



Verizon Literacy Summit, Nov. 14, 2005
Literacy and the Workforce - Next Steps in the Literacy Agenda

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I'm going to start by giving you a few sidebars on the theme of literacy and the workforce:

- The economic imperative for giving more careful attention to literacy and workforce readiness is evident -- for both individuals and the nation's well being. It's been evident for a long time.
- There is no better investment to make in America than its greatest asset, its people and its workforce. We all have a stake in it.
- The "same old, same old" in terms of programs and services just won't do it anymore. There is a lot going on in workforce and workplace literacy, all across the country, yet we aren't doing nearly enough. And what the current effort adds up to is anybody's guess.
- Neither adult education/ literacy nor workforce/workplace literacy is very high on the radar screen of the federal government or anyone else. This despite all the evidence that it needs to be a *much* higher priority.
- As long as adult education and literacy is marginalized, and it presently is, workforce/workplace literacy provision will also be marginalized. Tom Sticht's call for an AELS system makes sense, but current public policy doesn't value that.
- We have our heads buried in the sand while the world is changing, and fast! The U.S. is losing its edge, and we're still offering technical and college courses that lead people to low-wage jobs.
- To address our adult education and literacy needs (including workforce and family literacy), there is an essential role for all fund givers – federal and state government and corporate and private philanthropy.

If I could offer nothing more than these few sidebar comments, they would give us a lot to think about. But, the topic is actually a lot tougher than this.

In the past three years, CAAL has been doing research that's closely tied to workforce education and training – in our studies of links between adult education and community colleges, exemplary adult ESL provision in community colleges, and entry-level healthcare training. This work gives me a current window into some parts of this arena. But I've also been around in the field long enough to have seen a lot of the developments and setbacks in workforce and workplace literacy over many years.

It isn't news that we don't have enough young people in the education pipeline to fill the nation's workforce needs in the coming decades. It isn't news that a big part of the adult pool available for hire, especially at entry-level, are poorly skilled and increasingly have ESL problems on top of it. And, it isn't news that we're serving fewer than 10 percent of the 40-50 million people known to be in need of service. I don't expect the need to change much as a result of the current NAAL survey.

As I noted above, there *is* a lot going on in workforce and workplace literacy, all across the country. And we need to keep it going. But for purposes of future planning, what it adds up to is anybody's guess -- and no one is doing the research to find out. It is equally important to do it.

We need to develop a better understanding of what workforce literacy "is" in the current thinking (definitional issues)...what and where the exemplary efforts are...how and by whom the services are provided...how it is and isn't supported in existing federal and state legislation...how it is funded from both public and private sources...what concerns are on the minds of employers (e.g., in the health care industry)...what we have accomplished in the last decade or

so on this front in terms of service and improved employability... what we aren't doing and why...what the great research needs are...and what the burning issues and needs are for the decade ahead.

We would be wise to stop and take stock of what we've got now and consider how best to approach the future in terms of services, policy, funding, state and federal planning. This is all the more important considering that no part of adult education and literacy is now very high on the radar screen of the federal government, or most other policy and funding sources for that matter.

As some of you know, what I've just said about workforce literacy I also say about adult education and literacy in general. In fact, I've begun working with the help of about 20 leadership organizations to see if an independent blue-ribbon commission can be launched. We are agreed on the need for this. It would give us a really fresh way to assess where we're at in all areas of the field, where we need to go, and how best to get there in light of changing needs. And it would bring new thinking to the field and the issues, which is very much needed.

Of course, any serious look at workplace/workforce literacy will be complicated by several factors. What does it mean for adult education and for workforce training programs when so many American jobs are being outsourced (or in-sourced), for example? What does it mean when adult ESL needs for low-literacy persons is very high and growing almost daily? What does it mean for us when high school non-completion (more and more a "push out" problem) is growing at such an alarming rate, increasing the demand on all components of the adult education and literacy system, including job-related skills training?

I decided to share the views I've just expressed with a number of national and state experts, about 10 of them. Most of them would be recognized by adult literacy leaders as among our top authorities. The idea was to inform my own perspective, as well as that of other Summit attendees. In exchange for candor, I promised not to reveal names, and in the Q&A handout (see document attached), I've tried to honor that promise.

Suffice it to say the Q&A represents a mix of informed national and state perspectives -- people in federal government, state adult education and workforce development systems, national and state planning, service provision, policy analysis, welfare and work, research, partnerships with business and industry, and a few other cuts.

The advice I've been given reaffirms the points I've just made above -- about the need for a fresh, comprehensive look at the field in order to learn what we need to know to wisely plan for the future.

