

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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and Competitiveness

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Chairman Hinojosa and Members of the Subcommittee, the Department appreciates this opportunity to talk with you about the federally funded adult education programs that the Department of Education administers and the significant role they can play in supporting America's economic recovery. Adult education is an important part of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), and we appreciate your recognition of its role in helping adults increase their literacy skills, learn English, transition to postsecondary education, and obtain jobs that pay family-supporting wages. The Department very much looks forward to working with you to ensure that adult education programs continue to effectively prepare participating adults for employment and further learning.

I am the director of the Department's Division of Adult Education and Literacy. Our division is housed in the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). The division is responsible for the Adult Education State Grant Program as well as national leadership initiatives to support State and local accountability, program improvement, and innovation authorized by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) in Title II of the WIA.

Today, I will discuss the Department's adult education program and include some information on current learner demographics, program performance, and national initiatives that help adults in the United States obtain the literacy and employability skills they need to get and keep family-supporting jobs.

We are proud that the Adult Education State Grant Program is rated “effective” by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Our program participated in OMB’s 2006 Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) review, which is designed to assess and improve program performance, and identify program strengths and weaknesses. The Adult Education State Grant Program was one of five Department programs to achieve an “effective” rating during the time the Executive Branch carried out PART reviews. The PART assessment findings, including the scoring and explanation for program design, program management, strategic planning, program management, and program accountability are available online at [www.Expectmore.gov](http://www.Expectmore.gov).

### **Who Does Adult Education Serve?**

Adults eligible for services funded by AEFLA are at least 16 years old, are beyond their State’s age for compulsory school attendance, are not enrolled in high school, and lack sufficient mastery of basic educational skills. They do not have a secondary school diploma (or its equivalent) or are unable to read, speak, or write in English. More than 2.3 million students enrolled in adult education programs nationwide last year. Of those, 45 percent participated in English literacy programs (EL), 41 percent in adult basic education (ABE), which provides instruction to adults with reading and math below the eighth grade, and 14 percent in adult secondary education (ASE), which provides instruction between ninth and twelfth grade levels. Our most recent data show that Hispanics comprise the largest ethnic group enrolled in adult education programs at 44 percent, followed by White at 26 percent, African Americans at 20 percent, and Asians at 8 percent.

Adult education programs serve a varied and significant youth population, primarily high school drop-outs. Last year, more than one third of students (850,000) enrolled in adult education were between the ages of 16 and 24. Nearly one half million of these young learners had math and

reading skills below the eighth-grade level. About one fifth of these learners were unable to read, write, or speak English well enough to function on the job or participate in civic functions.

More than one million adults enrolled in programs assisted by AEFLA to improve their English proficiency. Three-fourths of these adults, when assessed, were found to have English literacy levels at “low beginning” to “low intermediate,” indicating a significant need to improve both spoken and written English-language skills to attain the proficiency necessary to allow them to advance in America and obtain family-supporting jobs.

### **How Is Adult Education Delivered?**

Appropriations for the Adult Education State Grant Program have remained at approximately \$560 million annually for the last five years. Program funding is distributed by formula to a State agency designated by State law. Nationwide, we find that 33 States provide State Grant funds to State educational agencies (SEAs), 12 States provide them to their community college or technical college systems, two States provide them to State workforce agencies, and five States provide the funds to their State Labor Departments.

The law requires that at least 25% of the total amount of funds expended for adult education and literacy activities in a State be from non-Federal contributions. Financial reports submitted to our Adult Education National Reporting System (NRS) show that on average every Federal dollar is matched by an impressive nationwide average of \$3.50 in non-Federal spending to educate adults who need to learn English or whose basic literacy skills are too low obtain family-supporting employment. Some States spend as much as \$9 dollars for every Federal adult education dollar they receive. Florida is an example of a State that matches at that level. Other States spend only the minimum required.

State agencies designated to receive AEFLA funds must, by law, distribute the funds competitively to eligible providers, including local school districts, postsecondary institutions, and community and faith-based organizations. Federal dollars appropriated under AEFLA support adult learning through more than 4,100 providers nationwide. Slightly more than half (51 percent) of these providers are local educational agencies; 16 percent are postsecondary institutions — primarily community, junior, or technical colleges. Among smaller providers, 21 percent of the national total are community-based organizations, and about three percent are faith-based organizations. We also find that four percent of all providers are correctional institutions and two percent are libraries.

