



POLICY BRIEF

LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON WIA REAUTHORIZATION

From a CAAL Roundtable of February 18, 2010

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Foreword

This Policy Brief, *Local Perspectives on WIA Reauthorization*, is the first of several new publications that will result from a series of invitational CAAL Roundtables being held this year and next. In the coming months, a second will focus on certification and credentialing and a third will deal with motivating chambers, business, and economic development agencies to take a more active role in advancing adult education and workforce skills development. Other Roundtables will be announced in due course.

I hope this Brief comes in time to be helpful to Congressional and other federal officials currently considering the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act and engaged in reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act. But there are important messages in the publication for other federal policymakers and state policymakers as well.

CAAL extends heartfelt thanks to participants in the “local perspectives” Roundtable. They are the front line. We at the national level sometimes take them too much for granted. These seasoned professionals gave generously of their time and thought to contribute to this project, and we are very much in their debt. We also want to thank our funders, whose support makes this program of Roundtables and other CAAL work possible – the Dollar General Corporation, the Joyce Foundation, the Walmart Foundation, McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., and numerous individual donors.

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LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON WIA REAUTHORIZATION

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A. BACKGROUND

On February 18, 2010, the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL) convened a Roundtable meeting of 19 leaders of local institutions identified by their peers as providing exemplary “adult education for work” service within a particular community or local labor market. The institutions are located in 16 states representing all regions of the United States (see Attachment 1). For this Roundtable project, “adult education for work” is defined as: “the education and training that adults with low basic skills need to become prepared for postsecondary education or training, and for family-sustaining employment and career advancement.” Most of the Roundtable participants had attended an earlier meeting (in April 2009) co-sponsored by CAAL and the National Center on Education and the Economy. The purpose of that get-together was to define the program components that effective adult education for work should contain. CAAL published some of the findings in June 2009 as *EXPANDING HORIZONS: Pacesetters in Adult Education for Work*¹. The meeting also helped inform a series of four publications put out in September 2009 by NCEE.²

¹ *EXPANDING HORIZONS: Pacesetters in Education for Work* is available from the CAAL website publications page (<http://www.caalusa.org>) as item NC-CAAL9.

² The NCEE series, collectively titled the ONE STEP FORWARD Initiative, are available from the website of Jobs for the Future (<http://www.jff.org>).

The February 18 Roundtable gave local leaders a forum in which to discuss – from their unique perspectives – changes that should be made in the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) to provide greater support from the federal government for adult-education-for-work programs containing the components they had identified at the CAAL/NCEE meeting. A related goal was to identify the changes that should be made in WIA to take adult education for work “to scale” – i.e., to provide this service to a far larger percentage of adults who want and need it. The meeting was timed according to CAAL’s best judgment about when Congress was likely to reauthorize WIA. National leadership organizations (including CAAL) have made a variety of proposals for WIA’s future form. Although the specifics differ, most believe WIA should be more supportive of adult education for work in some way. Because the invitees have “hands on” experience in making adult education for work an effective service, and because their programs are recognized as exemplary, the perspective of these local leaders on needed federal policy changes deserves special attention, whether or not it reflects the views of national leaders.

Due to the intricacies of WIA and the participants’ natural focus on service delivery issues, the February 18 Roundtable produced few suggestions for *specific* legislative changes. But participants expressed strong and distinctive views about various aspects of WIA, the context within which reauthorization should be considered, and the form it should take. These views are summarized below. CAAL does not necessarily endorse any of these views, but we believe they merit the attention of policymakers and leaders in adult education and workforce development, at both federal and state levels.

B. WHAT ARE ADULT-EDUCATION-FOR-WORK PROGRAMS ACHIEVING?

Most Roundtable participants believe that the scope, scale, and effectiveness of adult-education-for-work programs in the United States are far greater than many policymakers and other observers recognize. They are frustrated by this lack of recognition and think their experience has a direct bearing on national policy.

