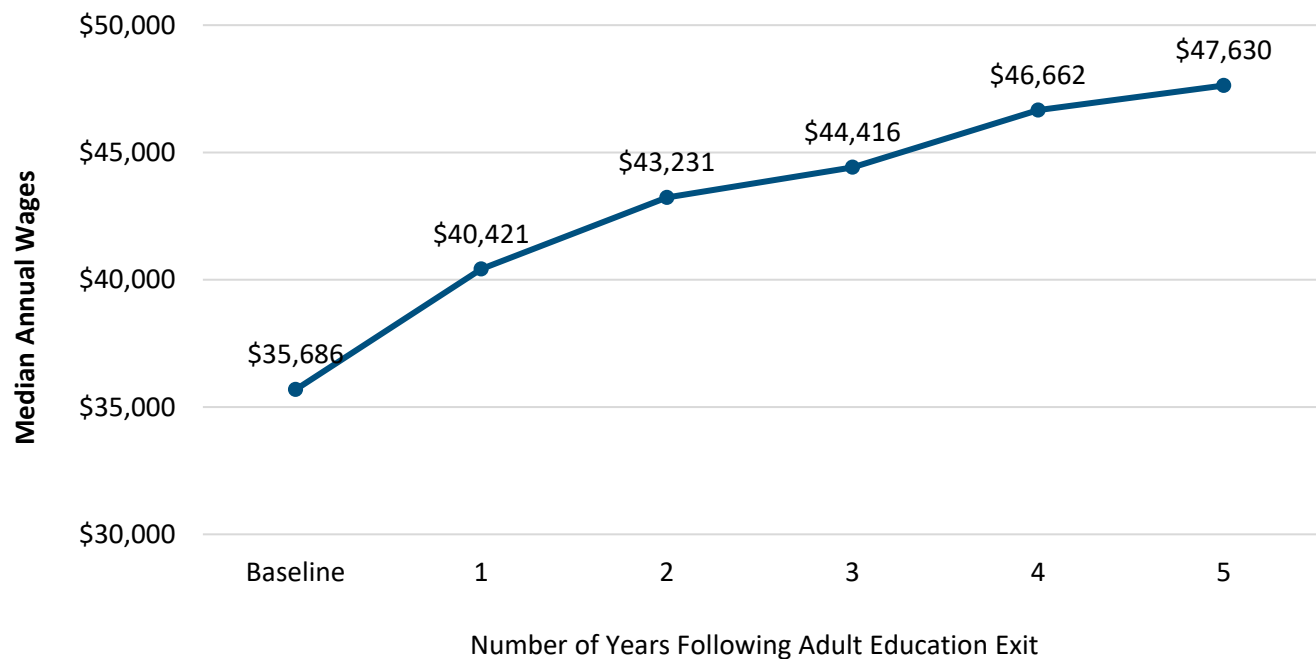
Long-term Wage Trends

Wages of participants grew by 33% from baseline to the fifth year after their exit.⁹ Exhibit 8 displays long-term wage trends for the 1,691 participants who had baseline data and data in all possible follow-up years. These trends show us that AE participants continue to improve their wages in the labor market each year following their exit.

Some participants only started consistently earning wages in Nevada after exiting their program, so they do not have baseline data. Their wages grew by 42% from the first year to the fifth year after exit.¹⁰ One goal of adult education is to give participants the skills they need to be successful in the labor force. For some participants, like those who showed up in the short- and long-term wage trend analyses, that may mean increasing wages from before to after adult education. For others, it may be a shift from irregular to consistent labor force participation over time. To describe the trends of these latter participants, we identified those who had incomplete baseline wage data, but complete wage data following their exit from their program (1,432 participants). Exhibit 9 shows post-only wage trends for this group.

