

Passing the Torch

Strategies for Innovation
in Community College ESL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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FOREWORD

CAAL has just completed a two-year study of Adult ESL services in selected community colleges. In another couple of months, we will publish the results of that work in a book-length report titled: *PASSING THE TORCH: Strategies for Innovation in Community College ESL*.

It is out of the ordinary to publish the Executive Summary of a major report before the report itself has been published, for the very good reason that recommendations can only be understood completely in light of their underlying detail. But CAAL decided to make this Executive Summary available now because there is high interest everywhere in providing English language learning services to adults and we want to contribute in a timely way to the energetic dialogue already taking place around the country.

Our recommendations are mostly common sense, although there are a few dramatic highlights. They are based on the findings and analysis of two extraordinarily knowledgeable individuals: CAAL's vice president Forrest P. Chisman (who served as the study director and who has been examining both community colleges and ESL service for many years) and JoAnn Crandall of the University of Maryland Baltimore County (our research director and one of the nation's most respected ESL researchers). Drs. Chisman and Crandall were assisted significantly by a team of co-researchers from the five colleges at the heart of this study. Out of a true labor of love, every member of this team gave enormous amounts of uncompensated time to make the study rich and meaningful. CAAL is deeply grateful to them. CAAL is also grateful to the colleges for providing their co-researchers with the substantial release time they needed to participate as fully as they did.

We hope that readers of this Executive Summary will also read the full report – and, in due course, the college profiles that we will publish along with other tools generated by the study.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation was the main funder of this study. The Ford Foundation and the Dollar General Corporation provided supplemental funding. Because the project took more time and was more expensive than originally projected, we are also indebted to The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. and to our other sources of general support funding.

Gail Spangenberg
President
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. SYNOPSIS

Adult education English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction is an essential national education service,* but the outcomes of most ESL programs are by no means as great as they should and can be – in terms of learning gains, retention, and transitions to further education. Fortunately, at least some programs have developed a wide range of innovative strategies that meet with considerable success in addressing these problems. Regrettably, inadequate funding for ESL – as well as administrative and other policy issues – has prevented programs from taking most successful strategies to scale, and other programs have no way to learn about them in depth. Funding for ESL should be greatly increased to permit the dissemination of these strategies and to allow more students to benefit from them, as well as to advance research and development of new strategies to improve program outcomes.

2. THE SERVICE

ESL instruction for adults is the largest component of America's adult education system. More than 40 percent of all adult students in publicly funded programs are enrolled in ESL classes – more than 1.2 million students per year – and most ESL programs have waiting lists for admission that sometimes exceed the numbers enrolled.

Virtually all ESL students are immigrants. Census data and projections indicate that half the growth of the American workforce in the 1990s was due to immigration – and most of our future workforce growth will come from this source, primarily from legal immigration. A large percent of adult immigrants (estimated at 15 million or more) have very limited English proficiency, and many also have low levels of prior education in their native countries. Most ESL students at the lower levels of English proficiency have less than a high school diploma. This combination of limited ability in English and limited education severely limits the contributions they can make to the American economy, as well as their prospects for personal well-being and assimilation. In large numbers, they seek out adult ESL programs and related adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary (ASE) programs to address these problems. As a result, ESL service plays a critically important role in improving the quality of our workforce and in addressing a wide range of social and economic problems.

3. THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE ROLE

Community colleges are among the largest providers of adult education ESL service in many states and communities. At community colleges in New York City, San Francisco,

* Notes: (a) The term “*adult education* English as a second language” is used in this report to distinguish it from other adult ESL service, such as programs for foreign students or services of private language schools. (b) This report uses ESL (English as a Second Language) rather than ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) because it flows better and is a convenience.

and Miami, ESL is both the single largest program offered and the fastest growing program. At most colleges, adult education ESL service is called “non-credit ESL” to distinguish it from the credit ESL programs colleges offer to prepare people with limited English proficiency for academic and vocational programs. In many respects, community colleges are ideal providers of adult ESL service, because they are adult-focused institutions that offer both non-credit and credit ESL as well as opportunities for immigrants to pursue further education – all under a single educational umbrella.