A large part of what most people know about adult education for work is based on data generated by two sources, the U.S. Department of Education's National Reporting System (NRS) for WIA Title II adult education funds, and U.S. Department of Labor reports on WIA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs. Roundtable participants believe these reports systematically understate the achievement of adult-education-for-work-programs, and probably adult education of any kind.

A principal reason for this, they say, is that, most of the resources they use to support adult education for work come from state programs (for adult education, vocational education, economic development, and other purposes), private donations (such as foundation grants), other federal programs (such as TANF or the Perkins Act), unions, and, importantly, local businesses that want customized basic skills/vocational training for incumbent workers or skilled employees who need preparation for high demand jobs. WIA funding is a small part of many, and perhaps most, of these programs. As a result, WIA reports on programs do not include a large part of the funding, services, and outcomes of adult-education-for-work programs, and these variables are rarely even aggregated at the state level, because of the mixing of funds. More directly stated, according to the participants, adult education for work is a far larger and more effective service than reports based on data from WIA or other federal programs indicate because it is not primarily supported by WIA funds.

Furthermore, Roundtable participants believe that another major reason for WIA underreporting on the scope and effectiveness of adult education for work is that the systems used to measure WIA outcomes do not accurately reflect the learning gains and persistence of students in programs designed to improve transitions and employability. The participants focused mainly on NRS limitations in making this point.

The NRS primarily reports learning gains on standardized tests designed to measure students' progress in completing life skills literacy levels, and it reports gains only for a single year. Insofar as it gathers information about other program outcomes, such as transitions to postsecondary education or entering employment, it reports that information only for individuals who state

these “goals.” Moreover, the outcomes captured by the NRS fail to take into account the context in which adult-education-for-work service is provided. Adult education for work requires contextualized instruction that includes a great many “workforce” skills or “pre-academic” skills that are not measured by most standardized tests. In some cases, these skills are as important as traditional “liberal arts” skills in improving employability. Moreover, standardized tests designed to measure how well students master traditional basic skills (such as reading, writing, and math) in a life skills context, are often not suited to measure how well students master those skills when taught in a workforce context. Finally, the Roundtable participants said that the levels of proficiency measured and reported by the NRS test scores are often not relevant benchmarks for student progress in contextualized adult- education-for-work programs.

In short, the participants think that many more students are served with far greater effectiveness by adult-education-for-work programs nationwide than policymakers and other observers recognize. It is impossible to gauge *precisely* the success of these programs, because existing data systems are not geared to report it. There exists a small library of program case studies supported by public and private funders that suggests their success is considerable, but the body of evidence from different sources has not been pulled together and placed in the public record.

From a national policy standpoint, this creates major difficulties. Policymakers are often reluctant to invest in adult education of any kind because they view it as a failed system with limited learning gains and low persistence. This universal indictment buries the scope and scale of adult education for work and the importance of investing in this component of the adult education system. It also ignores how much there is to build on. Policymakers and others sometimes invest small amounts in adult education for work on an “experimental” basis through demonstration grants and other means, which implies that adult education for work is a service that still needs to be invented. From the perspective of Roundtable participants, the service already exists, is provided on a daily basis, and has demonstrated effectiveness. It

merits systematic and categorical funding on a large scale if it is to serve the population in need.

The Roundtable participants certainly agree on the importance of experimentation. They indicate that they and others could benefit from learning how to make adult-education-for-work services even better. They acknowledge that many adult education and vocational programs lack the knowledge, resources, or will to provide this service. But they firmly believe that policymakers and others concerned about WIA reauthorization should not be deterred from making long-term, systematic investments in adult education for work because of misleading data that fails to capture its scope, scale, and effectiveness.