But the Q&A document also helps flesh out some of the particulars -- things we could and should be working on *right now*, regardless of whether a commission is launched or whether a fresh look at this field takes place. It gives us a starter menu worthy of further investigation and consideration by corporate and foundation funding agencies, and by government entities for that matter. So I hope you will examine the document carefully. Here's a brief summary of SOME of the sage advice I was given. I should note that there is a great deal of overlap in the various categories:

1: We need awareness activities on many fronts. For example, we need a far better understanding that workforce literacy is an important element of adult education. We need to develop better public understanding of the importance of adult literacy. We need to get employers and other economic leaders to

recognize the value of basic skills training for their employees and to address the gaps between jobs and the workers' skills. In addition, there should be more awareness that adult education providers are competent workforce development partners. We need to build understanding about the changing demographics (e.g., the growth in minorities and immigrant population, the aging of America) and how these changes impact on workforce literacy and adult education generally.

2: We need information-sharing opportunities: We could do a far better job now if we had opportunities for sharing what we're doing, what we know, and what problems we face. The best single mechanism for doing that would be to offer occasional national or regional workforce conferences, as we did at one point in the past. This is largely a matter of available funding. By the way, one area of special concern to CAAL is the incorporation of basic skills elements into programs for training entry-level healthcare workers, a very high priority need in America. We're trying to launch a program that will help meet informational needs in this area.

3: We need to fix the alignment or "silos" problem. There is lack of alignment among systems and funding streams, which impedes statewide planning. Overcoming the "silos" problem ought to be a priority. One aspect of the silo problem is that we have separated workforce literacy as well as family literacy from adult education and literacy. We need to integrate both back into adult education, as was the case 10-15 years ago. This is a challenge for researchers, policymakers, and funders.

4: Lack of funding remains a crucial problem. One advisor put it this way: funding for adult basic education services, regardless of the context in which it is provided, is ludicrously low. At the same time, federal and state expectations

for outcomes, accountability, use of research, is high. Stable funding is essential if programs are to plan workforce development strategically within their communities, and a higher level of funding is needed for programs to have the capacity to *be* accountable.

5: Scaling up. We need to identify and bring to “scale” worthy programs, which are now operating in isolation. For this, it is essential to have better public policy, more funding, and research.

6: Policy leadership. We need policies that reflect a real understanding of all elements of workforce literacy, and of the adult education and literacy system in general. National and state policy makers need to see that the United States is no longer an industrial giant and that, at the rate we’re going, we risk becoming only a tourist destination. The forces of globalization are part of this challenge. We need to learn how to deal with that and how globalization relates to the adult education and literacy system. Policy leadership is essential! But the big question is, who is going to provide it? At the state level, adult education programs themselves can help by becoming more involved in politics (legislatively) regarding federal and state initiatives.

7: Corporate and labor support. Corporate and labor support for workforce literacy needs to be strengthened. It’s very weak now. One advisor said this on the theme: “We need to move all kinds of workforce/workplace training from marginalization to core corporate funding. When the bottom line falls, usually training expenses are cut. It would make more sense to increase training to increase the impact on productivity.” There is a lack of business engagement and investment. We should be developing incentives and supports to aid employer investment, and to aid worker investment in their own skills development. One specific incentive suggested by one person is a form of

income support for the students themselves. It was noted that when low-skilled adults are in full-time education and training, and when they're working several jobs as some are, they get discouraged and drop out because they can't afford to stay in the program. Income support might help make their study a more realistic option.

8: Research. We need research on many fronts. Here are just a few examples: We need research on specific job-related needs, effective programs and approaches, training requirements and standards. We ought to examine healthcare policy issues and costs as they relate to profit margins because of their impact on investments in workforce training. Some promising work is being done on credentialing for skills learned, but we need to know more about how to do this, and about appropriate training and credentialing for service providers as well. We should have a far better definition of jobs in terms of the actual availability of specific kinds of jobs in the communities where workers live, and then we need to understand better the precise adult education/job training requirements as they relate to those jobs. In a nutshell, local program services should be geared more to local realities. Lack of clarity as to rapidly changing workforce needs is another subject for examination. There is need for continuous education and retooling of America's workforce. That's what lifelong learning is all about.

Overcoming marginalization of the entire adult education system (including family literacy *and* workforce literacy) has long been a goal of adult education and literacy. It remains a challenge and a goal. For it to become reality, action is needed in all of the above areas. And, along with it we need activities that develop a broader vision on the part of administrators, service providers, everyone. We need to convince others, especially federal and state government leaders, that adult education and literacy, including workforce

literacy, needs to be a far higher priority need – for which better accountability (and the help to develop it) is essential.

If I were to take all of this and boil it down to particular areas of need and opportunity for corporate funding action, at the top of my list would be periodic conferences to start bringing people together for simple information sharing. If nothing else were done, this alone would begin to correct some of the problems we have as we face the future. There are also plenty of other opportunities in the eight broad areas summarized above. And, if a couple of corporations were to put significant six figure funding into support of a blue-ribbon independent national commission, that would be a bold stroke indeed with profound implications for how we do our future work.