Non-credit ESL service at colleges resembles adult education ESL service offered by other providers (school systems and community-based organizations) in many ways. It is offered at no charge, and teaches the same range of core English skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening/comprehension in English) to learners who range from immigrants with virtually no English language ability at all to those prepared to undertake credit ESL programs or other forms of further education. Finally, the focus of most non-credit ESL is on “life skills English” – the language skills that will help immigrants function better in everyday life and on the job.

4. THE CHALLENGE

Like ESL service offered by other providers, however, non-credit ESL instruction at colleges has disappointing results. The federal government’s National Reporting System for adult education (NRS) classifies language proficiency by six levels. According to the NRS, the overwhelming majority of ESL students enter programs at the two lowest levels, and NRS reports that only about 36 percent of ESL students advance one level per year. Longitudinal research prepared for CAAL by two community colleges indicates that only a small percentage of ESL students are enrolled in programs for as long as four semesters (the equivalent of two years or less) – either consecutively or at any time. As a result, few ESL students experience significant learning gains from adult education ESL programs. Moreover, only about 10 percent of non-credit ESL students make transitions to credit ESL, and an even smaller percentage make transitions to college academic or vocational programs.

5. THIS STUDY

The problems of learning gains, persistence, and transitions clearly call for serious attention. Fortunately, at least some community colleges and other ESL providers have devised innovative and effective strategies to address them.

This report is based on a two-year study of ESL service at community colleges by the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL). The study draws on the authors’ extensive knowledge of and exposure to dozens of community colleges and ESL programs through other studies, but it is based primarily on an in-depth examination of the innovative strategies adopted by five community colleges identified by ESL experts and their peers as exemplary in their provision of adult ESL service. The five colleges are:

- Bunker Hill Community College – Charlestown, Massachusetts
- The City College of San Francisco (CCSF) – San Francisco, California
- The College of Lake County – Grayslake, Illinois
- Seminole Community College – Sanford, Florida
- Yakima Valley Community College – Yakima, Washington

The learning gains and transition rates of adult education ESL students at all of these colleges significantly exceed national norms and the norms for their states. More importantly, these colleges have developed a rich menu of innovative strategies for improving ESL service that can and should point the way toward progress for both other colleges and policymakers. This report describes those strategies in considerable detail and draws conclusions for practice and policy.

6. IMPROVING LEARNING GAINS

The colleges examined in this study have adopted at least three highly effective strategies for increasing learning gains of adult education ESL students. They are:

- High intensity programs with managed enrollment
- Extending learning outside the classroom
- Adapting curricula to learner needs.

High intensity instruction. Most adult education ESL programs meet at most three to six hours per week and are “open-entry/open-exit.” All the colleges examined in this study have implemented at least some programs that meet 12-24 hours per week (high intensity). In most of these programs, students may only enter at the beginning of each semester, and they are dropped from the program unless they attend on a regular basis. Many adult educators are concerned that ESL students cannot make such a large commitment to learning English, but all of these programs are filled, many have waiting lists, and most of the colleges are extending them. At Seminole, 80 percent of all non-credit ESL students are served by high intensity/managed enrollment programs. Programs of this sort invariably show greatly increased learning gains, compared both to national norms and to comparable low intensity programs at the colleges where they are offered. Students in the high intensity program offered by City College of San Francisco achieve learning gains per year that are twice to three times as great as students at comparable levels enrolled in the college’s lower intensity program.

Learning outside the classroom. All of the colleges examined have devised strategies to increase learning time and encourage students to practice their English with native speakers outside the classroom. All of them make extensive use of instructional technology for these purposes. Lake County, Seminole, and Yakima have devised instructional modules that require students to interact with native speakers in conjunction with class projects. Many of the colleges also make extensive use of informal conversation groups, homework, and individual tutoring. All of these colleges believe these strategies are integral to the success of their non-credit ESL programs.