C. WIA LIMITS IN SUPPORTING ADULT EDUCATION FOR WORK

Roundtable participants have a negative view of both Titles I and II of WIA in their present form. They see adult education for work as a sequence of specialized instructional services that leads low-skilled individuals along pathways to improved employability and transitions to postsecondary education. They believe instructional sequences must be supplemented by substantial amounts of guidance, counseling, case management, and social support services (such as assistance with childcare, transportation, and funding for tuition). Neither Title I nor Title II contains provisions for funding this total array of services. Participants find that, in practice, many Title I programs consist of what one participant called “too much bureaucracy and too little funding for service...and the service they do support is primarily short-term vocational training for workers with fairly high skills, rather than comprehensive adult education for work.” Title II programs fund traditional adult education service in academic skills, but they rarely support the contextualized instruction required to improve employability or the higher levels of instruction needed to support transitions to postsecondary education. And they seldom have adequate resources for the non-instructional services required.

Roundtable participants briefly discussed the reasons why Title I and II programs fail to support adult education for work. Among the factors they mentioned were that the accountability measures of both titles (such as the NRS in Title II) do not reward provision of this service or its

outcomes in terms of transitions or stable employment in family-supporting jobs. Many were also unclear what services were allowable by either Title – especially whether Title II funds could be used to prepare people with GED’s for college entry or provide guidance and other non-instructional services. They were also unclear about whether Title II funds can be used to provide support for non-academic workforce and college readiness skills.

Participants think that, in principle, it should be possible to “work around” these WIA limitations by forming partnerships between adult education providers and Workforce Investment Boards (WIBS) that combine the customized instructional services for low-level learners in Title II with case management, personal support, and occupational training services under Title I. In practice, they find that to do this now, they must cut through an almost impenetrable thicket of rules and regulations in both programs, because neither is designed to accommodate such partnerships. At the threshold level, the eligibility standards for adult education programs and Title I programs differ: eligibility for adult education is primarily based on the level of level of education, whereas eligibility for training and case management of the various Title I programs involves a variety of factors such as job status and job-search activities. Even if this threshold issue can be overcome, partnerships require changing the types of instruction both programs will support as well as working out knotty problems such as which agencies should be responsible for supporting which type of service and in what sequence. Participants find this particularly difficult to accomplish because the agencies that manage Title I and Title II programs usually have very different “corporate cultures” – one focused on combating unemployment and the other on improving basic skills as a goal in its own right. As a result, it is difficult for them to work together toward joint ends. In the words of another participant, “this is a marriage that neither party wants to make.”

The Roundtable participants would certainly welcome changes in Titles I and II that would make partnerships easier – although they think those changes would have to be extensive. But a number of attendees emphasized that policies aimed at enhancing partnerships within WIA should not elevate “partnership” to a goal in its own right. From the perspective of adult education for work, partnership is not a goal but one possible *means* to achieve the goal of

increased employability and transitions for low-skilled adults. Moreover, participants believe that any policies to promote partnerships should include the full range of possible partners, not solely WIA programs. Other essential partners are community colleges, economic development and TANF programs, unions, and employers, among others. If partnership is adopted as a strategy for strengthening adult education for work, these other institutions and programs should be full partners in planning, service design, provision of services, funding, and accountability, rather than nominal partners as mentioned in legislation. For example, a number of participants mentioned that they sit on local Workforce Investment Boards, but have little influence because the purpose of the Boards is to plan Title I activities. If partnerships are to be effective in enhancing adult education for work, all partners must have a voice at the table.

Some of the Roundtable participants had a similar reaction to proposals for unified state plans for all WIA programs. Such plans may break down “silos” within WIA, but they will leave major “silos” untouched unless they include full participation and binding commitments to perform functions essential to career pathways by all the partners who can make a contribution to adult education for work. Moreover, several participants observed that unified planning often results in programs with the largest budgets setting the agenda. Policymakers should be wary that, absent major changes in WIA, this will mean that Title I programs will dominate unified planning processes, and Title II programs will not be able to make substantial inputs.