One final note. In the midst of preparing these remarks I went off to see the movie *Good Night and Good Luck*. I mention this because I see a close connection between that film's message and why the adult education and literacy enterprise in America, in all its parts, matters so much. When we talk about literacy we're talking about nothing less than core values, inclusiveness, and the continuing viability of our democracy. We may not always understand how to get from here to there, but we need to keep pushing forward. In doing this, we *shouldn't* be deterred by the fact that there are no quick and easy fixes. And we *should* be committed to literacy across party lines because it is truly a nonpartisan issue and the evidence of need is very great.



Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy

Q&A with Various Workforce Leaders Prepared for the Verizon Summit Washington, D.C. - November 14, 2005

QUESTION 1: To what extent are America's workforce/workplace literacy needs currently being met?

Federal Perspective: To a very small extent. Most adults in our programs are served by general ABE, ESL and GED programs. Only about 5 percent of them are enrolled in dedicated workplace programs. Of course, there are many millions of adults who could benefit from workforce/workplace education that are not even enrolled in general AE.

Statewide Resource Development: Workforce needs are not being met at all. No one is interested in investing in human capital. Folks just don't understand the value of an educated and trained workforce. They would rather out-source or in-source (from Mexico, as you stated).

University-Based Research and Development Center: Workplace literacy needs are huge, but no one is really stepping up to the plate to fund programs to serve incumbent workers. Community colleges seem to be faring a bit better, but you know more about that than I do. The aging workforce is not prepared to deal with modern technology which has, of course, displaced a large number of workers. Companies have not been investing in the necessary technical training or literacy provision (the foundation for technical training). At least with the National Workplace Literacy Program (NWLP) there were incentives to incorporate literacy training, but those are gone now. To respond to global competition, companies have moved to Mexico and other places where wages are cheaper. Now even high tech jobs (which were supposed to be a strength of the U.S.) are being out-sourced to India and elsewhere. The picture is not rosy.

Welfare and Work: Very little.

Partnership with Business and Industry: America's workforce literacy needs are not being met. The 1992 NALS survey revealed that 46 to 51 percent of adults in the US have skills below a Level III, which is commonly considered the level required for successful employment. A full 40 to 42 percent of workers performed below level III (53-54 million). This is unacceptable in any economy, but especially in an economy that increasingly demands higher skills of workers. Additionally, employers increasingly report that they struggle to find qualified workers for their jobs. A 2002 survey of employers conducted by the Center for Workforce Preparation at the US Chamber of Commerce found that half of employers were having a hard time finding qualified job applicants.

Comprehensive Statewide System: There is a lack of coordination among funding sources at the national and the state level. Most states do not know the full extent of resources available. There is also a lack of coordination between adult education and higher education in many states. Postsecondary institutions, with the exception of community and technical colleges, do not view workforce training as part of their mission. States do not have a grip on total resources available for training because the funds flow to multiple agencies that do not coordinate their efforts. Employers are hesitant to use workforce training funds because of the bureaucracy. States should think about one coordinating entity where all training and education funds are brought to the table under one strategic plan. States should implement clear goals to be achieved with all funds, and hold the various agencies accountable.

University-Based Research & Development Center: Although we've seen some growth in employers' and Department of Labor's interest in worker literacy, it is still a concept that appears to be "under the radar." We face huge challenges in upgrading American workers' skills and knowledge, especially in technology, multicultural understanding, and English language skills. If futurists are correct, many organizations exist in a bubble and have not fully grasped the potential impact of the global economy and its implications at the national, state, and regional levels. A lot of states are just now coming to grips with the realities of employing English language learners – and this is primarily at a mostly superficial level (numbers).

Currently, we are fortunate in our state to have a professional charged with working across agencies at the state level to encourage collaboration to meet the needs of adults with limited literacy – with the larger focus being the preparation of adults to meet employers' needs for skilled workers. We also have a long and positive history of working in the area of workforce education. We have developed real expertise in this literacy area.

Although we provide training and other support for the state effort, we still reach very few businesses overall. The programs that have been successful in working with businesses have administrators that support the time and effort it takes to develop relationships with employers and the time it takes to train teachers to develop and provide customized foundation skills curricula. All in all, however, we have a LONG way to go to ensure that our workforce literacy needs are met.

Metro-Area Workforce Initiative: Every year, a skilled workforce is the number one need identified by our metropolitan-area chamber of commerce. The answer is that they are not being met.

QUESTION 2: What are the biggest obstacles to offering programs that are effective and commensurate with the extent and nature of the need?

Federal Perspective: Limited funding at all levels. Lack of long-range planning at all levels. Fragmentation of funding sources. Making workplace education a public and program priority.

Statewide Resource Development: Lack of awareness of the problem and how important it is to invest in our greatest resource, humans. Ineffective policy at the federal and state levels. Not real sure what the U.S. Department of Labor is doing. There is a lack of program design and outcome measures.