Adapting curricula for learner needs. All of the colleges examined have taken special measures to accommodate the major differences in English proficiency and prior education levels of ESL students. Perhaps the most striking strategy is Yakima's "learner-centered thematic" curriculum. Because virtually all of Yakima's students have very low levels of English proficiency and prior education when they enter the program, the College has adopted an instructional approach often used in third world countries. Rather than establishing a set curriculum, classes are structured at each level around study projects selected by students. This appears to engage the interest of students and make them "active learners," both in the classroom and outside. Yakima's approach to low-level learners has been highly successful: the learning gains and transition rates of its ESL students significantly exceed those of comparable students in the state.

The issue of assessment. Both the design and the implementation of these and other innovative practices for increasing learning gains are handicapped because there are no affordable assessment measures (tests) that indicate the full range of English language ability of adults and some of the tests available are expensive to administer. As a result, college and other ESL providers are to some extent "flying blind" when they must make decisions about how individual students can best be served, what progress and problems they are encountering, what types of innovative strategies will serve them best, and how effective those strategies are. This is a major structural problem in the adult ESL field and should be addressed by public investment or private initiatives to develop adequate assessment measures. It may be that combining existing computer-adaptive tests with advanced voice recognition software can address the problem.

7. INCREASING TRANSITIONS

Because most adult ESL students have very limited prior education in their native countries, improving their English language abilities will not by itself give them the opportunity to contribute all that they are capable of to our nation's workforce and society. It is discouraging that only about 10 percent make the transition to further education of any kind.

Transition rates are so low primarily because educational pathways from the lowest levels of English proficiency to enrollment in academic or vocational programs are so long. Usually, ESL students must devote years to improving their English by ESL programs and to improving their educational levels by ABE/ASE programs. Even then they must enroll in credit ESL programs, because the "life skills" curricula of most adult education ESL programs do not provide them with the specialized English language skills required for academic studies. These pathways to further education require a longer commitment of time, and a larger commitment of money, than most working adults with other responsibilities can make.

To address this issue, the colleges examined by the CAAL study have adopted a number of innovative approaches that significantly increase transition rates. Among these are the strategies to increase learning gains just discussed. The faster ESL students can master

life skills ESL, the faster they can move on to further education. In addition, the five colleges studied have adopted several other strategies. Among them are:

- Curricular integration with college preparation
- Co-enrollment
- Vocational ESL (VESL) programs
- The Spanish GED
- Enhanced guidance and counseling systems

Curricular integration. Most of the colleges examined have developed “pre-collegiate” programs. Instead of teaching students life skills English throughout the course of non-credit studies, these special programs teach many of the skills that would be taught in credit ESL. Programs of this sort usually provide high intensity instruction for these purposes to students beginning at the Intermediate level of English language proficiency or above. And they are usually designed to help students understand and meet the expectations of academic programs by special college preparation modules and by establishing expectations that are similar to those of academic courses. Most programs of this sort have transition rates that greatly exceed those of other programs for students at comparable levels at the same colleges.

An important variant of these strategies is Yakima’s transition program. Its goal is to help students make seamless transitions to ABE/ASE. It accomplishes this by enrolling ESL students in an increasing number of ABE courses taught in English beginning at the Low Intermediate level of English proficiency. This is a high intensity program, and a large percentage of the students who enroll in it not only complete the program but also become full-time ABE students at about the 9th grade ability level – the level at which ASE instruction usually begins. One key to success in this kind of transition program is that the curricula are usually designed “from the top down” to anticipate the requirements of credit ESL and academic studies. Another is that the programs use the same assessment measures employed by credit programs.