These and other limitations in WIA are a major reason that many Roundtable participants support their adult education for work programs primarily with funding from states, private sources, businesses, and other federal programs. They see these other sources of funding as more flexible in allowing them to design the types of service systems their students and communities really need. A number of participants observed that businesses view WIA in the same way. These participants have forged extensive partnerships with local companies for workforce education of many different kinds, and they believe these partnerships have been highly productive in meeting the demands of local labor markets. But they report that companies are often reluctant to join programs funded by WIA, because of the restrictive rules,

regulations, and paperwork this involves. It is simply too hard and time consuming to customize adult education for work to meet the specialized needs of local employers, especially when the demand for this service often arises on short notice.

D. MERITS OF AN ALTERNATE OUTCOME DRIVEN SYSTEM

One person said: “We don’t need Title I funding or Title II funding or some combination of both. What we need is funding that allows us to provide the full range of services required by adult education for work with as few restrictions as possible on how we do so.” Roundtable participants did not fully specify what form this alternative support should take, but they suggested some characteristics it should have.

For example, above all else, policies to support adult education for work should emphasize outcomes, not inputs. That is, policies should contain the fewest possible requirements for *how* this service is provided in terms of eligibility, curriculum, sequence of services, length of service, reporting, partnerships, case management, or other program elements. The primary requirement for funding, they say, should be achieving outcomes: such as placement and success in postsecondary education or vocational training, achieving family-supporting wages, and meeting local labor market needs. Progress toward these outcomes should be measured by what several participants referred to as “momentum points” – completion of steps along career pathways.

The group struggled with exactly what these momentum points should be, because they inevitably differ depending on the particular designs and goals of different adult-education-for-work programs as well as the level and types of skills individual students bring to them. In some cases, test scores might be used as momentum points. But most participants appear to believe that the present NRS levels and authorized tests are not well suited for these purposes. For the most part, they discussed “momentum points” in terms of course completion in programs designed to improve employability. Some participants suggested that the most useful types of tests for establishing momentum points would be locally developed and customized to particular programs. In this respect, they appeared to support the idea of “chunking” adult

education for work around program components (either courses or combinations of courses) that represent progress toward outcome goals. The types of tests that would be useful would be those that measure a student's readiness to move from one "chunk" to another. Many participants indicated that they already use formal or informal measures of "readiness to advance," rather than standardized test scores, to determine whether students are prepared to enter various components of their programs (such as whether students are ready to enter high- or low-level VESL programs). These measures are locally developed and usually not reported to either state or national funders. Formalizing these measures as "momentum points" could be one way to measure progress.

One logical extension of this idea is that federal and state funding sources should accept achievement of outcomes and progress along momentum points developed at the local and/or state level as accountability measures for adult education for work. Roundtable participants did not discuss this idea as such. But most of them emphasized that any accountability criteria should be based on longitudinal measures of student progress over many years. Students with very low basic skills and the working poor – who constitute a large part of the population in need of adult-education-for-work services – may take many years to achieve postsecondary credentials or certifications. This is because they have a long learning path and must also often drop out and re-enter programs due to personal circumstances. Also, many may benefit most from career ladders in which they progress from credentials requiring lower skills to those requiring higher skills. The important thing is not how long it takes them to achieve high-opportunity outcomes, but whether they reach those outcomes at all.

NRS accountability measures and those used by most states assess progress only for a single year. This is far too short a time horizon to determine the success of adult-education-for-work programs or students. One Roundtable participant reported that the state of Washington rewards programs on the basis of how many momentum points individual students have passed. In his view, this creates an incentive to serve low-skilled individuals because they must pass the most momentum points to achieve program goals and hence generate the most income for programs.

In addition to suggesting that funding for adult education for work be outcome based, participants think that it should allow for the greatest possible local flexibility. As one person put it: "The less WIA requires, the better." Because Roundtable participants represent a highly diverse and successful group of local programs, they naturally have a preference for local flexibility. But their reasoning merits national attention. Based on their experience, if adult-education-for-work programs are to be effective, they *must* be tailored to local circumstances. Three of the variables they believe should be considered are the characteristics of the population in need (e.g., the percent with limited English as contrasted to native speakers), employment opportunities available, and the institutional service structure in different communities.

