

Archived Information

Objective 3.4: All educationally disadvantaged adults can strengthen their literacy skills and improve their earning power over their lifetime through lifelong learning.

National Need

National Concerns. Educationally disadvantaged adults are individuals with no high school diploma or equivalent, or whose native language is other than English and who need of basic literacy skills. In 1992, the National Adult Literacy Survey found that approximately 40 million to 44 million individuals aged 16 and older (out of a total adult population of 164 million) scored at the lowest level of literacy skills. We can see the effect of that skill gap today. Large numbers of employers report difficulty in finding workers with the necessary combination of academic, technical, and interpersonal skills—especially in high-tech fields. The income gap between those with a good education and those without has been increasing for 20 years. Objective 3.4 focuses on providing adults with educational opportunities and transitions to work—through adult basic education or vocational rehabilitation—to acquire the skills and knowledge needed for their careers and to increase the number of their productive years. In addition to benefiting the individual worker, the economy as a whole will be strengthened through the creation of a more flexible, literate, and highly trained workforce.

Our Role. The Department of Education supports lifelong educational opportunities to improve the literacy and academic and technical skills of educationally disadvantaged adults across the country. The objectives are to be achieved through a number of programs authorized by the Workforce Investment Act Titles II and IV (the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments, respectively), Higher Education Act Title IV, and Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, among others. These programs:

- Assist states and local providers with the delivery of adult basic education, English as a Second Language (ESL), and adult secondary education services to adults without a high school diploma or equivalent to help them improve their basic literacy skills;
- Assist states and community rehabilitation providers in providing training and other services leading to quality employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities;
- Provide tax credits and student grants to individuals enrolling in an institution of higher education (see Objective 3.2);
- Fund vocational and technical education programs at the postsecondary level (see Objective 1.2);
- Conduct research and evaluation on effective methods for improving the educational and employment outcomes of individuals participating in these programs.

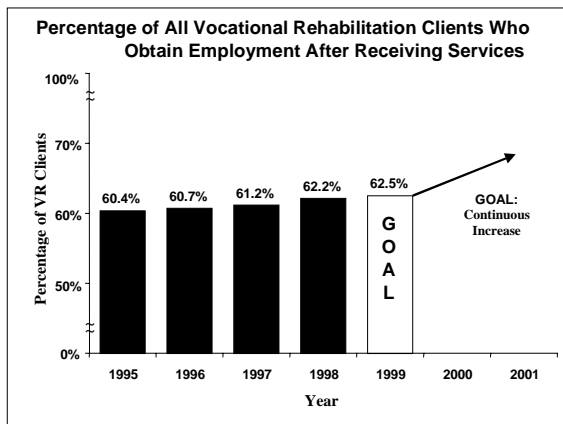
Our Performance

How We Measure. Indicators of lifelong learning include measures of the effects of Federally funded programs on encouraging adult literacy and employment. They include the percentage of persons with disabilities who receive vocational rehabilitation services and then obtain and maintain employment, the percentage of adults at the lowest levels of literacy being served in adult basic education, and the percentage of those adults who acquire a basic level of literacy.

Indicator 3.4.a. In vocational rehabilitation, the percentage of all persons who obtain employment after receiving vocational rehabilitation services will be maintained at 61 percent.

Assessment of Progress. No 1999 data are available, but progress toward target is likely. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) state grants provide services to help persons with disabilities prepare for and engage in employment to the extent of their capabilities. The program includes services such as vocational evaluation, counseling, mental and physical restoration, education, vocational training, work adjustment, job placement, and post-employment services. Priority is given to serving individuals with the most significant disabilities. In recent years, the percentage of individuals with significant disabilities as a proportion of all individuals achieving an employment outcome has risen; the cost of rehabilitating individuals with significant disabilities has been consistently higher than for other individuals with disabilities. As a group, persons who achieve employment as a result of VR services show gains in their ability to function in economic terms. Figure 3.4.a.1 shows that the percentage of VR clients who achieve an employment outcome is continuing to increase.