Co-enrollment. Even those non-credit ESL students placed in the same instructional levels differ in their English language abilities and their prior education, so at least some of them can succeed in certain non-credit or credit vocational or academic courses before they have reached the upper levels of non-credit ESL. Many colleges allow non-credit ESL students to “co-enroll” in certain courses taught in English. This practice not only allows students to gain valuable skills taught by those courses, but it also allows them to practice their English in authentic situations. It may also increase their motivation to persist in ESL, because it reinforces the idea that the purpose of ESL is not simply to learn more English. Longitudinal research prepared for this CAAL study indicates that co-enrolled students are more likely than other non-credit students to make the transition to credit ESL and other types of further education.

Vocational ESL (VESL). VESL programs are among the most effective and fastest growing forms of non-credit ESL instruction. That is because they provide a “shortcut”

to vocational certification in areas of employment for which there is a significant workforce demand – such as aspects of the allied health field, and various areas of construction, maintenance, and hospitality. They offer a shortcut in that they enroll students who are at the Intermediate levels of ESL and often have no more than a sixth grade education. Effective VESL programs allow these students to obtain postsecondary vocational certifications without having to pursue the time-consuming pathway of improving their skills through a sequence of non-credit and credit ESL programs and/or ABE/ASE instruction.

VESL programs take many forms. Those examined in this study have three elements: (1) a high intensity course that teaches students English language skills (such as vocabulary and particular types of writing) that are specially required by a particular vocation and that increase their general educational levels in math and other subjects the vocation requires, (2) enrollment in a pre-existing vocational program taught in English, and (3) an ESL support course that meets concurrently with the vocational course to help students with language or basic skills problems encountered in that course. The success rate of well-designed VESL programs, in terms of course completion and obtaining vocational certifications, is very high. In addition, a significant percentage of VESL students return to complete traditional non-credit and credit ESL programs – and to make transitions to higher levels of education. A major problem with VESL programs is that their development is often grant-funded, and it is difficult to sustain them after this funding ends.

The Spanish GED. The Spanish GED examination is a literal translation of the GED examination in English offered by the GED Testing Service. Most of the colleges examined offer courses to prepare for this test, and there are often waiting lists for these courses. Many immigrants prefer to take the GED examination in Spanish because they believe their writing skills in English are not strong enough. The Spanish GED not only provides these students with a valuable credential, but it also enhances their ability to make transitions to academic or vocational programs that require a high school diploma or equivalent.

Enhanced guidance and counseling. Because the pathways from non-credit ESL to academic and vocational studies can be long and complex, a strong program of guidance and counseling is required to help students make transitions. Most colleges make some efforts along these lines, but they are often unsystematic. A few colleges have developed systematic programs that include mandatory workshops and seminars, with special focus groups and individualized support by program specialists and faculty who are devoted entirely to assisting non-credit ESL students.

8. FACULTY QUALITY

Even the best designed programs to increase learning gains and transitions will not succeed without highly trained teachers to implement them. Effective ESL instruction requires specialized professional knowledge, teaching skills, experience, and personal

qualities that teachers who have not been trained for this field do not have. To develop and sustain a high quality faculty, programs must adopt four major strategies:

- Establish high standards for the hiring of faculty;
- Treat all faculty members like highly qualified professionals by providing them with appropriate status within the college through full-time employment opportunities, adequate reimbursement, benefits, and professional opportunities;
- Provide robust programs of continuing professional development; and
- Establish faculty resource centers and websites.

Standards for employment. Regrettably, most states have not established very high standards for adult education ESL teachers. In the ESL field, the “gold standard” for qualifications is a Masters degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) or a special certification in TESOL or a related field. This is a high bar to cross, but most of the programs examined by this study require qualifications at this level for their full-time faculty members, and an increasing number require equivalent standards for their new part-time instructors. These programs demonstrate that high professional standards can be both required and met.