The most effective way to construct programs that take account of these and other variables is often location-specific. For example, for transitions, partnerships between adult education programs and postsecondary institutions are necessary. This is the case even when adult education is provided under the auspices of colleges, because partnerships must be formed for movement from the non-credit divisions to the credit divisions of colleges. But the form these transition partnerships take varies greatly depending on the programs offered by particular colleges; their intake requirements; the availability of guidance, scholarships, and pre-collegiate services; and the attitudes of college leaders. The form also differs according to the size and capabilities of local adult education programs. There are probably as many forms of viable transition partnerships as there are colleges and adult education programs in the United States.

Local flexibility is also necessary if effective partnerships with business are to be forged. Because local economies differ, the types of jobs for which low-skilled workers should be prepared (and hence the nature of career pathways programs) also differ. In addition, the interest of local employers in partnering with adult education and postsecondary programs differs greatly. The success of workforce education, in particular, often depends on finding niches in local economies where there are jobs, and the contributions employers are willing to make vary. One of the participants noted: "We can't train every laid off factory worker to be a nurse. We have to find a wider range of opportunities." And in locations where there are few if

any jobs available that pay a family-supporting wage, the realistic goal may be to prepare a “pool of skilled workers who are ready to seize employment opportunities when they arise.” Roundtable participants also cited differences in the ability or willingness of TANF programs and WIBS in different communities to participate in adult education for work, as well as the presence or absence of other resources, such as strong union apprenticeship programs.

The main conclusion Roundtable participants appeared to draw from these differences is that successful adult-education-for-work programs are an intricate web of instructional components and institutional relationships that differ greatly from location to location. There is not simply one program or career pathway, but an aggregation of many routes to enhancing employability. That is an inherent characteristic of these programs. Thus, policies to support adult education for work should provide programs with the greatest possible flexibility to build the types of services their communities need. The allowable use of funds should be whatever it takes to achieve the major goals of transitions, training, workforce readiness, and family-supporting incomes for low-skilled workers. And the accountability measures should be progress toward these goals through the adult-education-for-work program components that are tailored to meet each community’s needs.

Although Roundtable participants were not able to pursue the full policy implications of this emphasis on local flexibility, it may be that policies governing Title II programs should greatly expand the range of instructional and non-instructional services they are permitted to provide. Additionally, Title II funding formulas should take account of the need for this larger range of services in some circumstances. For example, Title II programs may need to invest in pre-collegiate or case management services, depending on the availability of those services from other local institutions, and they should have the authority and resources to do so. And if a Title II program takes the leadership in adult education for work, it may or may not require funds to help postsecondary institutions or companies develop vocational programs that meet local labor market needs.

The Roundtable participants' final observation about an outcome driven system was that a large part of adult education should consist of adult education for work. Many emphatically stated that the primary reason most students come to their programs is to improve their job prospects, not to learn basic skills. They believe traditional adult education programs that emphasize improving liberal arts skills as a goal in its own right, or as a means to improve life skills for a variety of purposes, are letting their students down and are almost certain to obtain poor learning gains and poor retention. They think that even students with the lowest basic skills can and should receive contextualized instruction and workforce orientation toward improving their employability. The group does not see any trade-off between teaching liberal arts and workforce skills. To be prepared for family-sustaining employment, individuals need academic skills. But as the participants see it, they also need workforce skills and both can and must be taught in the context of preparation for employment. One participant said: "Our students are not naïve. They can tell whether adult education programs are leading them anywhere or not. If the programs aren't leading to employment, they will give up. If the goals and pathways of employment are reinforced, they will find a way to persist."

