

# Workforce Investment Act Community Conversation

*With State Directors of Adult Education About*

*Re-Authorization of the WIA*

Thursday, February 4, 2010

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) became law when the national unemployment rate was 4.5%, the Federal budget had a surplus, and the Nation was experiencing a time of robust economic prosperity. Years later, the legislation no longer reflects the economic realities our students face today.

As Congress and the Administration move toward re-authorization of the WIA, the Department of Education has sought input to inform its recommendations for the new law. To that end, the Department's Office of Vocational and Adult Education facilitated 19 WIA Community Conversations — or listening sessions — across seven Department of Education regions, eight states (California, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas) and the District of Columbia, involving over 500 participants in-person. Designed to reach specific audiences such as learners, providers of adult education and career training, national organizations, employers, and community college administrators and staff, the Community Conversations yielded rich, substantive discussions of key issues for reauthorization.

In addition, 9,000 practitioners were engaged electronically via National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) discussion lists. Department staff met with local, state, regional, and national organizations; these and other stakeholder groups submitted over 20 position papers.

## Focus Areas

Twelve focus areas or themes emerged from these combined input sources:

1. **Purpose:** Increase postsecondary and career success, strengthen families, and increase civic/community participation; include the most vulnerable populations, those at the lowest skill levels.
2. **Career Pathways and Other Key Program Strategies:** Tie programs to sectors; facilitate integrated basic skills instruction and occupational skills training; transition/bridge to postsecondary education and training programs; more explicitly integrate Easy Lessons (EL) Civics, family literacy, health literacy, workplace literacy, and computer literacy instruction; create a Career Pathways State Policy Leadership Grants Program.
3. **Support Services:** Provide personal and academic counseling at essential points (upon entry into a program, as adults move from one level to the next, and as they enter postsecondary education and training); expand support services such as child care, transportation, college and career counseling and mentoring; use transitions advisors; support case management.
4. **Teacher Quality and Effectiveness:** Establish a system of intensive, job-embedded, sustained professional development; support quality standards for professional development; create a national professional development entity; launch a free national digital library; use highly skilled instructors to coordinate program professional

development. Incorporate the following content: college and career readiness standards; reading, mathematics, and science instruction; transitions to postsecondary and career; adult education in work settings; adults with learning disabilities; formative assessment; integrating 21st century technology.

5. **Professionalization of the Field:** Increase the number of full-time positions; create conditions for practitioners to participate in professional development, such as paid non-instructional time for common planning, analysis, and professional development; establish minimum teaching standards and credentialing requirements; recruit young, trained practitioners and provide internships; offer incentives to states that encourage teachers and administrators to pursue certificates and high-quality professional development and that engage in true partnerships with local programs and universities to recruit and train future instructors.
6. **Technology:** Increase access to new computers and portable technology (e.g., handhelds, smart phones, e-tablets) to support learning and continued engagement of students; incorporate technology to offer additional materials to students and to differentiate instruction; use web-based learning management systems for students and teachers, including options for web-based assessments for students and teachers. Create a national project to develop an online, blended learning professional development model; approve an assessment as part of the National Reporting System (NRS) to determine computer skill competency for each educational functioning level; create state technology centers to assist programs with smooth integration of technology.
7. **System Flexibility and Innovation:** Promote, seed with resources, and scale up innovations that accelerate learning/student achievement, use work-based learning (i.e., shadowing, mentoring, internships), and expand and improve use of technology; increase teacher effectiveness; help adults navigate career pathways; integrate service delivery and data systems; develop articulation agreements; establish joint professional development across systems and for educators and business personnel focused on proven models.
8. **Alignment and Interagency Collaboration:** Create a shared vision that supports career pathways and sector strategies; use common definitions and assessments, align and simplify eligibility criteria, and streamline intake; increase access to training and other employment services, setting goals for dual enrollment; modify performance measures to recognize skill attainment in other titles/programs and capture progress along career pathways; include adult education and community colleges on State and Local Workforce Investment Boards.
9. **Data Systems and Use:** Use longitudinal data to determine learner outcomes over time; remove any remaining barriers to cross-agency data sharing to link adult education, postsecondary education, and employment data systems; strengthen/build upon the NRS.
10. **Accountability:** Establish a shared accountability framework across programs; use common assessments of basic skills, technical skills, and college and career readiness across programs; consider work readiness indicators and ways to measure progress along a career pathway; increase local accountability by having states set targets with local programs.

11. **Research:** Re-establish an independent research center; establish a research agenda to answer fundamental questions; identify whether, how, and when professional development makes a positive difference in student achievement; identify and replicate effective practices.
12. **Funding:** Increase appropriations to reach underserved populations; allocate more funding to basic education; establish employer incentives to increase access to education and training; create an EL Civics set-aside; create separate performance incentive funding for adult education; raise state leadership cap to 15%; reauthorize 10% set-aside for Corrections; create a fund for innovation resources.