Welfare and Work, Youth Employment: Program silos. Each element of the process is separately funded and administered when research points toward integrating as the best

approach. It's hard to do when they're run by different organizations. Also, the overall level of funding is an obstacle, and so is lack of research on effective programs. The biggest obstacles are the federal and state policies that direct adult education funding. No federal funds support this critical training need, either from adult education or from the Workforce Investment Act. Most state policies fail to steer funds and programs toward workplace-based basic skills education (where it can have the greatest economic impact).

Comprehensive Statewide System: Connecting current and future labor market trends with available training funds is critical. This has to be an ongoing effort, and postsecondary institutions must be willing to terminate programs/courses that no longer fit the workforce needs. Institutions shouldn't be funded unless their programs are current. Employers need flexible and timely courses/training with content that is chunked to meet the needs of the employer, not meet the needs of the institution or agency. Short-term training should align to certificates and degrees.

University-Based Research and Development Center: We have obstacles in the workforce education system, including adult education, in the private sector with employers, and also in other public sectors, such as the Department of Labor. These obstacles include the difficulty of working across systems, including different language, different missions, and different expectations for accountability.

We have adult education providers that do not understand why they should be interested in developing the expertise they need to develop and deliver work-based basic skills training in the classroom and in the workplace. In general, educational providers are not accustomed to marketing their services in the community. The sense is that "if we provide the educational services, learners will come" – which, apparently, doesn't work that well based on the percentage of adults eligible for services who actually participate.

Along with this, business and industry representatives need to be educated as to the extent of the skills gaps of employees and the benefits of providing training to their workers. Developing literacy skills is not a quick fix in most cases, a concept that those unaccustomed to teaching basic skills to adults find hard to accept. Also, many still believe that adult education is the "second chance" that adults do not deserve. They think that if they didn't get it the first time, that's too bad.

Adequate funding and the time needed to provide quality basic skills instruction in the context of work can be effective in developing workers with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the workplace. But, workplace literacy as an education priority gets put on the back burner or goes off the radar screen too easily.

Metro-Area Workforce Initiative: (1) Employers do not want to invest in low-end workers for fear they will leave their jobs for a small wage increase with a competitor. (2) Lack of understanding of cognitive issues that are intertwined with remedial education and developmental education. (3) In workplace learning, commitment must be present from all levels – i.e., CEOs, human resource people, line supervisors. (4) Logistics of offering education training in worker-friendly formats, clusters, etc. (5) Inadequate funding.

QUESTION 3:

What do you most need to know (or does your institution, state, or the nation need to know) to plan more effectively for America's future

**workforce needs? Or, where would YOU put the research emphasis?
Put another way, what don't you know now that if you did would make
your work easier or more effective?**

Federal Perspective: Among the many questions I would like to see addressed are: What approaches are effective in work-related basic skills education, under what conditions, for what purposes? How should work-related basic skills programs be evaluated? What are appropriate goals for them? What methods are being used to capture program results and lessons? What can decision-makers do to support high quality, work-related basic skills efforts? What is the role of credentialing in motivating basic skills attainment? Do intermediary agencies, including CBOs and temporary agencies, offer new approaches and techniques that can be adapted by the public-sector employment and training community? What role can trade associations play as intermediaries/brokers? What is the risk of non-investment by employers? How does work organization stimulate learning? What industries are doing ESL well? How can the cultural competence of those entering the workforce be enhanced? What do longitudinal studies of adult education intervention tell us? Which institutions are most successful with which population groups? Why are they successful? What practices are working? How do we address the issue of silos caused by multiple agencies and their funding streams? What is future work? What are the leading indicators for changes in basic skills? What are universal skill sets? What skills can be adapted or transferred?

Statewide Resource Development, National Analyst: We need an awareness campaign, information to commit CEOs to help solve the problem, effective program designs and outcome impact measures, best practices.

University-Based Research Center: The big research question is how to "scale up" from isolated enlightened projects to a national effort (policy research). One state that provides a model is Pennsylvania, and there are a few others. However, without a national priority being set on workforce development that includes incumbent workers, the problems will not be solved. Other research questions also exist, such as how content-specific assessments (that assess what workers are learning) can be used for federal/state accountability? (The usual academic tests, such as the TABE, are inappropriate in workplace settings and do not reflect the growth that has occurred. Companies that see the impact on workers are less concerned about test scores; they see the impact on their bottom line. However, there is not a direct quantitative relationship between training and productivity so it takes enlightened corporate leadership to push the initiative.) Another important research question is how to provide literacy services to small businesses. It has been well documented that the least educated workers are in small businesses, which have the least capability to deliver literacy provision services. Should services be offered through distance education, through computer-assisted instruction, through a consortium of local small businesses at a central place, through targeted programs at local colleges, etc.?

