

Transform Adult Education to Ensure More Students Reach Higher

In order to fulfill President Obama's goal that "every American commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training," the adult education system must be transformed to reflect the critical role it plays in our nation's ability to reach that goal. This requires changes to Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, including how success is defined and measured, how closely the Department of Education works with the Department of Labor and other entities, and what kinds of services are provided. Currently, the adult education system is hampered by too little funding and too many goals. While more funding for Title II is essential, adult education must be transformed so that it is seen by all as an important entry-point for low-skilled adults and older youth to longer-term education and training for 21st century credentials and careers. More adult education students must succeed in postsecondary education and training and in the workforce. Closer links and pathways to both postsecondary education and workforce development are crucial to ensure all students can attain family-supporting jobs, and gain greater self-efficacy in contributing to the educational success of their children and participating in society.

Our Title II reauthorization recommendations include:

- 1. Developing a new mission statement for adult education that is focused on helping lower-skilled individuals acquire the educational skills needed to achieve postsecondary and career success and attain family-supporting jobs.**
 - Revise the WIA Title II purpose and activities to focus on increasing the rate at which all students attain career and postsecondary success. Given the limited federal investment in adult education (\$1 of every \$4 spent on adult education comes from the federal government), it is essential that these dollars be strategically targeted toward supporting better postsecondary and employment outcomes for more students, just as the federal government targets its limited Elementary and Secondary Education investments on promoting particular outcomes. The states can maintain the flexibility to spend their adult education matching dollars as they wish.
 - Strengthen state planning requirements to promote closer ties with Title I and achieve greater outcomes for all students. Require state Title II adult education plans to specify how state and local programs will:
 - Plan and collaborate with Title I programs;
 - Help adult education students gain access to career counseling, job placement, and support services by increasing co-enrollment in WIA Title I programs. Set targets that steadily increase the percentage of Title I and II co-enrolled students over time and to promote closer connections between the two titles;
 - Connect with or involve the business community;
 - Describe activities that will move people along career and educational pathways, including readiness for and success in college, job training, employment or career advancement;

2. Supporting, seeding, and scaling up innovations that combine basic skills and postsecondary education and training.

- Support integrated and dual enrollment. The law should explicitly allow services to be provided before or in combination with work or postsecondary education and training and recognize that program strategies can include, but are not limited to, approaches that integrate basic skills and postsecondary education and training content or which may dual or concurrently enroll students in basic skills and postsecondary education and training.
- Provide targeted funding for integrated, dual, and concurrent approaches that combine basic skills and postsecondary education and training. Target \$75 million of federal Title II state grant appropriations to states for seeding and scaling up such approaches that integrate basic skills and postsecondary education and training or which dual or concurrently enroll students in basic skills and postsecondary education and training. Initially distribute \$25 million through formula to states so all states can work on designing new programs. Then provide \$50 million in competitive grants to states that wish to scale up these new efforts. This will help create new and shorter pathways for all students.

3. Providing federal support for workplace education programs, placing strong and visible focus on basic skill services to incumbent workers:

- Fund research, development, and dissemination activities and facilitate communications and provide technical assistance services in planning, development and improvement of programs;
- Fund best practices development; and
- Encourage increased access to workplace education through flexible delivery modes, including weekend, compressed, or accelerated formats, and technology-based strategies to adult education for lower-skilled incumbent workers in federal guidance and technical assistance.

4. Revamping data collection and performance accountability systems in order to incent and document continuous improvement toward the goal of increasing the rate at which all students achieve readiness for and attain postsecondary and career success leading to increased labor market outcomes.

- In the interest of building a robust performance management system, the federal government should help states develop state data collection systems that track students on a multi-year basis along pathways across adult education, postsecondary education and training, and into the labor market. Such systems should be anchored to a reformed National Reporting System (NRS). The government should provide funding to states to build their capacity to track adult education students along the pathway using administrative data, rather than student surveys (which are more expensive and provide less reliable data);
- Reform the NRS to better align the goals of WIA Titles I and II, GED and college and job readiness outcomes, related reporting and performance criteria, and varying realities of state adult skills and economic development needs; and

- Measure all core outcomes (educational gains, entered employment, retained employment, receipt of secondary school diploma or GED, and entered postsecondary education or training) for all Title II participants. This will establish a baseline of performance. Programs should continue to be required to work with students to establish educational and employment goals, but these goals should not be used in the NRS for purposes of establishing the denominator for measuring performance on core outcomes.

5. Making explicit that Title II programs can provide services to adults both without and with a high school diploma.

- Some state and local programs mistakenly believe that service to high school graduates is not allowed by WIA Title II. However, the service criterion in the law is “low skill level”, not exclusively lack of high school diploma. The law should explicitly state that Title II programs can use federal funding to provide services to adults both without and with a high school diploma, or its equivalent, in partnership with community colleges, WIA Title I services, and other providers.

Endorsed by:

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