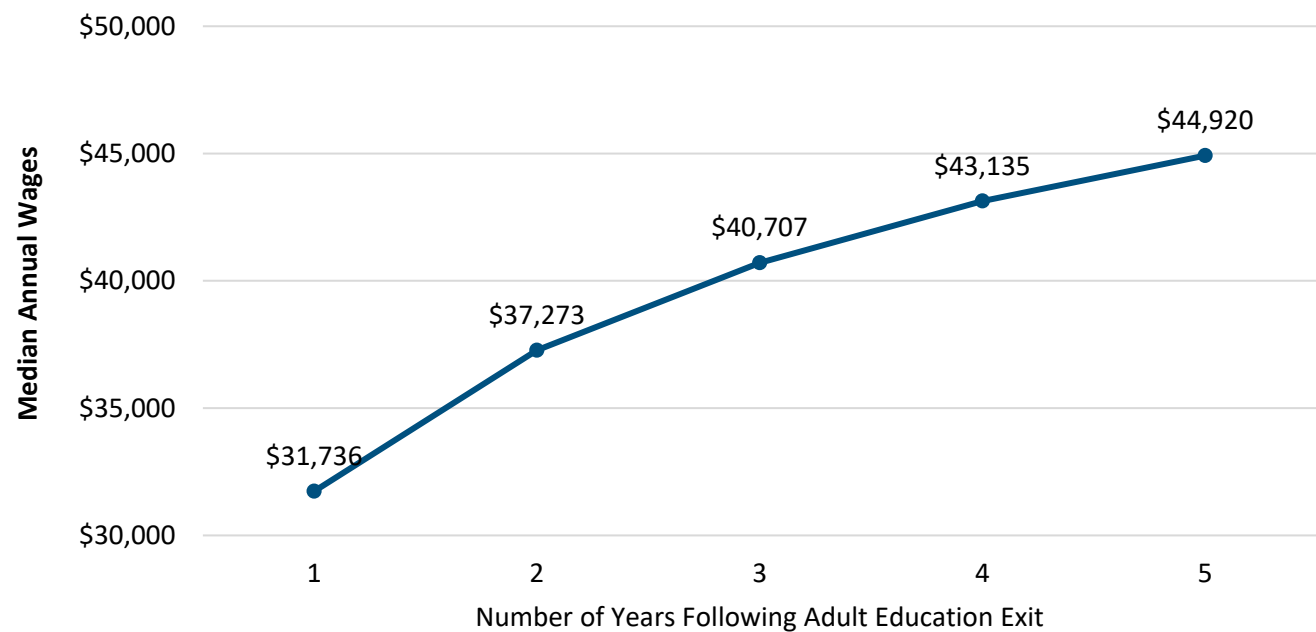
⁹ This statistic is based on 1,691 participants who had complete baseline wage data and complete data for each year after they exited their program.
¹⁰ This statistic is based on 1,432 participants who had incomplete baseline wage data but complete data for each year after they exited their program.

Exhibit 8. Long-term Wage Trends



Note. $N = 1,691$. Data from the Nevada AE system (FY 2018–2022) and DETR (FY 2017–2023). Wages adjusted for inflation to 2023 wages using CPI. The sample size decreases each year because some participants recently exited their programs. Baseline: 1,691; Year 1: 1,691; Year 2: 1,555; Year 3: 1,175; Year 4: 970; Year 5: 593.

Exhibit 9. Post-only Wage Trends for Participants With Incomplete Baseline Wage Data



Note. $N = 1,432$. Data are from the Nevada AE system (FY 2018–2022) and DETR (FY 2017–2023). Wages adjusted for inflation to 2023 wages using CPI. The sample size decreases each year because some participants recently exited their programs. Year 1: 1,432; Year 2: 1,268; Year 3: 818; Year 4: 616; Year 5: 357.

Participants' Wage Growth in Context

How do AE participants' hourly wages compare to those of other adults in the Nevada labor market?

Adult education participants are different from the broader labor force. Participants are usually adults who lack basic educational skills, do not have a secondary school diploma or its equivalent, or cannot speak, read, or write in English (NDE, 2023). However, the two groups may be more similar after participants exit their courses.

By the fifth year after their exit, participants had higher hourly wages than the average employee in Nevada.¹¹ In May 2023, the median hourly wage for Nevada employees was \$21.54 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). At baseline, AE participants earned \$17.16 per hour, but by the fifth year following their exit from adult education, they earned \$22.90 per hour, which is \$1.36 more per hour than the average Nevada employee.