E. TOP DOWN OR BOTTOM UP: SERVING LOW-SKILLED STUDENTS

A number of participants expressed concern that most adult-education-for-work programs place primary emphasis on helping students with fairly high levels of basic skills make transitions to postsecondary education or vocational training. This emphasis is understandable, because these students are in a position to make important advances in improving their immediate employability, and success in helping them cross clearly defined "momentum" points is easy to document. But some participants suggested that undue emphasis on these students is a form of "creaming" the population in need of service. In the words of one, "Should we be raising the bar for adult education by pulling from the top or pushing from the bottom?" Another observed that "transitions are important, but so are basic skills. In fact, having better basic skills is a form of workforce preparation." Evidence of this is that companies often contract with adult education programs for contextualized basic skills instruction alone.

Most importantly, a large percentage of adult education students, and the majority of ESL students, have very low basic skills. If there is a national interest in improving the job prospects of low-skilled adults, these students should not be left out of adult-education-for-work programs. Some participants also emphasized that students should not be rushed into postsecondary and vocational programs before their basic and workforce skills are adequate to complete the coursework and to move along career ladders from lower-skilled occupational training to more demanding degree programs. One person pointed out that ESL students admitted to her college's credit programs often return to her non-credit ESL courses to gain the skills they need to succeed.

High intensity programs and managed enrollment. Most of the group agreed that both top-down and bottom-up strategies should be used. Programs should “take students from where they are and move them into readiness for high opportunity employment.” But several observed that success in helping very low-skilled workers and students pursue career pathways often depends on accelerated instruction. They believe that many students will not persist in even the best contextualized basic skills programs for years on end. Among the approaches mentioned to accelerate instruction were high intensity programs that meet for 10 or more hours per week, and managed enrollment that permits students to enter basic skills instruction only at the beginning of each course (as opposed to the usual “open enrollment” model that permits students to enter any time during the semester). Flexible scheduling and the use of technology to facilitate distance learning were also discussed and considered to be of high importance.

It is not clear whether the Roundtable participants think these and other existing strategies are adequate to move the full range of individuals with very low skills along career pathways, or whether new, supplemental strategies must be developed as well. For example, high intensity/managed enrollment programs may require a greater time commitment than some working adults can make, and the promise of technology for instruction in this field has yet to be fully explored. But most participants agree that these students should be a priority in adult-

education-for-work programs and that this priority should be expressed in some way in WIA reauthorization.

F. OVERCOMING BOUNDARIES & BARRIERS

Some of the group stressed the importance of clarifying “who is responsible for doing what” in providing adult education for work, regardless of whether WIA is reformed. As noted above, they believe adult education for work is a combination of many customized instructional and non-instructional services, and these are presently provided by separate institutional “silos.” Even if WIA reform breaks down some of the silos between Title I and Title II programs, other silos remain that can hinder the development of effective programs.

Because the Administration has launched an initiative to support workforce development by community colleges (“the American Graduation Initiative”) that would appear to allow investments in adult education for work, most of the Roundtable discussion focused on the problem of defining boundaries for service in colleges. The participants pointed out that many colleges are not interested in providing career pathways for low-skilled adults. They stressed that individual college leaders determine if they are prepared to take up this challenge, and indicated that many college leaders devalue both adult education and vocational training because they believe the primary mission of their institutions is to prepare students for transfer to four-year institutions. These colleges are unlikely to support adult education for work, they said. In addition, many areas do not have strong community colleges, and in many other areas vocational training centers or other institutions are more motivated and better equipped to increase the economic prospects of low-skilled adults. On the whole, Roundtable participants seem to feel that the need for greater support of adult education for work cannot be met by increased funding for colleges alone. Other sources of federal support will be required, including an improved version of WIA, greater flexibility to use TANF funds for career pathways programs, and, ideally, legislation that directly funds adult education for work as a service in its own right.

Equally important, participants pointed out, silos *within* most community colleges also stand in the way of providing effective adult education for work. Among those most discussed were the boundaries between adult education and developmental education and between non-credit and credit ESL. If at least one goal of adult-education-for-work programs is to prepare students for postsecondary transitions, they ought to provide the same instruction that developmental education and credit ESL programs do. Indeed, a number of participants who manage adult education transition programs said they offer exactly the same instruction that is given by developmental and credit ESL courses to their upper level students, often using the same textbooks and course designs. But a number of participants reported that colleges that manage adult education programs are often reluctant to allow this type of service and/or to admit transition students into credit programs unless they first complete developmental courses. One participant who administers a large non-credit ESL program said that her college's credit ESL director would not even meet with her to discuss this issue.

