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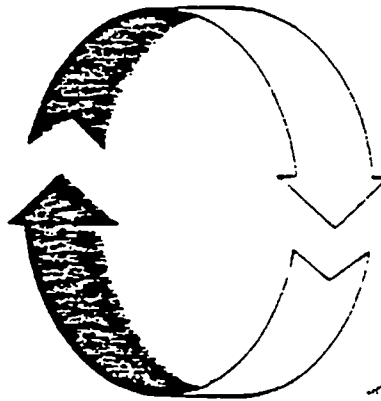
ABSTRACT

The directors of adult education from the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the territories met to discuss implementation of the National Literacy Act and Adult Education Act (AEA) and to begin the process of developing recommendations regarding reauthorization of AEA in 1995. The forum discussions centered around the following aspects of implementation: (1) administrative requirements (state planning processes, the definition of literacy, state literacy resource centers, state advisory councils, and coordination requirements); (2) program funding (direct and equitable access and the 5% administrative cap); (3) program quality (measures and standards for program quality indicators); and (4) set-asides and special projects (Section 353 funds, institutionalized/correctional education, and gateway grants). Recommendations were formulated regarding these and other issues identified during telephone interview with state directors conducted before the forum and during the course of the forum. The increasing role of technology, the need for coordinated community service centers, and the increased recognition of and funding for lifelong learning were among long-term issues identified as important for the beginning of the 21st century. (MN)

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SUMMARY OF STATE ADULT EDUCATION DIRECTORS FORUM

February 18-19, 1993



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SUMMARY OF STATE ADULT EDUCATION DIRECTORS FORUM FEBRUARY 18-19, 1993

I. Introduction

Directors of Adult Education from the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the territories met February 18-19, 1993 to discuss implementation of the National Literacy Act (NLA) and Adult Education Act (AEA) and to take the first step in developing recommendations for reauthorization of the AEA in 1995. The forum was conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) and Office of Policy and Planning (OPP).

Discussions during the two days centered around four broad areas of implementation: (1) administrative requirements, (2) program funding, (3) program quality, and (4) set-asides and special projects. State Directors also identified several activities that they expect to take place in the coming weeks and months, including an opportunity for further discussion of these issues at regional meetings; and efforts by State Directors to be more proactive in articulating their concerns through Congressional hearings, position papers, the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, and other appropriate forums.

Organization of Forum

Under each of the four implementation areas, a variety of issues were drawn from responses to four ED-generated surveys of Directors.¹ Table 1, on the following page, summarizes these issues by topic and implementation area. At the forum, Directors also were given the opportunity to introduce and examine additional issues of concern in implementing the NLA and AEA.

To facilitate and focus the dialogue during the forum, issues were initially grouped into one of two categories: "pro-con" issues and "problem" issues. "Pro-con" issues were those that the forum facilitators designated as eliciting the most distinct arguments for and against taking some action on the item. Four issues were so classified: (1) determining who should establish model performance standards (Federal or state); (2) tying performance indicators to funding decisions; (3) determining whether or not to retain the 10 percent set-aside for institutionalized individuals; and (4) determining whether or not to retain the set-aside for Gateway Grants. Directors were asked to break into groups and debate the issues by listing the positive and negative aspects of each issue, and generating a list of recommendations based on their discussion.

¹ Prior to the Directors forum, nine State Directors were interviewed by telephone using each of the four survey instruments. Through these interviews, State Directors identified issues and concerns relating to the implementation of the NLA and the AEA in the areas of administrative requirements, program funding, program quality, and set-asides and special projects. The interviews were intended to provide background information and to foster discussion at the forum.

TABLE 1
Summary of Issues

Implementation Area	Topic	Issue Area
Administrative Requirements	State Planning Process	Four-year cycle and usefulness of planning process
	Definition of Literacy	Appropriateness of definition
	State Literacy Resource Centers	Appropriate role of the centers
	State Advisory Councils	Appropriate role of councils
	Coordination Requirements	Meeting coordination requirements in the NLA and improving coordination with other Federal agencies Coordination between the basic state grant and AEA's competitive programs such as workplace literacy and adult education for the homeless
Program Funding	Direct and Equitable Access	Interpretation of the provision
	5 Percent Administrative Cap	Appropriate level of cap at state level Appropriate level of cap at local level
Program Quality	Measures and Standards for Program Quality Indicators	Tying indicators to funding decisions and evaluation Establishment of model performance standards at Federal or state level
Set-Asides and Special Projects	Section 353 Funds	Maintaining the set-aside for special/innovative projects
	Institutionalized/Correctional Education	Viability of institutionalized/correctional education as set-aside
	Gateway Grants	Viability of Gateway Grants as set-aside

"Problem" issues were identified as those areas that involved more complex resolution and did not lend themselves to clear-cut, for-and-against arguments. Eight issue areas were identified: (1) state planning process, (2) coordination requirements, (3) State Literacy Resource Centers, (4) funding process/criteria, (5) direct and equitable access, (6) 5 percent administrative cap, (7) Section 353 set-aside, and (8) coordination with Adult Education for the Homeless (AEH) and workplace literacy programs. Directors were asked to describe the problems they encountered in implementing different features of these AEA provisions, suggest any alternative solutions to the identified problems, and offer general recommendations for change in the legislation to address these issues.