### **How Is the Quality and Transparency of Adult Education Services Ensured?**

The Department is helping States ensure program quality as well as making performance accountability information transparent and easily available to Congress and the public. The Adult Education State Grant program is one of the first Federal education programs to build a publicly available system providing national data that can be used to evaluate State program effectiveness and ensure continuous improvement. Our Adult Education National Reporting System (NRS) collects and monitors data on adult education student outcomes, and State-level data are available to the public on line. The Department has assisted States and local programs in using the data they collect for the NRS to develop publicly available, easy-to-understand report cards demonstrating State and local performance on student achievement. Several States use report cards to provide performance data to State legislators, students, and the public.

AEFLA requires States to establish outcome-based accountability systems to determine the effectiveness of local providers in continuously improving adult education activities. The national reporting system (NRS) identifies five core student outcomes that States report on to

meet their accountability requirements under AEFLA, along with definitions of the measures, methodologies for collecting them, and reporting formats. The five core measures are: 1) educational gain, 2) attainment of a high school diploma, 3) entry into postsecondary education or training, 4) entered employment, and 5) job retention.

States are adopting performance-based funding models to distribute both Federal and State adult education funds. These models provide incentives for local providers to improve the quality and effectiveness of their services. At least ten States use some form of performance-based criteria in funding adult education service providers. The Department is supporting a national project to assist States in implementing performance-based funding by providing training and technical assistance on performance-based funding for States that want to create or improve such systems. Sixteen States recently participated in our national training workshop on performance-based funding supported by this AEFLA national leadership project.

### **What Results Does Adult Education Achieve?**

In the last five years, over 3.9 million enrolled adults have made “demonstrated improvements”, as measured on standardized assessments, in reading, math, and English proficiency. Highlights from our NRS five-year aggregate data show that:

- 1) 615,828 learners or 42% who set a goal of obtaining a job found and entered employment after they exited the program.
- 2) 813,367 learners or 51% who set a goal of obtaining a GED (or its State equivalent) received a GED.
- 3) 231,691 learners or 37% who set a goal of enrolling in postsecondary education successfully entered postsecondary education or training after completing the program.
- 4) 1.8 million adult learners or 38% succeeded in improving basic literacy skills.

- 5) 2.1 million immigrants or 39% improved writing, reading, and oral proficiency in English.

### **What Challenges Face Adult Education?**

The Department's work in partnership with the States has produced significant accomplishments and helped many learners achieve their education and employment goals. Many challenges still exist, particularly in the job market, where the "bar" for literacy skills that are required for family-supporting employment is constantly being raised.

**1) Our Federal-State partnership serves only a small portion of the adults who need literacy instruction.** The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) found that over 30 million adults have below-basic levels of literacy and another 63 million read English only at a very basic level. This finding indicates that 44 percent of adults living in the U.S. could benefit from English literacy instruction. In addition, our State partners are facing the worst fiscal crisis since World War II and must re-examine all their financial commitments, including appropriations for adult education.

**2) America's high school drop-out rate is significant, and students who leave high school frequently look to adult education to provide the education and support they need to earn the secondary credential required for even the most basic employment.** Data from the Department's National Center for Education Statistics show that 73.2 percent of public school students graduate within four years of starting high school. Among young adults, ages 16 to 24, 9.3 percent are out of school and don't have a diploma.

**3) Adults need postsecondary credentials to obtain jobs that will allow them to feed their families and pay their mortgages.** The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that almost 75 percent of jobs in occupations that are projected to experience above average employment growth through 2016 and had above average wages in 2006 typically require some level of

postsecondary education. Currently, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2007 American Community Survey, 65 percent of adults have no associate or higher degree.

**4) Immigrants with lower educational skills and training need to learn English not only for employment but also to participate in civic functions that are necessary for life in our democracy.** The U.S. Census indicates that the number of adults who are immigrants and/or who speak English less than "very well" is significant and growing. Assuming that today's levels of immigration remain constant, immigrants are expected to account for half of the U.S. population by 2015 (based on 2007 Educational Testing Service report entitled *America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future*, ETS, 2007). One-third of foreign-born persons in the U.S. do not have a high school diploma, and approximately 17.8 million adults are limited English proficient.

#### **How Is the Department Addressing the Challenges?**

The Department has created initiatives designed to address the challenges facing adult education programs nationwide by enhancing program quality and stimulating development and innovation. Our leadership initiatives are carried out under the authority of section 243 of the AEFLA, which authorizes the Secretary to establish and carry out a "program of national leadership activities to enhance the quality of adult education and literacy programs nationwide." In recent years, Congress has appropriated between roughly \$7 million and \$9 million for these activities.