Status. Regrettably, cost constraints prevent most colleges and other adult ESL programs from employing a very large number of full-time ESL instructors. The vast majority of instruction is provided by part-time teachers. Full-time faculty provide an anchor of professional expertise to programs, and they can undertake a variety of essential tasks such as program administration, curriculum development, training, testing, advising students, evaluating program performance, and developing improved strategies for instruction that part-time faculty cannot undertake. The City College of San Francisco (CCSF) has shown that colleges can increase the ratio of full-time to part-time faculty if they have the will to do so and that they accrue many benefits from this policy. Roughly half of the CCSF’s ESL faculty are employed full time.

Regrettably, too, part-time instructors at most of the colleges examined by the CAAL study (except CCSF) are paid at half the rate or less of full-time faculty, although many of the colleges provide them with healthcare and other benefits (which have substantial financial value), as well as opportunities for professional development and preference in hiring for full-time positions when openings arise. Also, all of the colleges examined have largely eliminated differentials in salary, benefits, and professional opportunities between faculty that teach in credit and non-credit programs that are common in many community colleges.

Professional development. All of the colleges examined provide faculty members with opportunities for continuing professional development through stipends and/or released time to attend professional conferences, workshops, special training sessions, and courses

toward advanced degrees. They also provide reimbursement for work on curriculum development and other program improvement activities. Moreover, individual colleges have developed distinctive strategies for professional development. Among these are:

- Peer mentoring at Yakima. Experienced faculty members are paired with new teachers in a structured program to help the new teachers master the College's distinctive approach to instruction.
- TESOL Certification Program at Lake County. The College has developed its own TESOL certification program that provides 30 credit hours of courses that are in many ways equivalent to the instruction provided by Masters degree programs in TESOL. The purpose of the program is to provide qualified ESL staff for the College, and Lake County has raised the hiring requirements for its ESL faculty as a result. The program is offered at a nominal cost to Lake County faculty and largely supported by tuition from K-12 teachers who can gain ESL teaching endorsements by taking some of the courses.
- Training for the REEP** Writing Rubric at Bunker Hill. The REEP rubric is the primary ESL assessment measure used at Bunker Hill. It requires on-going faculty training to assure consistency in scoring. This training builds mutual faculty understanding about the expectations of non-credit and credit programs, as well as the opportunity for collective learning that extends beyond assessment.
- Reflective teaching at CCSF. This strategy consists of highly structured faculty discussion groups that address major problems that arise in the classroom and then explore possible solutions. Faculty members believe this form of professional development greatly increases their teaching skills.
- Program Specialists at Seminole. Seminole employs three staff members whose sole duty is to support faculty in performing their duties. This support includes counseling and trouble-shooting with students, assessment, curriculum development, managing instructional technology, and a wide range of administrative functions that relieve faculty of non-instructional duties and allow them to concentrate more fully on teaching.

Resource centers and websites. All of the colleges examined maintain extensive resource centers that include information about curricular frameworks, assessment, lesson plans, course syllabi, and other tools of instruction. Most of the colleges also have extensive faculty websites that provide this information online and serve as a means of communication among faculty members about issues of general and specialized interest.

** An online adult ESL assessment and instructional system developed by the Arlington (Virginia) Education and Employment Program (REEP).

9. ENGINEERING INNOVATION

The limits of innovation. The instructional and staff development strategies adopted by the colleges examined in the CAAL study provide a rich menu from which other colleges can select innovative strategies to improve the performance of their programs. However, only a fairly small number of students and faculty are served by these strategies, even at most of the colleges that have developed them. Progress toward adopting, expanding, refining, and disseminating innovative strategies to other programs has been episodic and slow. In part, this has been due to inadequate funding for adult ESL service, which is treated below. In part, however, these problems arise from the fact that most colleges have not adopted the managerial strategies required to optimize the resources they have.

To consolidate the gains colleges have made in improving non-credit ESL, and to move forward in providing better service to more students, individual colleges and other providers must adopt more systematic approaches to program improvement. In addition, federal and state authorities must provide certain kinds of support for innovation that are beyond the scope of what colleges and other providers, acting individually, can generate.

