



Kevin McCarty, poster boy for adult education

BY JEFF VONKAENEL / jeffv@newsreview.com

California Assemblyman Kevin McCarty is not only a leading legislative advocate for adult education. He is also a poster boy for its importance. I recently met with McCarty and his educational policy team, and he told me how adult school enabled him to receive his El Camino High School diploma.

Because he had focused more on playing baseball than on academics, McCarty dropped out of high school during his senior year. He soon realized his mistake. Like hundreds of thousands of other Californians, adult schools gave McCarty a second chance.

And McCarty has put that high school diploma to good use, attending American River College and then CSU Long Beach, and finally earning his master's degree in public policy and administration from Sacramento State.

Elected to the Sacramento City Council in 2004 and to the state Assembly in 2014, McCarty is the Democratic coach for the annual legislative softball game. He also serves as chairman of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance.

His Assembly Bill 2098, which recently passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, recognized the role that adult schools can have in helping immigrants learn English and the basic rules of citizenship, which will help them support their children's education, and improve their chances of employment. As a result of this new law, future assessments of adult schools will look at how well they serve the immigrant population.

But the big issue for adult schools is funding. For more than a century, California led the U.S. in providing adult education. In 2008, adult schools had a \$750 million state budget and served more than 1.2 million students.

But during the 2008 recession, Gov. Jerry Brown pushed through a proposal

that removed mandatory funding for many programs such as adult schools and gave school districts more local control to allocate funds. Given a choice of funding adult schools or K-12, most districts dropped their adult school programs.

As a result, in 2009, the number of adult school programs plummeted from 535 to 223, serving 800,000 fewer students. Some of the funding was restored in 2013 when the state approved the Adult Education Planning Grant, which called for the creation of 70 community college and regional consortia for planning and coordinating adult education. Last year, McCarty helped California adult schools receive a 4.1 percent cost-of-living adjustment. But funding is still not anywhere near 2008 levels.

And with California's population growth, the need is greater. We have hundreds of thousands of Californians who want to learn English, who want to get their high school diploma, who want to take parenting classes and who want to develop job skills, but who are being turned away because of lack of funding. Adult schools also benefit local employers and the community at large. It would be a much better investment than bribing a large corporation to move to a city.

I asked McCarty if he was going to sponsor legislation calling for another \$250 million for adult schools to help get back to 2008 levels. He wasn't sure he had the votes. He told me that while most legislators support adult education, it's just not a high priority for them.

Let's make it a higher priority. More funding for adult education would be a home run for California. □

Jeff vonKaenel is the president, CEO and majority owner of the News & Review.

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