Another way of considering the economic well-being of participants is to compare their hourly wages to poverty wage benchmarks. **By the fifth year after their exit, participants are earning \$22.90 per hour, which is just over a living wage for a one-adult household in Nevada.** An adult living in a household with no other adults or children would need to earn \$22.46 per hour to meet basic needs in Nevada (Glasmeier, 2024). However, the necessary hourly living wage grows as the household includes more adults and children. For example, in a household with one adult and two children, the adult would need to earn \$52.12 per hour to meet basic needs (Glasmeier, 2024). Currently, we do not have data on participants' household configurations. In the future, data on the number of working adults in the household and the number of nonworking adults and children will help to paint a more precise picture of participants' economic stability.

Higher Education Trends

After starting an adult education course, participants may continue their education by enrolling at a postsecondary institution. With data from the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE), we examined whether participants enrolled or completed a certificate or degree at a Nevada college or university during or after they started adult education. The enrollment data were available from FY 2017 to FY 2023 and the degree data were available from FY 2017 to FY 2022.

- 1,101 participants enrolled at a postsecondary institution during or after they started adult education (4.4% of participants).¹²
- 315 participants completed a certificate or degree during or after their adult education. Of those participants, 31% earned a certificate that required less than 1 year of study (138 participants), 29% earned a certificate that required at least 1 year of study (116 participants), 38% earned an associate's degree, and 2% earned a bachelor's degree or more (193 participants).

¹¹ We calculate hourly wage estimates for AE participants by dividing participants' annual median wages by the number of full-time working hours in a year (2,080 hours based on a 40-hour work week for 52 weeks). We calculate estimates based on the group of participants with long-term wage data available ($N = 1,691$).

¹² An additional 433 AE participants had enrolled in an NSHE postsecondary institution prior to starting an adult education course.

CONCLUSION

- **Nevada’s AE system served 24,786 participants from 2017 Q3 to 2024 Q1.**
 - Almost half of the participants (47%) who had records of attending K–12 education in Nevada were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.
 - The percentage of participants who earned at least one EFL gain increased from 31.7% to 52.4% over time (2018–2024).
- **Participants improved their wages in the labor market each year following their exit.**
 - Participants’ wages grew by 11% in the first year after program exit and had grown by 33% by the fifth year after program exit. Wage growth was higher for participants who earned at least one EFL gain during their program (13.9%) than those who did not (9.7%).
 - By the fifth year after program exit, participants earned \$22.90 per hour, which is more than both the median wage in Nevada (\$21.54) and the hourly wage needed to meet basic needs in a one-adult household in the state (\$22.46).
 - Some participants only started consistently earning wages in Nevada after exiting their program. Their wages grew by 42% from the first year to the fifth year after exit.
- **A small number of participants enrolled in higher education following their exit.**
 - About 4.4% of participants enrolled at a postsecondary institution in Nevada during or after their adult education studies. Also, 1.3% of participants completed a certificate or degree.

Appendix. Data Systems Review

The Nevada P–20 to Workforce Research Data System (NPWR) has tremendous potential to offer researchers and policymakers key insights on the outcomes of Nevada Adult Education (AE) participants. With these data, we described AE participants’ demographic characteristics, education attainment, and wage outcomes. However, data limitations constrain the insights we can provide. The trends we describe may generalize only to a small group of participants due to several missing elements—data, variables, and a comparison group—in the NPWR. We believe the NPWR can continue to improve aspects of the data systems to enable researchers to draw stronger conclusions from these findings. We review some of these areas for growth in this section.

Missing Data

Exhibit A-1 provides an overview of the number of participants in each data set and the number of participants who could be linked across adult education, workforce, and education data sets.

First, most participants are missing wage data. Only 17% of participants had enough data to be included in the short-term, long-term, or post-only wage trend analyses.

