

American Competitiveness Initiative

How can we compete
when
93 million adults
have skills below
the high school level?

The Adult Competitiveness Challenge

February 22, 2006

***Increasing
educational access
for millions of
undereducated parents
and workers.***



The Adult Competitiveness Challenge

THE AMERICAN COMPETITIVENESS INITIATIVE

Adult educators support an American Competitiveness Initiative to ensure a competitive workforce.

THE ADULT COMPETITIVENESS CHALLENGE

Ninety three million American adults (45% of the adult population) have limited reading, writing, and math skills (the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2005). It is difficult to imagine how individuals and their families can be successful or how public initiatives like job training, health, welfare reform, immigration, and children's education can be successful when 45% of the adult population is undereducated.

WORK:

Current and future jobs require educated adults with flexible skills that result from the accomplishment of a GED or high school diploma plus some college—not necessarily a two year college degree but some college, according to Tony Carnevale (2002) of the Educational Testing Service. Carnevale projects that within the next decade the US will be **12 million short** of this level of worker.

Where does industry find 12 million more workers with GED/high school plus some college? Public Schools? In 2005, the Department of Labor reported 150 million people in our workforce. In 2005, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported 3 million students graduated from high school. Thus, at best, **ONLY 2%** of our workforce comes from public schools EACH YEAR. So the source of workers must be the adult population today. We cannot afford to wait 50 years for education reform to reconstitute the workforce. We must move at least 12 million of the 93 million through the GED and on to community college within the next five years.

FAMILY:

How can No Child Left Behind be successful when the number one predictor of school success is the parent's education, and 45% of the adult population has basic skill deficiencies? How can the health of the family be provided for when the American Medical Association reports that 46% of adults cannot read and follow medical instructions (Nielsen-Bohlman, 2004). The success of job training, welfare reform, drug abuse, recidivism, aging, and an array of other family and social initiatives depends on adults who can read and interpret written material, compute mathematics, and communicate in the English language.

COMMUNITY:

How can our communities engage their citizens if 45% have difficulty reading and interpreting printed material? How can 93 million adults and their families realize the full benefit of being a member of their community and a citizen of this country?

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:

The Department of Education is responsible for leadership in adult education issues. The Secretary and Assistant Secretary have each cited the Department's response to the NAAL as strengthening the high school initiative (Department of Education, 2005).

We agree with that response for the 2% of the annual workforce that comes from high school graduates. But what about the 98% of the workforce that is no longer in school and already in the workforce or wanting to become a part of the workforce?

The Department's Institute for Education Sciences (IES) proposes to discontinue the one research center devoted to adult learning and scatter adult research through other centers that focus on children's education research. The result will be little or no adult oriented research.

The Adult Competitiveness Challenge: Who has the political imagination to provide educational access to a significant portion of the 93 million?

POLITICAL IMAGINATION

At the turn of the 20th century, high school became mandatory because the work place demanded that level of education.

At the turn of the 21st century, high school plus some post secondary/technical courses, not necessarily a college degree, is necessary for work with a family-sustaining income.

SUMMARY: If current and future jobs require GED/high school plus some college, there are three issues:

1. To provide **access** to adult education and family literacy services for a large portion of the 93 million who are left behind
2. For those successful with the adult education services, to enable their **transition** to community, technical, or four-year colleges.
3. To **convince the US Department of Education**, which oversees adult education services, that even though a high school initiative is important, it is only a small part of the answer when high schools produce only 2% of the annual workforce.
4. To convince IES to continue a research center devoted to adult learning research.

The Challenge:
“What is missing at the moment is a political imagination of how we do something just as big and just as important for the transition into the twenty-first century as we did for the nineteenth and twentieth.”

***Paul Romer, Stanford University Economist
from “The World is Flat” by Thomas L.
Friedman.***

It is not just jobs. Family and community responsibilities and expectations require similar levels of education as the work place.

In order to be competitive, we must provide access to adult education services for a large portion of the 93 million undereducated adults for the sake of these individuals, their families, our communities, and our country.

Political Imagination: Increasing Access for Millions of Undereducated Adult Americans

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

How do we provide access to a large portion of the 93 million undereducated adult Americans?

INCREASE ACCESS/QUALITY SERVICES:

Only 3% of the 93 million undereducated adult Americans have access to adult education and family literacy services primarily due to limited funding. However, states are doing well with the funding they received. The federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) sets incentives for states meeting or exceeding WIA performance standards. Last year, 43 state adult education programs qualified for incentive grants based on those performance standards. The remaining states and territories expect to qualify within the next two years.

With the limited funding available, adult education provides quality services and is poised to expand to meet individual and societal needs through a graduated increase in funding that would allow programs to expand services while maintaining quality services. Table 1 depicts an aggressive five year growth plan based on the federal allocation for state grants that currently provides approximately \$200/student. The federal allocation is supported by a state and local commitment of \$3 for every federal dollar, resulting in an overall federal and state investment of approximately \$800/student.