Welfare to Work: It would be really helpful to have better hard information on what jobs will be available in the future that pay enough to support a family and what specifically does someone need to know to get a particular job – i.e., what specific skills do they need, not just high school reading basic skills but specific reading, writing, math, and technical skills required for each job? AND, how many jobs will actually be available? We're always hearing that there aren't enough good jobs to go around no matter what skills people have.

University-Based Research Center: How can we best integrate and streamline workforce education services across systems? This should be addressed in the K-12 system, including engaging parents as well as educators and employers in discussing employment possibilities in

the community and/or region, employment needs and related training and education to address those needs, and strategies for developing career and work skills as part of a broad educational plan (a plan that includes more than teaching students to write a resume and interviewing skills).

Research needs to be done that can accurately show what employers, and the community, will gain from employees/citizens with increased basic skills levels. What are the actual impacts of workplace or workforce education programs? How can we get a handle on return on investment statistics that can put a dollar amount to what companies stand to gain? It would be easier to sell the concept of workforce literacy if we could say..."ABC Company was able to save \$50,000 a year in wages by not needing a translator for employees who were not fluent in English." As a rule, we are not able to get this information from our projects, because when the project is over, there is no additional support for tracking.

QUESTION 4:

What organizations do you see as the main provider of services in this area now (for example, community colleges and proprietary schools, the school system, the adult education and literacy system)? Is the relative role about right or do we need to rethink how services are provided and by whom?

Federal Perspective: Community colleges could, if supported by leadership and funding, make a major contribution here.

Statewide Resource Development: Community colleges, some nonprofits, a few companies. State leadership is important in this area. For instance, the Secretary of State Literacy Office in my state still has a small grant program in workforce/workplace literacy.

University-Based R&D: We need to rethink the system on a national level, but the types of providers may differ across the states. (As long as adult education in any context is marginalized as it is, workforce/workplace literacy provision will also be marginalized. Tom Sticht's call for an AELS system makes sense, but public policy doesn't value it.) As to which type of agency should be delivering services, community college would seem to be a logical choice. However, in some states they are not strong. CBOs may be better equipped with the proper training to offer services, but my experience would lead me to not recommend volunteer organizations to provide workforce/workplace literacy. The training is specialized, confidential, and possibly long-term, not matching up with the strengths of volunteer tutoring organizations.

Welfare to Work: The bulk of literacy services are provided by the K-12 system and the bulk of job training by the community college system. The problem for both services is that they're not nearly as effective as they need to be. Moving particular literacy services to a different entity doesn't change it. I worry less about who's doing the providing and more about how effective the providing is.

Partnership with Business: Currently, what few workforce literacy services are provided are delivered by a hodgepodge of providers. Some community colleges provide pockets of workforce literacy education. Employers who are frustrated enough to provide the education on their own typically hire private training vendors. The current providers of adult education - typically licensed K-12 teachers - are not generally the most appropriate providers of workforce

literacy, especially that provided in the workplace and employer-driven. This education must be delivered by providers who are well-versed in adult learning methodologies, business culture and language, contextualized basic skills curriculum, and "blending" basic skills and occupationally-focused education. Ideally, providers would be trained and certified in these skills (like the workforce education certifications created by James Madison University: <http://www.jmu.edu/wdc/home/index.shtml> and the professional development networks of PA WIN (www.foundationsskills.org), and VA WIN (<http://vawin.jmu.edu/>). We also like community colleges providing this education and providing a "bridge" to further postsecondary education.

Comprehensive statewide system: The problem, in my opinion, is lack of alignment and lack of a strategic plan both at the national and the state level. We really haven't articulated where we need to go or what we're trying to accomplish! We have our heads buried in the sand while the world is changing-and fast! The U.S. is losing its edge, and we're still offering technical and college courses that lead people to low-wage jobs.

University-Based R&D: In my state, community colleges, school districts, intermediate units, and community-based organizations receive funding to provide adult basic education. This diversity is also seen in the programs funded to work in the area of workforce development. When these services are provided, the emphasis is on development of basic skills within the context of work. In one of our major programs, the context is narrow and selected cooperatively by the employer and the adult educator who will provide the training. In the classroom, the context might be more generic; however, the emphasis is still on basic skills development. We don't have many community colleges, for a number of reasons. Proprietary schools and the few community colleges in my state provide training and/or courses for employers. Generally, the proprietary schools focus on specific job training with little emphasis – or knowledge about – teaching the underlying basic literacy skills. In most – but not all – cases, community colleges provide technical training programs through their continuing education units or through certificate classes without an emphasis on developing the underlying basic skills. One of my local service colleagues feels that not enough marketing of/by adult education providers has been done to convey the message to businesses within the community that quality workforce foundation skills training can be provided by local adult education providers.

QUESTION 5:

How would you assess the adequacy of federal and state policy and funding for workforce/workplace literacy (job-related skills training)?

Federal Perspective: The whole effort is underfunded and fragmented at all levels (including the employer level).