Figure 3.4.a.1

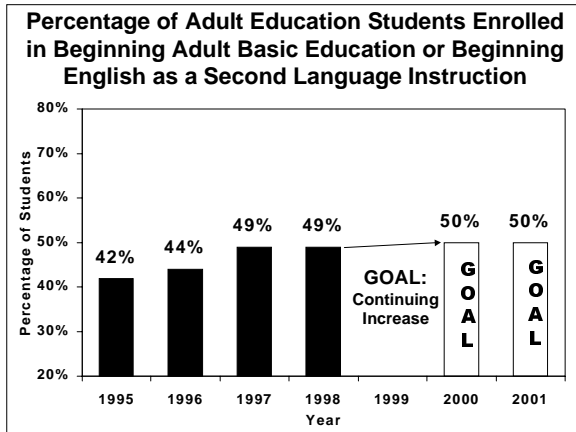


Source: Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) state data. *Frequency:* Annual. *Next Update:* Late 2000. **Validation procedure:** Future routine monitoring and onsite reviews of Vocational Rehabilitation programs will specifically address procedures to verify grantee reports. **Limitation of data and planned improvement:** Data are reported by the states and are not independently verified.

Indicator 3.4.b. By fall 2000, adults at the lowest levels of literacy (those in beginning Adult Basic Education and beginning English as a Second Language) will make up comprise 50 percent of the total National enrollment.

Assessment of Progress. Data show a positive trend toward target. No 1999 data are available, but continuous progress was made between 1995 and 1998, making further progress likely. Consistent with its predecessor law, the new Adult Education and Family Literacy Act emphasizes serving the most educationally disadvantaged adults. For example, a state's needs assessment must include individuals most in need or hardest to serve. And, in making subgrants, states are to consider the applicant's past effectiveness in improving the literacy skills of those adults with the lowest levels of literacy. Figure 3.4.b.1 underscores the importance of targeting services to an increasing percentage of educationally disadvantaged learners in the adult education system, despite the fact that it may be more difficult and time-consuming to achieve outcomes for this population than for other adults in the system who have slightly higher skills.

Figure 3.4.b.1

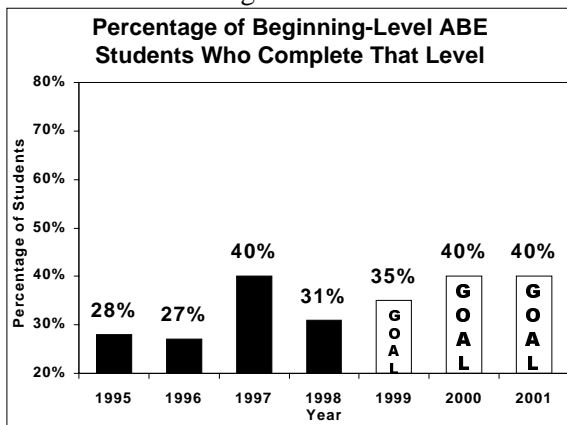


Source: Adult Education Management Information System. *Frequency:* Annual. *Next Update:* Late 2000. **Validation procedure:** The data provided prior to 1998 were verified by onsite monitoring and review and internal review procedures. The 1998 data were verified by the U.S. Department of Education data quality attestation process and *ED Standards for Evaluating Program Performance Indicators*. **Limitations of data and planned improvements:** As a secondary recipient of this data, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) must rely on states and local service providers to collect and report data within published guidelines. Starting with the July 1, 2000 reporting period, new data collection and reporting protocols will be implemented. These protocols include standardized data collection methodologies and standards for automated data reporting. Additionally, OVAE is developing a data quality validation process for states based on the ED's *Standards for Evaluating Program Performance Data*.

Indicator 3.4.c. By 2000, 40 percent of adults in beginning-level Adult Basic Education programs will complete that level and achieve basic skills proficiency.

Assessment of Progress. No 1999 data are available, but progress toward its target is likely. Figure 3.4.c.1 shows that although the trend line has fluctuated over the past 4 years, the overall trend has been a positive movement toward the target. Adults who enroll in Adult Basic Education (ABE) at the beginning level tend to be the most educationally disadvantaged, with literacy skills roughly below the sixth-grade level. The performance data reflect the percentage of low-literate adults who demonstrated a level of educational progress needed to advance to the next educational functioning level. Educational functioning levels are arranged in a hierarchy from beginning literacy through high school completion. Currently, fewer than one-third of adults who enroll in beginning-level ABE in a given year complete that level within the year. Building on the previous indicator, this indicator stresses that it is not sufficient to ensure that educationally disadvantaged adults simply have access to appropriate adult education programs. The programs must be of sufficient quality to ensure that these learners succeed in them.