Approximately 35 specific recommendations were identified by the State Directors through the discussion process the first day. On the second day, State Directors divided themselves into five groups to consider in greater depth the recommendations they had offered the previous day and to generate any new recommendations on issues that had not been raised prior to the meeting. Each group of directors was instructed to use colored stickers to prioritize the list of posted recommendations: a **green dot** was to be used to indicate the group's agreement with and support for a recommendation; a **red dot** signified a group's disagreement with a recommendation. Directors were instructed to place **no dot** at all next to a recommendation if their group was split and could not reach consensus on the recommendation.

Through a classification system developed by the facilitators, it was determined that a recommendation showed *general agreement* or consensus if at least four of the five groups of directors chose to put a **green dot** beside the item. Recommendations were considered to represent emerging consensus, or *moderate agreement*, if three groups placed a **green dot** beside the issue. *Other recommendations* were classified as lacking consensus if two or fewer **green dots** were placed and/or one or more **red dots** were placed next to an item.

Report Organization

A summary of the discussions at the State Directors Forum is presented in this report. This information is intended to inform subsequent discussions by Directors related to the 1995 reauthorization of the AEA. Five additional sections are contained in this report. The next four sections summarize the issues considered in each of the four implementation areas, along with the corresponding ranked recommendations. The final section presents a number of additional recommendations that were discussed and that received widespread support during the first day's deliberations, but did not appear on the list of recommendations on the second day. Although they were not rated, these recommendations are presented because of the strong support they received the first day.

II. Administrative Requirements

The National Literacy Act and Adult Education Act contain several requirements for administration of the adult basic education program. State Directors discussed issues relating to these requirements in five areas: the state planning process, definition of literacy, State Literacy Resource Centers, State Advisory Councils, and coordination requirements.

State Planning Process

The AEA mandates that states submit a state plan every four years specifying how states will administer and operate activities supported with Federal AEA funds. States must also conduct an evaluation of 20 percent of local grantees each year, or 80 percent of grantees over four years.

Issue: Four-Year Cycle and Usefulness of the Planning Process

Recommendations with General Agreement

- All Federally funded entities providing adult basic education services (e.g., JOBS, JTPA) should be required to share state plans, if they are required to coordinate with one another.
- New adult education state plans should not be due until after the new regulations go into effect following reauthorization.

Other Recommendations

- The state planning cycle should be increased from four to five years.
- All Federal programs (e.g., JOBS, JTPA, vocational education) should be on the same starting cycle for planning and should conduct joint planning.
- Additional data besides Census data should be collected for planning purposes; Federal assistance is needed in collecting these data.

Definition of Literacy

The statute defines literacy as “an individual’s ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential.”

Issue: Appropriateness of Definition

Recommendation with General Agreement

- A common definition of terms, such as “literacy” and “adult,” should be incorporated into all other pieces of Federal legislation dealing with literacy skills (e.g., JOBS, JTPA, vocational education).

Recommendation with Moderate Agreement

- A common definition of standards of minimal functional competency should be developed at the Federal level.

State Literacy Resource Centers

The AEA stipulates that Federal funds may be used to fund State and/or Regional Literacy Resource Centers to promote and support literacy efforts in a given state or region. The Act requires that the centers be awarded on a competitive basis by the governor's office in each state.

Issue: Appropriate Role of the Centers

Recommendation with General Agreement

- State Literacy Resource Centers should be linked electronically with the National Institute for Literacy.

Other Recommendation

- State Literacy Resource Centers should not be involved with policy and research.

State Advisory Councils

The AEA also requires that Federally funded State Advisory Councils on adult education and literacy be appointed by and responsible to the governor. Most state programs currently have advisory bodies, generally appointed by the chief state school officer. The legislation, however, mandates specific agency representation on an advisory committee appointed by the governor, if Federal funds are to be used to support this committee. Currently, three states are seeking certification as a recognized advisory council.

Issue: Appropriate Role of Councils

Recommendation with General Agreement

- For those states forming "Super Councils" — state advisory councils representing a diversity of agencies — such councils should have only an advisory capacity.