As a result, non-credit adult education students in most colleges must pay for developmental education courses before they can enter credit studies, rather than receive the necessary instruction free from adult education. Some suggested this is because colleges see developmental education as a profit center. Whatever the reason, a number of participants expressed the view (which they believe research supports) that the sooner low-skilled students can enter credit courses, the greater the likelihood that they will persist in and complete in postsecondary programs. As one person put it, "seeing credit in the near term is the great motivator," and anything that delays the transition to credit decreases motivation. A number of participants also said they believe that the tests colleges use to screen students into credit or developmental education are imprecise. Many students who cannot pass the tests can succeed in credit programs. In contrast, some colleges believe that students have "the right to fail" if they choose to bypass developmental courses. Participants feel there must be a balance between realistic assessment of college readiness and inflexible restrictions on credit studies.

Several in the group were critical of what they called the "add a course" response many colleges and other institutions take to meeting the needs of low-skilled adults. This often results

in multiple levels of developmental or credit ESL courses that either precede admission to credit studies or restrict the credit courses students can take. Although federal policy cannot solve these and other “boundary” issues in colleges, it should recognize that they exist. One possible policy response is to make sure that Title II programs are authorized and funded to provide the full range of college readiness instructional and non-instructional services and to require states to define “college readiness” more precisely in their WIA state plans. Another possible approach is to require colleges receiving federal funding to form articulation agreements with adult education programs.

Lack of tuition money. Another “boundary” discussed at the Roundtable was that Pell grants – on which many low-skilled adults must rely for further education – do not cover the cost of certain forms of adult education for work. For example, most non-credit courses (except developmental education) are not eligible for Pell Grant aid at all, and the cost of many “integrated” high intensity programs that blend basic skills with occupational or academic studies exceeds the maximum amount available under Pell. This is especially true of programs that include preparation for certain healthcare and other high-demand occupations, for which tuition charges are often very high. In these and other cases, students may need additional tuition assistance. Roundtable participants believe that the maximum Pell grant amount should be greatly increased and that eligibility should be expanded, although they did not discuss either issue in detail. Some in the group said that they were able to obtain at least some scholarship support to fill tuition gaps from state funds, donations from business, and other sources. This is one area in which closer partnerships with Title I and TANF programs could be useful. WIA reauthorization might encourage Title I programs to give higher priority to the tuition needs of students in adult education for work programs. Likewise, TANF programs might pay for tuition in these programs — at least for the period during which individuals are eligible for TANF.

G. NARROWING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE: THE BIG MESSAGE

Participants in the February 18 CAAL Roundtable did their best to offer suggestions on how federal policy could provide more support for adult education for work, and CAAL informed

them about federal policy issues presently under discussion. Nevertheless, there clearly is a large gap between the perspectives of federal (and state) policymakers and local practitioners in this field – and in the fields of job training and adult education more generally. Roundtable participants had a hard time calibrating their experiences and concerns to the topics of policymakers. For example, they found it difficult to make *specific* suggestions about provisions of the Workforce Investment Act. The size of this gap between policy and practice may well be the most important finding of the Roundtable. In some cases, it was very great indeed. For example, a number of directors of large, successful adult-education-for-work programs said that they had never seen a state plan for either Title I or Title II services (let alone their own state plan) and did not know what state plans contained or why they were significant.