Statewide Literacy Resource Development: Federal and state policy is very poor.

University-Based R&D: For the most part, there has been a lack of leadership at the federal level except for the NWLP projects. (However, the feds didn't have the concept of "scaling up" and instead bred a dependency on federal NWLP funds year after year.) Some states have taken leadership roles such as Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. But, for the most part, policy and funding are inadequate. Where is the leadership?

Welfare to Work: Literacy in general is greatly underfunded. Job training, if you count student aid, is not necessarily underfunded, but capacity building is. Most of the federal funding is for student aid and dollars go to individuals. That only helps when there's a program people can sign up for. There's not enough start-up funding. There isn't enough venture capital for start up funding. In policy, the biggest problem is that things are all split up in different agencies—e.g., welfare reform, job training, higher education, youth employment. This makes it hard to think in an integrated, seamless way and to develop a set of services that goes all the way through an individual's education program.

Partnership With Business: The National Workplace Literacy Program was funded from 1988-1996 with \$133 million. It funded 300+ projects that seeded some very significant and successful programs and projects. However, the federal government has since been backing away from funding workforce education and training. It has completely dropped funding of any workforce literacy programs.

Comprehensive Statewide System: Totally inadequate. No alignment of department/systems. We have no way to measure the outcomes of short-term training. We know enrollment or participation, but are people gaining from the participation? A few states (New York, Indiana) have conducted audits of funding resources. They find that the real problem is not the resources, but the coordination of resources.

University-Based R&D: State policies and funding vary widely from state to state, and, generally, literacy issues are most often NOT on the radar screen with anyone except adult education providers. Funding is inadequate – I'd say almost non-existent - at the federal level. Also, WIA Title I purposes and policies and Title II purposes and policies do not always coincide. Although adult basic education often might serve the purpose of preparing adults for the workplace, it is so much broader than that. As a result, having the federal adult education program housed within the WIA is somewhat awkward – how does one address family literacy? How does one address adult ESL needs in terms of learning enough English to navigate the community? These contexts do not necessarily 'fit' with workforce education.

We often hear that for adult education providers to grow and strengthen their programs, additional funding needs to be earmarked for staff to develop relationships in the community with employers and other key stakeholders in workforce development. Due to limitations on program administration costs – and a staff person who is NOT teaching is considered administration – it is difficult for agencies to develop relationships in their communities. [Although many adult basic education administrators are full-time, they may not have time to take on this additional responsibility.] Adult education providers need to be more recognized as competent partners rather than just nice people who “teach grandma to read.” To gain that respect; however, agencies need to shift their focus to workforce education. A colleague of mine characterizes federal and state policy/funding as fickle and political. For that reason, she thinks that adult education and literacy providers should become more knowledgeable and active within their legislative arenas.

QUESTION 6:

In no more than a sentence each, what do you see as the six most important problems/challenges in this field?

State Resource Development: (1) Lack of awareness. (2) Lack of policies that cover the entire ball of wax (as you state). (3) Lack of program effectiveness. (4) Sharing of information. (5) Lack of corporate and labor support.

University-Based R&D: (1) "Scaling up" isolated efforts through public policy and funding. (2) Getting national and state policy makers to see that the U.S. is no longer an industrial giant and will soon become only a tourist destination (already the service sector is growing the fastest). We need policy leadership! (3) Dealing with globalization (e.g., we now ship raw materials off shore to be made into products which are then imported for us to buy!). (4) Moving all kinds of workforce/workplace training from marginalization to core corporate funding. When the bottom line falls, usually training expenses are cut. It would make more sense to increase training to increase the impact on productivity. (5) Marginalization of the entire adult education system. (6) Health care policy and costs. Those costs are eating up profit margins that could be invested in workforce training.

Welfare to work: (1) Lack of funding. (2) Lack of research on specific job-related needs. (3) Lack of research on effective program approaches. (4) Lack of integration of adult education and job training. (5) Lack of business engagement and investment. (6) Lack of income for the students themselves. (While they're in full-time education and training for low-skilled adults, it takes a lot of hours and when they're working on several jobs they get discouraged. They literally need income support so that they can cut back on work to make a real difference. Otherwise, they get discouraged and drop out because it takes too long to reach their goals.)

Partnership with Business: (1) Defining standards for specific workforce literacy skills. (2) Credentialing skills. (3) Appropriately trained and credentialed training providers. (4) Incentives and supports to aid employer investment. (5) Incentives and supports to aid worker investment in their own skills development.

Statewide Planning System: (1) Lack of alignment among systems. (2) Lack of clarity as to the rapidly changing workforce needs. (3) Lack of awareness of the changing demographics-growth in minorities and immigrant population and the aging of America. (4) Lack of accountability for performance and results. (5) Lifelong learning - the need for continuous education and retooling of America's workforce.