### **Key Stakeholder Response: Student Voices**

Student audiences asked for free classes, larger classrooms, more hours, and classes at different times of the day. They requested childcare and other support services. Students emphasized the need for teachers who think and care about students and an increased number of teachers, which would allow for improved grouping of students and more time in and outside of the classroom. Students asked for classes on grammar, social studies, science, and conversational English. They requested new computers and explicit computer instruction and more textbooks and learning materials.

Students also said they needed information about and help with making the transition to college. Many asked for help finding a career closer to their original field of training and prior employment, specifically credential evaluation and other supports for foreign-born, underemployed professionals.

### **Alignment with National Leadership Goals and Visions**

These 12 themes align with President Obama's vision for workforce development and The Secretary's foundation for education reform.

In April 2009, President Barack Obama proclaimed: "America cannot lead in the 21st century unless we have the best educated, most competitive workforce in the world." His vision for workforce development is to create and support opportunities for every American to commit to at least one year of higher education or advanced training in his/her lifetime. The five elements of the President's Vision for Workforce Development are as follows:

1. True one-stop shopping for high-quality services
2. Streamlining service delivery and establishing new waiver authority
3. Engaging with employers on a regional and/or sectoral basis
4. Improving accountability
5. Promoting innovation and identifying and replicating best practices

The Secretary's Four Pillars of Education Reform are as follows:

1. Prepare students for success in college and the workplace.
2. Put highly effective teachers in every classroom and effective leaders in every school.
3. Build data systems that track student achievement and teacher effectiveness.
4. Turn around our lowest performing schools (2,000 dropout factories).

## **Key Discussion Points**

Discussion participants commented on the proposed Reauthorization, responding to and expanding upon the twelve overarching themes OVAE staff had identified from previous Community Conversations and other sources of input. The state directors emphasized that the reauthorized WIA should clearly define goals for states without rigidly prescribing how states must accomplish them. The National Governors Association was suggested as a model for maintaining states' rights for flexibility when implementing a law.

### ***Purpose***

- Ensure that most vulnerable populations are included. Many students are functioning at the lowest literacy level. If we are to deliver a truly world-class education, we must understand our target populations and carefully determine what the desired outcomes for these populations should be.
- We must eschew short-term solutions, such as focusing on re-engaging individuals in low-paying jobs as quickly as possible. We aren't going to solve our states' economic woes by serving hamburgers to one other.

### ***Career Pathways and Other Key Program Strategies***

- Find ways to encourage and facilitate interstate sharing of best practices for career pathways and other strategies so that everyone can benefit from the expertise and experiences of their professional colleagues.

### ***Teacher Quality and Effectiveness***

- Raising teacher quality and effectiveness will require that our instructors can teach using current technology.

### ***Professionalization of the Field***

- Because adult education instructors are not paid well, few young, trained practitioners can afford to stay in the profession. They need better pay and more job security.
- A highly effective teacher definition should be part of instructor requirements.

### ***Technology***

- When students come to class with their cell phones and iPods® and see antiquated computers, they walk. Many instructors are retired K-12 teachers who didn't use technology during their prime teaching years; we need instructors who can teach using new technology.

### ***Alignment and Interagency Collaboration***

- Having key players at the table is critical to successful strategic planning. Interdepartmental/interagency planning not only helps establish common definitions and performance measures but also demonstrates how we can help each other. At the same time, we must take care to safeguard Education's voice in consolidated plans.
- Partnerships formed with the Department of Labor (DOL), state community college systems, and other entities under the Shifting Gears Initiative were very beneficial to adult education. It will be important to maintain these partnerships after the initiative expires.

- Although conversations with DOL at the state level are encouraging, those messages aren't reaching the local labor offices. Partnerships must be built at every level, including the local level.

### ***Accountability***

- When considering work and career readiness indicators and how to measure progress along a career pathway, be mindful that most students need at least 2 years at college level to apply what they are learning.
- Be mindful that adult education is provided in different academic settings, and take steps to ensure that basic academic skills — reading, writing, and math — don't get short shrift.

### ***Funding***

- Increased support for professional development is vital. Stakeholders are pushing us to serve more students, but we need to dedicate more funds to ensure better outcomes for the students we already serve. Implementing an integrated instruction strategy requires professional development; we're asking teachers to teach differently from the way they learned to teach.
- In future, when funds to states are cut to correct distribution errors from prior years, allow states to make up for errors over time.
- The American Community Survey (ACS) doesn't cover outlying areas in Guam, which has a significant impact on their funding. Representatives from Guam requested assistance in appealing for an alternative mechanism to provide representation for the outlying areas for the purposes allocating funding. Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) staff encouraged them to put their request in writing (with a copy to OVAE) and keep their plight in front of the Department of Labor.