What colleges must do. Colleges must adapt their managerial and organizational systems to engineer innovation. At a minimum this will require:

- A commitment to strategic planning for non-credit ESL. Colleges must establish processes to comprehensively examine the design and effectiveness of their non-credit programs on a regular basis (ideally each year), establish specific goals and objectives for program improvement, and support the implementation of these measures. With the exception of CCSF, none of the colleges examined has implemented comprehensive strategic planning processes at the program level, and CCSF's plans are developed only once every seven years.
- Establish managerial responsibilities to support strategic planning. At most colleges, responsibility for non-credit ESL, credit ESL, and ABE/ASE is fragmented among different departments or divisions. Nobody is responsible for identifying and developing the improvements in service required to meet the needs of ESL students, and nobody has the authority to implement those improvements. Although program directors and department chairpersons nominally have this responsibility, they are overwhelmed by routine administrative duties. Colleges must establish points of responsibility for program improvement and provide supplemental staff support.
- Expand research on program outcomes and integrate it into the program development process. The information most colleges and program managers have about the effectiveness of their programs is remarkably limited, and it is seldom used for program planning. NRS reports are rarely used for these purposes at the colleges examined for three reasons: the colleges do not believe they accurately reflect what programs teach, they are based on

questionable assessment measures, and they do not distinguish among different program components. Most importantly, neither NRS data nor most of the other data available to ESL programs provide longitudinal (multi-year) information of student progress, and this is essential to assessing programs in which students often take many years to achieve their goals. Colleges must forge closer relationships between their ESL programs and their institutional research offices to generate the longitudinal data they need, gather data on key variables not now recorded, and apply that data to planning processes. This CAAL study found that such relationships are both possible and fruitful.

- Provide supportive budgeting systems. Most colleges employ some version of baseline budgeting systems that primarily reward programs for increasing or maintaining the numbers of students served, and they are reluctant to incorporate innovative strategies into their core budgets. Colleges should adopt budgeting systems that place greater emphasis on learning gains, transitions, and other outcomes, and they should at least incorporate the resources required to develop innovative strategies into their core budgets.

What others must do. To substantially improve non-credit ESL service, certain measures should be taken by federal, state, or private funding sources. Among them are:

- Establish a system of peer learning in adult education ESL. This CAAL study discovered that colleges are rarely aware of the innovative strategies adopted by their peers, and there is no effective mechanism by which they can get this information. This failure of information dissemination greatly reduces the rate of program improvement in non-credit ESL. One of the most important steps that can be taken to improve program quality is to establish a system of peer learning that will result in the dissemination of in-depth information about innovative practices (through both face-to-face contacts and the use of technology) and foster collaborative efforts in research and development.
- Improve reporting requirements. The NRS system places requirements on programs that the colleges examined have found to be of little value in assessing their programs and developing strategies for better service. Because the primary goal of the NRS is to compare the performance of states, a sampling methodology, rather than a system that requires assessing every student with prescribed tests, might be considered. Programs would benefit from a system that allows them to benchmark their performance relative to their peers. A collaborative effort of ESL programs and states would be required to design an effective benchmarking system.
- Support research on priority issues. There has been very little high quality research that would inform program improvement in adult education ESL, outside the areas of pedagogy and teacher training. Among the types of programs needed are:

- Baseline longitudinal research on the effectiveness of adult education ESL service;
- In-depth research on the effectiveness of innovative strategies and why they are successful;
- Research on the contributions that CBOs make to ESL service, by providing both instruction and supportive services to learners;
- Research on strengthening the linkages between ESL programs and welfare or other job training agencies;
- Research on improving the cost effectiveness of programs that provide immigrants with the English language skills required to pass the test for American citizenship; and
- Research on how ESL programs can be structured to improve students' lifelong learning of English after they have separated from formal instructional systems.

10. COSTS AND FUNDING

The need. It is widely acknowledged that total national funding for adult education ESL service is grossly inadequate to meet either the need or the demand for this service. The long waiting lists at many ESL programs are often cited to support this point. This study has demonstrated the effects of inadequate funding on the quality, rather than the quantity, of instruction.