University R&D Center: (1) One of the real problems is that jobs are not necessarily available in the communities in which workers live. In my state, few low-income families are willing or able to move to another community to find work (e.g., lack of a support network, lack of knowledge about other communities). Also, the jobs that are available do not pay a living wage. Economic fluctuations in the communities often result in those adults at the bottom of the economic ladder being the first ones to lose their jobs, so the cycle of poverty and unemployment continues. And, if the adult is employed, the companies/businesses are often small with few or no chances for advancement OR they are large businesses that do not put training dollars into helping workers at the entry level develop and move ahead within the business. (2) At the programmatic level, funding for adult basic education, regardless of the context in which it is provided – be it workforce education, family literacy or civics/community education - is ludicrously low while expectations for outcomes... for accountability... for use of research on teaching adults (what research??) are high. There is no career ladder in adult education... another problem.

University R&D: (1) Employers and other economic leaders who recognize the value of basic skills training for their employees to address the gaps between the jobs and the workers' skills (awareness). (2) Adult basic education providers offering work-based foundation skills in the classroom, either before or while adults are working, that focuses on high priority basic skills,

such as technology use and communication (work focus in classroom). (3) Additional opportunities/incentives for provider agencies to become competent in contextualized (work) instruction (professional development). (4) Recognition of adult education providers as competent workforce development partners (public relations and interpersonal skills). (6) Stable funding to allow programs to plan workforce development strategically within their communities. (7) Adult education programs need to become more involved in politics (legislatively) regarding federal and state initiatives.

University R&D: (1) Funding limitations of programs. (2) Employee time restraints. (3) Priority issues of programs and administrators. (4) Lack of knowledge by adult education providers in how to provide work-contextualized basic skills education. (5) Narrow vision by administrators and instructors.

Metro Area Workforce Initiative: Funding, employer commitment, public perception of the issues, professionalism of education and training community, vocational ESL programs for low-level students.

Federal Perspective: See the following federal Workforce Education Plan used in regional meetings:

National Level: (1) AEFLA implies that Workplace Education Programs (WEP) are important, but does not directly mandate state action. Given no real mandate, it's not surprising that Workplace Education support is scattered. (2) The National Reporting System gives little opportunity for states to take credit for WEP performance. Many WEP's offer instruction that is less than 12 hours in duration, the minimum for NRS inclusion. (3) AEFLA accountability measures are built on the concept of program exit, which makes continuous, on-going learning in workplace programs uncountable beyond initial program enrollment. (4) National Leadership Program provisions in AEFLA suggest WEP development, but OVAE to date has funded projects of limited scope. (5) After an 8-year, \$130 million investment in the National Workplace Literacy Program (1988 to 1996), no coherent plan was implemented to support follow-up, evaluation and dissemination efforts.

State Level: (1) States struggle to match WEP outcomes with NRS requirements; adults enrolled in workplace programs are often not fully counted by NRS. (2) Many states have so little non-federal funding that they give maximum priority to keeping existing programs operational, without considering the potential for capacity expansion that WEP's afford. Also, there have been limited opportunities for states and locals wishing to develop WEP systems to learn (in depth) about promising practices, though a few states, mostly in the South, have arranged mutual-help efforts. (3) While some states have developed WEP systems through their State Leadership Program, many states appear to lack the ability to conduct such long-range planning.

Local Level: (1) Employers sometimes provide basic skills training to workers, usually in the context of occupational training. What data exists suggests that it is a very small part of their overall training investment (2 percent of \$55 billion, as reported by ASTD). (2) Local adult education programs are often reluctant to invest time in developing relations with employers unless they are provided with incentives or developmental funds from states or employers themselves. (3) And some local programs, with limited budgets and part-time staff, are just not prepared to make the investment to expand their efforts to other clients, even if the resulting programs were financially self-sustaining.

Possible Solutions: (1) Continue support of the NIFL Workforce Education and Conference Board Work-based Education websites to maintain these useful services to workplace educators and

employers. (2) Establish a collaborative process with DOL and Commerce to identify and foster promising practices for incumbent worker education and training. (3) Explore the feasibility of providing tax incentives to employers who support WEP activities in partnership with AE programs. (4) Use the Higher Education Act reauthorization opportunity to foster partnership development between community colleges and employers by establishing a WEP funding priority in Title VII (FIPSE) and in Title VIII (Grants to States). (5) Improve the NRS in order to account for the unique outcomes of WEP's. (6) Develop and implement a long-term **National Leadership Plan** to assist the expansion of workplace program partnerships. (7) Support R&D-to-practice efforts on national and regional bases - example: National/Southern States Workplace Peer Conference in April 2006 in Houston. (8) Support competitive, matching grants for State Workplace Education Programs. This could include developmental grants for new systems and operational grants for experienced state programs. (9) Use the AEFLA reauthorization opportunity to foster AE/employer workplace education partnerships via a state grant set-aside (either a required funding percentage or budget line item, like EL/Civics). (10) Create performance measures in the NRS that reward continuous learning.