The Department is currently using national leadership funds to help address our current economic challenges. We are supporting projects to develop innovative models that should help to connect completion of basic skills and English proficiency instruction to acquisition of high-demand jobs. National leadership funds are expanding the "pipeline" to postsecondary

occupational training by preparing low-skilled adults for entry into, and advancement in, high-demand employment, based on regional economic needs.

The Adult Basic Education (ABE) Career Connections project, supported by national activities funds, is working in six local demonstration sites to assist ABE students to obtain the education and training necessary to begin careers in high-demand fields. One local program participating in this project is Instituto del Progreso Latino in Illinois, which is extending its certified nursing assistant program and creating a certified medical assistant program in response to the local labor demands in healthcare. Career pathway programs like the one at Instituto del Progreso Latino link basic education funding under AEFLA with projects for academic postsecondary coursework, work-specific instruction, hands-on classroom, and work site training supported by others.

Several States have launched large-scale efforts to realign their adult education systems with these “pathways” models supported in part by State leadership funds made available to all States under section 223 of the AEFLA. The State of Washington has developed a model that delivers English as a Second Language instruction integrated with occupational skills training. States also are using incentive funds provided under section 503 of the WIA to support these efforts. Oregon has invested its incentive money to connect its adult basic-skills program with its postsecondary career pathways initiative. Ohio has used its incentive funds to build its “stackable credential” model so that the model extends to the adult basic education program.

The Department also uses national leadership funds to support other projects linking low-skilled adults to the training they need for family-supporting employment. Our “Ready for College” discretionary grants help youths who have dropped out complete high school and prepare to succeed in college. The four States participating in this project (Kansas, New Jersey, Colorado and North Carolina) are demonstrating how to enhance adult secondary education to better prepare young adults for college success. The Kansas Board of Regents is working with seven



community colleges to improve teacher quality in math, writing, and critical thinking instruction. Essex County College in New Jersey leveraged its work on this project to earn private sector funding through Walmart's Gateway to College National Network. These innovative projects link adult education with other funding sources that pay for a range of services that would not otherwise be provided by the adult education program.

### **How Is Collaboration Improving Adult Education Services?**

The Department uses AEFLA national leadership funds to promote increased collaboration between the WIA Title I One-Stop system and the Title II adult education system in order to improve outcomes for adults who have both basic skills and employment needs. For example, using those funds, Maryland's Montgomery College and Montgomery Works' One-Stop Center collaborated to revise an English language customer-service training course developed by the National Retail Federation. The course integrates training on customer-service job skills with learning English. The State of Washington's Yakima Valley Community College and South Central Workforce Council worked together to enhance adult learners' basic literacy skills and their transition to employment. This project assessed clients who were receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) benefits and referred those with appropriate skills and interest in allied health to a Nurses' Assistant Certification training program offered by the college. Adult basic education providers and One-Stop Career Centers in Springfield and St. Joseph, Missouri, developed a model for referring clients from a shared client database between adult education programs and the career centers.

By supporting projects like these, the Department has used national leadership funds to design models that link adult basic-skills instruction with employment and ensured that adult education programs retain their mission as education programs. In providing assistance, our programs provide instruction in reading, writing, and math at a level appropriate to participants' needs.

Reading skill is a gatekeeper for all other areas of education, and few adult education teachers currently have research-based training in how to teach reading effectively.

Collaboration among the Department, the National Institute for Literacy, and the National Institute of Child Health and Development has been fruitful in identifying the evidence base for high-quality reading instruction. The Department is partnering with 18 States (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Texas, and Wisconsin) to put this knowledge to work in classrooms by providing intensive teacher training in evidence-based reading instruction.

The Department assists States in improving the quality of English as a Second Language teachers so that they can better meet the education and employment needs of adults with limited English skills. Direct technical assistance supported by the Department's national leadership funds has been provided to 30 States in the last five years by the Department's Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA) and CAELA Network projects. In Texas, teams of staff, regional professional developers, and local program administrators and teachers have worked to develop teacher training to better integrate workplace skills into ESL instruction, and to effectively teach adults at beginning literacy levels.

### **In conclusion**

We are very proud of our support for adult education and hope it can contribute to the success of America's economic recovery, especially in bringing basic literacy and English skills training to low-income adults.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify about the Department's adult education programs. We look forward to working with you to support the needs of adult education learners.