Relatively few students are served by innovative strategies to increase learning gains and transitions. The main reason is that these strategies are considerably more expensive than standard ESL service. On average, the national expenditure for adult ESL is on the order of \$600 per enrolled student per year, but the innovative strategies examined by this report cost on the order of \$1500-\$3000 or more for a student who would be enrolled for two semesters each year. This forces colleges and other providers to choose between serving a large number of students with standard ESL instruction, and serving a smaller number with enriched service that improves their learning gains and transition rates. Because of federal, state, and institutional pressures to serve as many students as possible, most providers tilt toward limiting their investments in enriched strategies. Inadequate funding also limits the ability of colleges and other providers to retain more full-time faculty, provide equitable reimbursement for part-time teachers, develop robust professional development systems, and adopt the measures required to engineer for innovation.

Although most colleges could be more creative in finding additional resources to support innovative strategies in ESL, there are limits to their ability to do so. A major increase in total national funding for adult education ESL is urgently required. Without it, there is

little chance that either the quantity or quality of this essential service will be improved greatly. Additional funding can be provided on a targeted basis or more comprehensively. A combination of both approaches is desirable.

Targeted approaches. Some specific areas where additional funding should be targeted are:

- Transitions programs. At present there is a policy vacuum with regard to increasing transitions by ESL students to further education, and no funds are earmarked for this purpose. States and programs should be mandated to develop policies and plans to greatly increase transition rates, and at least \$100 million in federal funding should be earmarked to support these efforts, including the expansion of VESL programs.
- Program improvement funds. At present, 12.5 percent of federal funding for adult education is earmarked for program improvement. This amount is manifestly inadequate to support the professional development, systematic planning, and creation of innovative strategies required, let alone to meet the cost of assessment and reporting mandated by the NRS. A major increase in funding for these purposes from federal and state sources is essential.
- Peer learning. As noted above, the adult ESL field urgently needs a system of peer learning to disseminate the lessons learned from innovative strategies developed by some programs to others. This is a highly cost-effective means of program improvement.
- Development of adequate ESL assessment measures. The lack of assessment measures that are affordable to administer and measure the full range of ESL skills is a major structural problem in the ESL field. A significant investment is required by government or the private sector to overcome this problem.
- A more robust research agenda. There has been very little investment in most aspects of research on adult education ESL. As noted above, the list of essential topics that require high quality research is long. A major investment in any or all of these is required.
- Adopting supportive policies. A number of federal and/or state policies create barriers to the most effective use of resources now available. In particular, policies that create incentives to increase the quantity of students served, rather than the quality of service, should be modified. Also, programs should be permitted to charge tuition and fees for adult education ESL programs when public funds are inadequate to support the quantity or quality of service required. The CAAL study found evidence that a substantial number of non-credit students are willing and able to pay for this service if they must.

Comprehensive reform. Targeted funding increases would make a major contribution to improving the quality of adult ESL service. By themselves, however, these increases would not be sufficient to reduce waiting lists or to take many innovative strategies to scale. To accomplish these goals, a major increase in total federal/state funding specifically for ESL is required. At present, total national funding is on the order of \$700 million per year. Doubling that amount would be a reasonable initial goal.

Accomplishing this may well require a reconsideration of how adult education ESL is positioned in the overall adult education system. At present, there is no separate authorization or line item appropriation for ESL. Policy and funding for this service are combined with policy and funding for ABE/ASE. Yet, in most respects, ESL is a wholly different service from adult education for native speakers of English. It serves a very different population with very different needs and goals, and it employs almost completely different instructional methods and tools. This study recommends that policymakers and adult education leaders consider carefully whether it is in the best interests of all aspects of adult education, including its adult ESL strand, to separate the present policy and funding links. In many respects, these links are artificial and may be counter-productive to improving both ESL and ABE/ASE service.