Figure 3.4.c.1

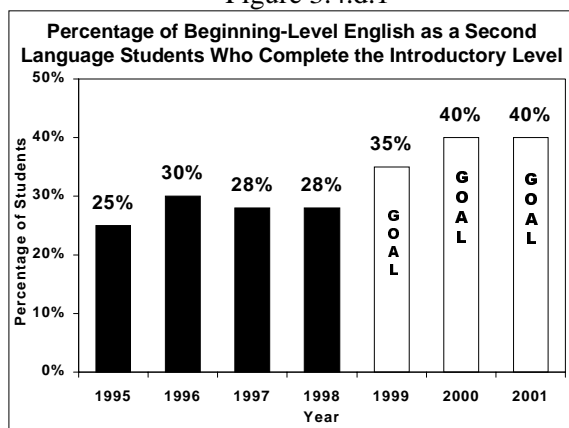


Source: Adult Education Management Information System. *Frequency:* Annual. *Next Update:* Late 2000. **Validation procedure:** The data provided prior to 1998 were verified by onsite monitoring and review and internal review procedures. The 1998 data were verified by the ED data quality attestation process and *ED Standards for Evaluating Program Performance Indicators*. **Limitations of data and planned improvements:** As a secondary recipient of this data, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) must rely on states and local service providers to collect and report data within published guidelines. Starting with the July 1, 2000 reporting period, new data collection and reporting protocols will be implemented. These protocols include developing standardized data collection methodologies and standards for automated data reporting. Additionally, OVAE is developing a data quality validation process for states based on ED's *Standards for Evaluating Program Performance Data*.

Indicator 3.4.d. By 2000, 40 percent of adults in beginning English as a Second Language will complete the introductory level and achieve basic English literacy.

Assessment of Progress. No 1999 data are available, but progress toward target is likely. Figure 3.4.d.1 reflects the percentage of beginning-level English as a Second Language (ESL) learners (adults with minimal or no English language skills) who demonstrated a level of English proficiency needed to advance to the next educational functioning level. Educational functioning levels are arranged in a hierarchy from beginning ESL through advanced ESL. Well over half of all ESL learners enroll at the beginning level, but less than one-third of these students complete that level each year. This indicator highlights the importance the Department places on ensuring that English language and literacy instruction provided through Federally funded Adult Education programs is of high quality and leads to significant learner outcomes.

Figure 3.4.d.1



Source: Adult Education Management Information System. *Frequency:* Annual. *Next Update:* Late 2000. **Validation procedure:** The data provided prior to 1998 were verified by onsite monitoring and review and internal review procedures. The 1998 data were verified by the U.S. Department of Education data quality attestation process and *ED Standards for Evaluating Program Performance Indicators*. **Limitations of data and planned improvements:** As a secondary recipient of this data, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) must rely on states and local service providers to collect and report data within published guidelines. Starting with the July 1, 2000 reporting period, new data collection and reporting protocols will be implemented. These protocols include standardized data collection methodologies and standards for automated data reporting. Additionally, OVAE is developing a data quality validation process for states based on the ED's *Standards for Evaluating Program Performance Data*.

How We Plan to Achieve Our Objective

How ED's Activities Support the Achievement of this Objective.

- **Strengthening accountability.** The Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) is continuing development of an outcome-based National Reporting System (NRS) for the state-administered, Federally funded adult education program. Using a common set of outcome measures and uniform data collection system, the NRS will measure and document learner outcomes resulting from adult education instruction. The collection of state outcome data will enable states to correlate effective practices and programs with successful outcomes and will also assist states in assessing progress in meeting their adult education goals. For local providers, the NRS will help instructors and administrators plan instructional activities and services to enhance student outcomes. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has implemented strategies to improve the effectiveness of its program monitoring, including a new state monitoring system based on performance outcomes and meetings with program stakeholders to gather input on how it can enhance the utility of its monitoring reports. In addition, the reauthorized Rehabilitation Act (Title IV of the Workforce Investment Act) provides greater access to training and employment services, enhances consumer choice in the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) State Grants program, streamlines the state VR service delivery system, and improves program accountability.