TABLE 1: Proposed Aggressive Five Year Growth Plan (see appendix for detailed plan)

FY	State Grant Allocation	Projected Enrollments		
		ABE	English Literacy	GED/AHS
2006-2007	\$ 585,000,000	1,094,147	1,191,097	484,749
2007-2008	\$700,000,000	1,134,470	1,234,993	502,613
2008-2009	\$1,000,000,000	1,253,149	1,364,188	555,193
2009-2010	\$1,500,000,000	1,445,083	1,573,128	640,712
2010-2011	\$2,000,000,000	1,617,722	1,761,065	716,712

What would the gradual increase of funds be used for? First, let's look at what we know about adult learning and secondly apply what we know to priorities for the 93 million.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT ADULT LEARNING?

WHAT ARE ADULT STUDENTS LIKE? Unlike school children who all learn the same skills and content in each grade, each adult has unique learning goals related to individual work, family, and/or community responsibilities. Adult education and family literacy responds by creating individual learning plans for each adult. Because of those work, family, and community responsibilities, the amount of time they can devote to going to class is limited. To further complicate the delivery of services, approximately 50% of adults who have not completed high school are suspected to have a learning disability—they have average or above intelligence but learn differently. Low-literate foreign born adults who speak a native language other than English are desperate to learn English in order to work, speak with their children's teachers, access health care (especially seniors on Medicare), and participate in the community. Current research (Comings, 2005) reveals that work, family, and community responsibilities conflict with participation in classroom activities, even though the adult students wish to continue. Supported non-classroom opportunities enable adults to continue improving skills when those interruptions occur.

One of the richest sites for adult education services is in the workplace. Jobs are changing, becoming more complex and requiring higher order skills and problem solving. Employers do not want to lose loyal employees. Providing adult education at the workplace (Workplace Education) enables development of reading, writing, math and problem solving skills customized to the work tasks. For the adult educator, helping the adult learner design an individual learning plan is much easier when it relates to a specific worksite goal. As a result, there are currently thousands of workplace education programs in existence; some paid for by the industry; others subsidized by public funds.

Lastly, many adult learners see the GED as their terminal goal. We now know that the GED is no longer enough. We must create transitions that expand access to the community college level courses and technical programs.

WHAT ARE ADULT PERSONNEL LIKE? Eighty percent (80%) of adult education instructors are part-time. Thousands in the instructional workforce are volunteers. Many of the program managers have other job responsibilities. Even though they bring a richly diverse set of skills to our work, few of the teachers, tutors, or program managers have training in adult education services prior to working in adult education. The National Evaluation of Adult Education conducted by Development Associates (1994) indicated that a critical success factor for adult education programs is the capacity to employ some full time instructors who either teach full-time or teach part-time and serve as a resource to part-time teachers and tutors. That local instructional leadership promises to further improve the quality of services.

The same National Evaluation identified a second factor for successful adult education programs: linkage to at least five other agencies. Undereducated adults need an education but they often need services from job training, public health, social services, and others. Adult Education program managers' job requires them to reach out to these other agencies to establish bilateral referral procedures between adult education services and these other support services.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT ADULT LEARNING? Research in adult learning is minimal. One reason is that little funding has gone to support research in adult learning. The other reason for the scarcity is the research constraints related to studying adult learning. Each adult learner may have a unique learning plan to meet his/her specific work, family, and/or community related

needs. As a result, comparisons and controls are confounded when everyone is not learning the same thing the same way. Secondly, adult learners are not required to attend class (no compulsory attendance as in public schools) making random assignment and control groups difficult to create and manage.

As a result, where standard scientifically based methods fit with the adult learner population, those methods should and could be used. However, other methods should be allowed and encouraged where they best fit.

How Would Program Expansion Funds Be Used?

FOUR PRIORITIES—THREE STATE, ONE FEDERAL: INCREASED ACCESS, CONTINUED QUALITY, PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT, AND RESEARCH

PRIORITY #1: ACCESS TO QUALITY SERVICES

1.1. Access: The first priority is to expand access by increasing the existing quality adult education and family literacy services. By instituting an aggressive managed growth policy, access is increased while quality is maintained.

1.2. Non-classroom Learning: The second access priority is non-classroom opportunities for students who cannot attend class sites. Those opportunities that promise success include web-based, home study, and video options supported by a teacher accessible by phone or email.

1.3. Transition to Community College: The third access priority includes incentives for adult education and community college personnel to create transition plans and procedures that encourage GED and adult high school graduates to continue learning.

PRIORITY #2: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY STAFF

2.1. Staff Quality: The first staff quality priority expands professional development services and accountability for all program managers, teachers, and tutors.

2.2. Instructional Leadership: The second staff quality priority would include funding levels that would allow local services to invest in some full time teachers/instructional leaders to provide the instructional leadership for the part-time teachers and tutors.

PRIORITY #3: PRIVATE SECTOR PRIORITIES

3.1. Workplace Education: The private sector program expansion opportunity includes providing incentives for states to build their capacity to customize instruction for specific workplaces enabling workers to retain employment as well as move up the career ladder.