Coordination Requirements

The legislation contains requirements stipulating that adult education programs funded through the Act coordinate with other Federal programs, including JTPA, vocational education, and JOBS. The AEA requires review of the adult education state plan by the State Job Training Coordinating Committee and by the state boards or agencies responsible for vocational and postsecondary education. The NLA amended the AEA to require that providers demonstrate coordination with social service providers in the community. The NLA also stipulates that indicators of program quality be, to the extent appropriate, mutually supportive of indicators and standards developed under other Federal laws such as JTPA and JOBS.

Issue: Meeting Coordination Requirements in the NLA and Improving Coordination with Other Federal Agencies

Recommendations with General Agreement

- Better coordination at the Federal level is needed to promote coordination among agencies at the state level.
- All funds targeted to provide adult basic education should flow through a single source, the Adult Education Act. All basic skills funding (e.g., workforce education, apprenticeship training, school-to-work transition) should also be cross-referenced to the original legislation.²
- The term "basic skills," as utilized in all Federal legislation, should refer to the definition in the AEA.

Recommendation with Moderate Agreement

- As designated in the Federal Regulations, the list of entities with which adult education programs are to coordinate is out of date and needs to be updated to reflect current practice and to encourage new partners with adult education.

Issue: Coordination Between the Basic State Grant and AEA's Competitive Programs, Such as Workplace Literacy and Adult Education for the Homeless (AEH)

Recommendation with General Agreement

- Workplace Literacy appropriations should be increased to trigger state formula funding.

² This recommendation reflects the merging of two very similar ideas raised during discussions with State Directors.

Other Recommendation

- Statutory provisions authorizing the AEH program should be revised so that funds can be distributed on a formula basis.

III. Program Funding

Program funding issues were raised in two areas: direct and equitable access and the 5 percent administrative cap.

Direct and Equitable Access

The NLA amended the AEA to require that states provide "direct and equitable access" to Federal AEA funds by LEAs, public or private nonprofit agencies, community-based organizations, correctional facilities, postsecondary educational institutions, and institutions that serve educationally disadvantaged adults.

Issue: Interpretation of the Provision

Other Recommendations

- State education agencies *may* provide direct and equitable access to funds to local agencies (e.g., CBOs, LEAs, community colleges).
- Direct and equitable access should be modified to allow states flexibility to foster collaboration within regions or other geographic entities.
- A "hold-harmless" clause should be attached to formula funding to protect currently funded projects/states.

Five Percent Administrative Cap

The legislation provides that states may spend up to 5 percent of their grant, or \$50,000, whichever is greater, to administer the AEA at the state level. This same percentage is applicable at the local level, except that states have flexibility to waive this requirement if the needs of the local program could not be met under this cap.

Issue: Appropriate Level of the Cap at the State Level

Recommendations with General Agreement

- The 5 percent cap for administrative costs at the state level is insufficient to adequately implement the mandates of the law; therefore, the cap should be increased from 5 percent to at least 6 to 8 percent, with the minimum funding level at \$80,000 or \$90,000.
- "Instructional" services should be changed to "direct" services in the legislative language.

Recommendation with Moderate Agreement

- A definition of state administration (currently in rule) should be put into law.

Issue: Appropriate Level of Cap at Local Level; Need to Differentiate Between Instructional Services and Activities Such as Technical Assistance and Evaluation

Other Recommendations

- The language in the legislation should be changed to read "direct services" instead of "instructional services."
- Costs for evaluation, technical assistance, and personnel development for the local level should not be considered part of the administration budget.

IV. Program Quality

Issues of program quality were discussed in two areas related to measures and standards for program quality indicators: tying quality indicators to funding decisions and evaluation, and establishing model performance standards.

Measures and Standards for Program Quality Indicators

The legislation requires states to develop, by July 1993, a system of indicators of program quality that are to be used to judge the success of state and local adult education programs.

Issue: Tying Indicators to Funding Decisions and Evaluation

Recommendation with General Agreement

- The primary purpose of indicators of program quality should be program improvement. While acknowledging the need for a relationship between performance on the indicators and program funding, State Directors agreed that each state should determine that relationship.

Issue: Establishment of Model Performance Standards at the Federal or State Level

Recommendation with General Agreement

- States should be prepared for the coming debate on performance standards.

Recommendation with Moderate Agreement

- A two-tiered approach should be used in setting standards: establishment of national minimum guidelines in combination with state variations or standards.
- Federal model standards and measures should be developed with no enforced minimums; states should be given the option of adhering to these standards.

V. Set-Asides and Special Projects

In the area of set-asides and special projects, topics included Section 353 funds, institutionalized/correctional education, and Gateway Grants.

Section 353 Funds

Section 353 of the AEA provides funding for special experimental demonstration projects and teacher training. Fifteen percent of the grant is to be used for this purpose, with a minimum of 10 percent mandated for teacher training. These special projects are defined as those that involve "innovative methods . . . systems, materials, or which may have national significance or (are) . . . of special value in promoting effective programs."

