

Forum: The Power of Equity and the Future of Adult Education

Introduction to the Forum

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What do well-compensated educators, the ability to engage with diverse cultural perspectives, and a commitment to nurturing spaces where the most marginalized can lead have in common? They are all building blocks for adult education programs that center equity while demonstrating their widespread economic and societal value.

In their pieces focusing on the need to address wage inequities (Cortes), deepen ties to DEI work (Hatten), and promote the benefits of an immigrant workforce (Pickett) in adult education, the authors featured in the forum build on the field's interconnectedness to showcase its broader importance. Cortes underscores how better wage equity and living wages can strengthen adult education's impact on social mobility, leading to economic benefits like increased funding and a less transient, more educated, diverse workforce. Such a trend has the potential to push against the concomitant backlash towards DEI work, outlined by Hatten, who laments that failing to prioritize racial and social justice has the potential to limit investment, diminish student access to critical services, and negatively impact the recruitment and retention of diverse personnel. Finally, Pickett's perspective provides a concrete example of how, by paying homage to their experiences, programs can both retain – and uplift – immigrant staff and remove barriers to their leadership, illustrating how investing in programs, DEI, and creating a

sense of community can benefit the field.

The strategies provided by these authors are particularly beneficial at a time when there are questions about the value - in fiscal and societal terms - of educational efforts that celebrate our culturally diverse reality and the immigrants that revitalize many regions across the country. Structural, organizational, and programmatic commitments that center equity can expand the impact of adult education as students, families, and their communities reap benefits from policies that streamline access to high-quality, well-funded programs staffed by teachers who are valued for their expertise, perspectives, and unique histories.

As the field of adult education prepares for the potentially monumental policy changes that the new administration will usher in, these pieces by Cortes, Hatten, and Pickett are a clarion call - a roadmap for advocacy and sustained action. Programs may need to battle for their very existence, let alone pay equitable wages, all while they defend DEI against its erasure, and advocate for immigrant students and staff facing deportation and discrimination. In this moment of unpredictability, adult education risks being marginalized or subsumed by the broader sociopolitical landscape, making Hatten's call to "speak truth to power" essential for the field's continued relevance and survival.