PRIORITY # 4: RESEARCH:

4.1 Research: The Institute for Educational Sciences (IES) should allocate *an amount equal to* 1% of the federal adult education state grant allocation to fund an adult education research center to conduct and disseminate research to the various audiences (e.g., teacher/tutors, program managers, professional developers, state staff, policy makers, and publishers). IES should encourage experimental research in adult education; however, it should also acknowledge and fund other designs that are more compatible with adult learners as subjects.

What about the 93 million? Our political imagination in these priorities increases access to services by expanding the existing quality services while adding non-classroom alternatives and options, investing in the skills of all who provide those services, and expanding research to build a broader understanding for addressing the needs of adult learners.

Notes:

Page 1 * 2% of the annual workforce comes from high schools. The current workforce is 150 million (DOL). Public Schools graduate 3 million per year (NCES).

Carnevale, Tony, speech given to the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, February, 2002, Washington, DC. Dr. Carnevale describes “some college” as post-secondary training in community colleges, technical schools, proprietary schools, as well as four year institutions.

Comings, J.P., Parrella, A., and Soricone, L., Persistence Among Adult Basic Education Students in Pre-GED Classes, Harvard Graduate School of Education , NCSALL REPORT #12, December 1999

Department of Education (2005)

- 1. At the release of the NAAL webcast, Acting Assistant Secretary Beto Gonzale, proposed their high school initiative as the response to the NAAL.*
- 2. Commenting on the results of the NAAL in a speech at the U.S. University Presidents Summit on International Education, Secretary Spelling stated, “The president and I think that's simply unacceptable. So, we're supporting high school reform that focuses on core subjects like reading, math, and science to help more students graduate ready for college.”*

Development Associates, National Evaluation of Adult Education, Development Associates, Arlington, VA, 1994

National Assessment of Adult Literacy, NCES, 2005,
<http://nces.ed.gov/NAAL/index.asp?file=FAQ/General.asp&PageId=133>. See attachment of Key Findings.

Nielsen-Bohlman, L., Panzer, A.M., Kindig, D. A., Editors, Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion, AMA Committee on Health Literacy, 2004

Romer, P., quoted in The World is Flat: A Brief History of The Twenty-First Century, p. 289, Thomas L. Friedman, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2005

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National Assessment of Adult Literacy Key Findings

Individuals with lower literacy levels are disproportionately represented in the unemployed.

- 51 percent of adults at the Below Basic prose literacy level were not in the labor force in 2003; while 35 percent were employed full time.
- 38 percent of adults with basic prose literacy were not in the labor force and 6 percent were unemployed.

Hispanics represented 12 percent of the NAAL population but 39 percent of the adults with Below Basic prose literacy.

Scores for adults who spoke Spanish or Spanish and another non-English language before starting school dropped 17 points from 1992-2003 for prose and document literacy but did not change significantly for quantitative literacy.

Literacy was lowest across all three scales for adults who did not complete high school. These adults made up the largest group with Below Basic prose, document and quantitative literacy. For example, over 60 percent of adults without a high school diploma had Below Basic quantitative literacy.

Adults without a high school diploma or GED represent 15 percent of the total NAAL population but 55 percent of the adults in the lowest prose literacy level.

20 percent of adults with Below Basic were Black.

While 35 percent of adults with Below Basic prose literacy spoke Spanish or Spanish and another non-English language before starting school, these individuals account for 8 percent of the population.

Forty-six percent of adults with Below Basic prose literacy had one or more disabilities compared to 30 percent of adults in the NAAL population. The percentage of adults with multiple disabilities in the Below Basic prose level was significantly higher than the percentage of adults with multiple disabilities in the NAAL population (9 percent)

Five Year Projection of Adult Education and Literacy Enrollment with Projected Increases in Allocations

Year	<i>Projected Federal Grants to States</i>	<i>Projected State and Local Funding*</i>	<i>Projected Total, Federal, State & Local</i>	<i>Cost Per Student**</i>	<i>Possible Enrollment</i>	Possible Enrollment by Program Component***		
						Adult Basic Education (39.5%)	English Literacy (43%0	Adult Secondary/GED/Adult Diploma (17.5%)
2006- 2007	\$585,000,000	1,630,994,198	2,215,994,198	800	2,769,993	1,094,147	1,191,097	484,749
2007- 2008	\$700,000,000	1,712,543,908	2,412,543,908	840	2,872,076	1,134,470	1,234,993	502,613
2008- 2009	\$1,000,000,000	1,798,171,103	2,798,171,103	882	3,172,530	1,253,149	1,364,188	555,193
2009- 2010	\$1,500,000,000	1,888,079,658	3,388,079,658	926	3,658,438	1,445,083	1,573,128	640,227
2010- 2011	\$2,000,000,000	1,982,483,641	3,982,483,641	972	4,095,499	1,617,722	1,761,065	716,712

* All but seven states exceed their required 25% match. Thus, this column estimates only a 5% increase in state and local contributions per year

** This column assumes a 5% increase in cost per student annually over the baseline reported 2002-2003 expenditures

The 5% increase is based on increase costs due to inflation, instructional materials, and teachers' pay.

*** The latest USDOE Report to Congress (2002-2003) reported 39.5% of enrollment in ABE, 43% in English Literacy, and 17.5% in Adult Secondary

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