Issue: Maintaining the Set-Aside for Special/Innovative Projects

Recommendation with General Agreement

- The Section 353 language and funding process should remain as is.

Other Recommendation

- State and local coordination should be required for Section 353 grantees.

Institutionalized/Correctional Education

The legislation mandates that at least 10 percent of grant funds be used for adult education programs for institutionalized persons, including adults in correctional education.

Issue: Viability of Institutionalized/Correctional Education as a Set-Aside

Other Recommendations

- The mandated 10 percent set-aside for all institutionalized should be eliminated.
- The ability to benefit (e.g., for residents of nursing homes and mental institutions) should be balanced with the Americans with Disabilities Act regulations.

Gateway Grants

The National Literacy Act established a program of competitive two-year grants, called Gateway Grants, to public housing authorities to establish literacy programs for public housing residents.

Issue: Viability of the Gateway Grants as a Set-Aside

Recommendation with General Agreement

- The public housing population should be added to the existing list of special populations designated under the Adult Education Act.

Other Recommendations

- Existing language in Section 322(3)(A) of the AEA should be changed to read: ". . . may be used for grants to serve public housing residents for literacy programs and related activities." This deletes the two-year competitive grant and mandated direct funding of public housing authorities.
- Existing adult education providers should be required (or at least encouraged) to coordinate with public housing authorities to deliver services to the public housing population.

VI. Additional Issues and Recommendations

During the course of deliberations during the two-day forum, State Directors raised a number of issues that they considered to be important but that were not included in their final list of recommendations. In this section, we present summaries of recommendations that were not ranked, new issues introduced at the forum, and the long-term issues and trends that Directors identified as important to the growth of adult education. There was broad agreement that the following recommendations and issues be considered in future discussions about reauthorization.

Recommendations from Telephone Surveys

Six recommendations generated from the telephone surveys of State Directors prior to the forum received strong support and were discussed at length during the forum's first day, though they were not included in the final list of recommendations:

- The definition of literacy in the NLA is appropriate and useful.
- While a specific recommendation did not emerge concerning the role of the governor's office in establishing State Literacy Resource Centers, clearly State Directors felt that the involvement of the governor's office was unnecessary, and in some instances resulted in duplicative efforts in the state. A strongly expressed view was that funds for these Resource Centers should run directly through the agency responsible for the administration of the AEA in each state.
- While no specific recommendations came forth about the role of the governor's office in regard to State Advisory Councils, it also was clear that the State Directors do not support an advisory committee appointed by the governor. Reasons given for this are twofold: (1) the committee would become too political; and (2) in states where the chief state school officer is elected, political conflicts could arise between the governor and the chief state school officer over an educational program.
- No clear consensus was reached on the issue of direct and equitable access, although directors generally agreed that the process needs to be reexamined. Several Directors were concerned that the direct and equitable access process creates destructive internal competition and that the competitive nature of the application and funding process breaks up natural coalitions among service providers.
- Institutionalized and incarcerated populations should not be included in the same set-aside.
- Gateway Grants should be eliminated as a separate set-aside.

Recommendations Generated at the Forum

State Directors identified a number of issues that were not raised during the initial telephone interviews in preparation for the forum. Although consensus was not reached on these issues, the following items received at least some support from State Directors:

Recommendation with General Agreement

- The AEA should encourage a percentage of the adult education allocation for innovation and technology in adult education. This could be realized through incentives or additional Federal discretionary grants.

Recommendation with Moderate Agreement

- State Directors value the efforts of volunteers. Section 382 of the AEA should be funded to support volunteers in adult education.

Other Recommendations

- The 80/20 split between ABE and adult secondary education should be eliminated. States should be given the flexibility to determine the appropriate ratio in their state.
- ED's Division of Adult Education and Literacy should be required to coordinate current national and state efforts on program improvement (e.g., the National Institute for Literacy and National Center on Adult Literacy don't communicate with each other).
- Reporting of student progress should be related to intensity of services so that data mean something.
- ED's Office of Technology should be required to fund technology in adult education.
- The National Center for Education Statistics should be required to fund the National Adult Literacy Survey for all states.
- Policy makers need to consider eliminating standardized testing as a requirement to show learning gains; instead, alternative assessment should be emphasized to verify learning gains.
- Any allowable set-asides should not be based on populations or organizations but should be defined by function. State Directors are concerned that too many special interests are being served through the AEA, and that this process increases the administrative burden at the state level.

Issues for the Future

State Directors were asked to identify long-term issues that would be of concern to them in the beginning of the 21st century. Their comments were condensed at the forum into five major themes:

- (1) The increasing role of technology;
- (2) Establishment of and need for coordinated community service centers;
- (3) Increased recognition of and funding for lifelong learning;
- (4) A shift in the role of instructors from giver/teacher to facilitator of learning; and
- (5) Expanding learner participation in the learning process.