- The wage data were only available from fiscal year (FY) 2017 to FY 2023.
- Most participants were missing too much wage data for us to reliably estimate their annual wages. For example, participants may have data for some quarters within a year but not others. It is unclear whether they were not earning wages or if the wages they earned were not reported. Therefore, we excluded these participants from the analysis.
- When data are missing, we cannot say whether this is because (a) the participant did not work, (b) they were employed in another state during that quarter, or (c) they had informal employment. We are only able to report on the wage trends of participants who had formal employment in Nevada and whose employers reported their wages.

Exhibit A-1. Frequency of Data Available Across Nevada P-20 to Workforce Research Data System (NPWR), 2017 Q3–2024 Q1

Data/Years	# Participants	Details
AE System Data		
2017 Q3–2024 Q1	24,786	Started AE
	21,778	Exited AE
DETR Wage Data		
2016 Q3–2023 Q2	11,237	Have at least one quarter of wage data
	8,596	Exited AE by 2022 Q2
	4,019	Have baseline wages
	2,316	Have baseline + one complete year of post-AE wage data
	1,691	Have baseline + all complete years of post-AE wage data

Data/Years	# Participants	Details
	1,432	No baseline, but all complete years post-AE wage data
NSHE Enrollment Data		
2016 Q2–2023 Q2	1,534	Enrolled in NSHE before, during, or after AE entry
2016 Q2–2023 Q2	1,101	Enrolled in NSHE during or after AE entry
NSHE Completion Data		
2016 Q2–2022 Q3	315	Earned a degree during or after AE entry
NDE Data (K–12)		
2009–2024	2,302	Have any K–12 records in Nevada
	2,133	Have at least some K–12 records from Grade 9 or higher

Note. $N = 24,786$. AE = Adult Education. Includes data from the Nevada AE system, Nevada Department of Education (NDE) Data, Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE), and the Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation (DETR).

Second, most participants are missing secondary education data, and some may be missing postsecondary education data.

- **Secondary education:** We were only able to access secondary education records for participants who went to school in Nevada from 2009 to 2024. Therefore, we are limited in what we can say about the background of the adult education population. Many participants are older and would have attended high school before 2009.
- **Postsecondary education:** We are limited in what we can say about participants' transition to postsecondary institutions. Some participants may go on to enroll in higher education in in-state postsecondary institutions outside of NSHE or outside of Nevada, but we do not have access to those data. Additionally, some participants may have enrolled outside of the time frame for which data were available. We cannot assess enrollment in NSHE after FY 2023 or degree completion after the first quarter of FY 2023.

To the extent possible, it would be helpful for the Nevada AE system to collect data from participants regarding their postsecondary aspirations and their postsecondary enrollment in and outside Nevada. These data would help researchers better track educational trends for AE participants. It would also be useful for researchers to better understand how data are collected and by whom, and why data are missing.

Missing Variables

Some key participant demographic characteristics are not included in the data sets.

- The data did not include indicators on the type of courses in which participants enrolled or the specific type of educational functioning level (EFL) that participants gained. For example, it would be useful to know what types of courses were most common, and whether the course type is linked to outcomes.
- The data provided an exit date, but did not include an indicator of whether participants completed their courses or were exited automatically due to lack of attendance. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the median days of duration for participants who completed their coursework or look at outcomes for only participants who completed their coursework.
- The data did not include information about participants' household structure or the work status of other adults in their households. These statistics would help us better contextualize the findings in this brief. Such information could help researchers determine how many adults and children are in each household and how many are working and, therefore, what wages are needed to support families.

Missing Comparison Group

We examine participants' earnings before and after adult education; however, we cannot definitively say whether adult education coursework or programming caused any wage or educational changes. We show that AE participants' wages increased over time, but we cannot be certain whether adult education caused these changes because we do not have a comparison group. We only had access to data for AE participants. To estimate the impact of adult education, we would need to be able to compare participants' trends to similar adults in Nevada who did not enroll in an adult education program. Because NPWR expects to add additional data, researchers soon may have access to data about Nevadans with backgrounds similar to those who participate in adult education. With this expanded data set, research could compare the trajectories of AE participants to those of similar populations who did not participate in adult education.

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