- **Using technology to improve instruction and program administration.** OVAE will continue to support a multiyear initiative to extend access to adult basic education and literacy services to adult learners within their homes, workplaces, and communities. Included among projects being supported are the following: 1) Cyberstep, a collaborative effort among five literacy service innovators to create high-quality multimedia instructional materials, including print, video, CD-ROM, Internet, and Web TV components; 2) LitKit, a multimedia CD-ROM training kit for adult literacy staff development; and 3) External Diploma Program On-Line, a project to adapt the traditional external degree program to an electronic format that adult learners can access on the Internet. OVAE is continuing its support of the Crossroads Café II-Family Literacy Project. Crossroads Café II will produce 26 videos, 30 minutes each, suitable for television broadcast, use in a literacy program, or use at home by adult literacy learners.
- **Improving program performance.** The English Literacy and Civics Education Demonstration Grants Program will help states and communities provide limited English proficient adults with expanded access to high-quality ESL programs linked to civics and life skills instruction on understanding and navigating our government system, the public education system, workplace, and other key institutions in American life. In addition, the Department is conducting the National evaluation studies of "What Works" in adult basic education and ESL programs. The purpose of these studies is to assess the effectiveness of instructional techniques and program practices developed to serve ABE and ESL learners. Results of the studies will be used to develop indicators and establish benchmarks of program effectiveness. To better serve a growing population of adults in the Federally supported adult education and literacy program, OVAE is developing a project to improve the system's ability to teach adults with learning disabilities. The learning disabled have specific difficulties with basic language-learning processes that affect their ability to acquire competence in reading, spelling, and writing. In addition, OVAE is planning to become a partner with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in the U.S. Department of Justice and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services to create a National research center concerning juvenile offenders with learning and other disabilities. OVAE's research interest focuses on the delivery of improved literacy and transition services to incarcerated young adults.
- **Increasing public awareness.** OVAE initiated a project with the U.S. Conference Board to demonstrate to employers, unions, and employees the economic benefits of improving workers' literacy skills to enhance workplace performance. Major project achievements include the release of a publication titled *Turning Skills into Profit: Economic Benefits of Workplace Education Programs*. OVAE plans to support the creation of a National project called the High Skills Communities Initiative, a recognition program to acknowledge communities for their local capacity building efforts around adult education and literacy.
- **Providing technical assistance and training.** To equip both state and local level adult education administrators, OVAE plans to support a professional development initiative designed to help state and local staff implement continuous program improvement strategies and to meet the accountability requirements of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Planned activities include the development of the following: 1) a university-based Executive Leadership Training Institute; 2) a listserv focused on program management issues; 3) a Web site on professional development issues and resources; and 4) a state administrators national forum. The Teacher Standards and Certification/Professional Development Initiative represents a major focus to strengthen the instructional skills of adult basic education teachers and to broaden the range of current instructional resources available to them.
- **Improving employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.** RSA will work with other agencies to fund grants to assist state and local consortia to identify and work toward eliminating barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities. The Department will use the \$2.4 billion request for Vocational Rehabilitation State Grants to support education and employment-related services, including vocational training and job placement. In addition, RSA will issue performance standards to increase

accountability of state VR agencies in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve high-quality outcomes.

- **Providing access to assistive technology for individuals with disabilities.** RSA will use \$15 million of the request for the Assistive Technology Program to support grants to states to establish alternative loan programs enabling individuals with disabilities to borrow funds to purchase assistive technology. In addition, RSA plans to target \$13.5 million of the request for the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research to support research and demonstration activities that will increase the accessibility of information technology, telecommunications, and assistive technology.

How We Coordinate with Other Federal Agencies

- **Coordinate program administration** in the following areas: implementing the Lifetime Learning tax credit (Department of the Treasury); providing appropriate School-to-Work transition services for students with disabilities (Department of Labor and the National School-to-Work Office); implementing the Ticket-to-Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (Social Security Administration); and implementing the Workforce Investment (Department of Labor).
- **Create a national research center** focusing on juvenile offenders with learning and other disabilities (Department of Justice).
- **Address disincentives to work** that affect Social Security Administration beneficiaries (Social Security Administration).
- **Increase access to educational services** for clients of the Temporary Assistance for Need Families (TANF) Program (Department of Health and Human Services).

Challenges to Achieving Our Objectives

The target for Indicator 3.4.a. is based on the receipt of sufficient funds to at least maintain current services in the VR State Grants Program. The Rehabilitation Act requires a state VR agency to implement an approved order of selection if it cannot serve all eligible individuals and serve first those persons with the most severe disabilities. About half of the state VR agencies are operating under an order of selection. We expect the number of persons with significant disabilities served by the VR Program to continue to rise as a result of recent amendments that streamline VR eligibility requirements for Social Security beneficiaries.

Indicators 3.4.c. and 3.4.d. target the most educationally disadvantaged adults, including those with learning disabilities and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners who have limited literacy skills in their native language. Providing services that produce literacy gains for these adults is challenging, but the Department is pursuing a number of strategies targeting at this population. Studies of adult basic education and English as a Second Language identify effective instructional practices and ensure a more effective diagnosis of learning disabilities.