Perhaps there is a large gap between policy and practice in all fields. But the Roundtable discussion was troubling in that it seemed to reflect an alienation of local providers from federal (and state) policy related to workforce skills development. Many of the participants see federal policy as a counter-productive tangle of rules and regulations that create barriers to providing the service they believe is needed, rather than as a source of support for their work. They do not think that WIA in its present form gives them much help, and they seem doubtful that any revised legislation will be more helpful. They seem to believe that Washington does not have a commitment to adult education for work, or that federal policymakers simply do not understand the realities of this field – or both. In an especially telling moment, the head of one large program responded to the news that the Department of Education was planning to commit \$30 million to innovation grants in this field by saying, “I lost \$20 million in state funding this year in my program alone, “ and threw up his hands. The implication was that Washington does not understand the level of resources needed to make progress in adult education for work.

The gap between policy and practice in this field is not healthy for policymakers or practitioners. There is clearly a need for professional development to help local program leaders understand federal and state policy better and to express their concerns in terms that policymakers can put to use. Otherwise, federal and state policymakers are almost certain to be

uninformed of many issues that must be addressed at the service level and how best to address them. At the same time, policymakers must spend more time seeking inputs from the local level and trying out their ideas on at least the most experienced local leaders. The field hearings on WIA reauthorization held by the Departments of Education and Labor in late 2009-early 2010 were a good start in this regard. They should be followed up by on-going consultations with local leaders on the policy solutions that are being developed and on the implementation of those policies. Both the state directors of adult education and state officials responsible for workforce development have established a working relationship with federal policymakers. But many participants in the CAAL Roundtable appeared to see as much distance from their state offices as they do from Washington.

H. SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Despite the gap between policy and practice, the CAAL Roundtable participants provided at least some useful guidance for reauthorization of WIA. Among the major points made were:

- Adult education for work takes somewhat different forms in different places, but it is a far more extensive and successful enterprise than many policymakers recognize. Federal funding for it should not be limited to demonstration programs. Although these have value, restricting federal support to demonstrations is the equivalent of putting adult education for work on probation. It needs and deserves to be incorporated into ongoing federal policy as a distinctive education and training service that receives substantial, systematic, and categorical support.
- In its present form, WIA provides very little support for adult education for work. A comprehensive revision of WIA, rather than minor adjustments of existing provisions, is required to provide adult education for work with the support it needs, and any revision must focus on the most direct ways to provide that support.
- Although it is hard to argue against partnerships between the WIA Titles I and II, partnership should not become a goal in itself. The goal should be to provide the full range of services required by adult education for work with as little bureaucratic process and red tape as possible.
- In addition to a partnership between Title I and Title II programs, community colleges, TANF and economic development programs, businesses, unions, and other institutions or programs should be equal partners in any attempts to strengthen adult education for work.

- Policymakers should be wary of subsuming support for adult education for work under other education and training initiatives. Because present federal funding for this service is small, there is a danger that it will be neglected in policies that also support other forms of workforce development.
- Policies to support adult education for work should focus primarily on outcomes such as transitions, completion of training programs, improved workplace skills, and income gains, and they should allow for the greatest possible local flexibility in how programs achieve those outcomes. Programs should be held accountable for achieving these outcomes over multiple years. On an interim basis, they should be held accountable for the progress of students past “momentum points” that are directly related to reaching program outcomes tailored to local circumstances and needs.
- Any policies that support adult-education-for-work programs should recognize that individuals with very low basic skills are a significant portion of the population served and provide the resources needed to serve them.
- To the extent possible, policies that support adult education for work should encourage institutions to break down boundaries and barriers that slow students’ progress toward completing degree or certificate programs or reaching other employability goals. For example, colleges should be encouraged to eliminate distinctions between adult education and developmental education programs or between credit and non-credit ESL when this will allow students to progress more quickly to enrollment and success in credit studies.
- Policymakers should address the need to provide tuition support so that low-income adults can take advantage of the full range of adult-education-for-work programs, either by changing Pell Grant regulations or by other means.

Although these points are not a legislative roadmap for WIA reauthorization, they are touchstones against which policymakers and national leaders should test their ideas about what form reauthorization should take. CAAL hopes these voices will be heard and heeded.

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