QUESTION 7:

Why do you think the corporate funding community should invest in workforce literacy? How would you target that funding?

Federal: Trade associations and unions could make the case, collaborate/mediate.

State Resource Development: Why should corporations invest? We are investing in our people, our greatest resource. If we can just convince folks that our greatest resource is the people and what we can offer as evidence of return on investment, that'll be a major accomplishment. The case needs to be made in "return on investment" terms. In the 90's, we started to make the case, but interest and policies and programs waned.

University-Based R&D: Companies have a vested interest in improving their workforce as well as ensuring an educated workforce in their communities. Corporate funding needs to be targeted at influencing federal and state policies as well as serving as models for other companies. Those who are involved in workplace literacy programs are the best spokespersons to other companies to show how their company has increased its productivity. However, for the most part, corporations have not taken on the responsibility. They have instead relied on technology and out-sourcing. So I would target corporate funding to lead by example and to influence federal and state policies to "scale up" the effort.

Welfare to Work: (1) On the individual employer level, we have to be able to show them what the return on their investment will be. They need to act not just to do well but because it will lead to increase productivity and the ability to compete. I'm not sure we have good return on investment models. (2) We should use the same type of business arguments for the national corporate community and tie it to the aging of the workforce, baby boomer retirement, and shortage of higher skilled workers. If they don't want to be caught later on, this is the time to be investing.

Partnership with Business: Workforce literacy education and programs must be employer-driven to be effective. The corporate foundations have the right perspective on this. The

funding should be targeted to entities that work closely with employers, e.g., chambers of commerce.

University-Based R&D: For us to realistically expect corporate funding, we need to have our providers ready to meet the need, and be able to meet that need in a competent, professional manner that will show results. That responsibility lies with us, as providers – although it will be difficult to achieve without funds to help programs become more professional and more competent. Businesses appear to be interested in customized instruction; however, this can be expensive. So, investments might be best placed in professional development so that the field can offer instructors (for a fee, of course) to employers that are skilled in working with adults, skilled in teaching basic academic skills (reading, writing, math), and skilled in integrating instruction in these skills with work content AND with effective adult learning strategies.

University-Based R&D: Public perception, inclusive of the business community, regarding adult education providers needs to be advanced through a positive marketing effort. Normally, statewide adult education providers have not included workforce literacy in their mission statements and for many organizations it is difficult to integrate for a variety of reasons.

Metro Area Workforce Initiative: Public funding follows successful demonstrations by foundations. Funding should be targeted to career pathways that serve low-level learners, where employers establish clear career ladders and make commitments to provide release time for employees. We need better contextualized curriculum for low-level learners that helps them choose careers and learn basic skills in the context of career pathways.

GENERAL COMMENTARY OFFERED TO CAAL

Commentator 1

I strongly agree with your sense that it is time to take stock of adult basic education in general and ask if maybe there isn't a better way. Most of the adult literacy and basic skill programs we see are very ill-focused and in my view and many are not very consequential. From what I can figure out, almost half of adult education money (state and federal) is now being spent on GED prep, an alternative pathway to high school completion for adolescents and young adults who have been encouraged out of high schools without a diploma. Yet, the GED in itself has virtually no economic return and very small percentages of GED earners are using it as a foundation for postsecondary credentials. A second large chunk of ABE money is used to pursue very modest reading gains for individuals who are not in the labor force. As a result of this skewed allocation of resources (and of course the paltry amount of money being spent), there is little real economic return to ABE as presently constructed.

It looks to us that a very small percentage of ABE (perhaps 10-15 percent) is being spent in workplace settings in ways that even begin to try to work with employers and job context to help boost motivation and enhance learning.

We are working now with a state department of workforce development trying to design and launch a meaningful demonstration of workplace literacy. We are helping them sort their way through the assessment and certification issues, make the business case to employers, help motivate employees, find good providers, use best practices of adult learning, and leverage economic context for literacy gain for workers and productivity gain for employers. Frankly, there isn't much out there we can adapt from others and that is a pretty serious problem.

Commentator (2)

You are certainly right that nobody is pulling together what is and isn't going on in workforce literacy anymore, and this should be done.

We spent about 2-3 years researching, publishing, and disseminating information about this from about 1991-94. Interestingly, our best seller was an annotated bibliography done by a summer intern! We had to give it up, because we couldn't find any more funding for it. But we did profile about 100 programs before it was over, a few of which were published as profiles—others were included in various analyses. At about the same time, OVAE had a program of workforce literacy grants that continued for a few more years. Parker used these as a platform to pull together a learning consortium of programs that continued until about 2000. And he continued to try to sell the value of the idea at OVAE, but obviously had no success with the current administration. He is one of the few people who has tried to keep up with it.

From about 1993-1998, Suzanne Knell is another. She held **an annual workforce literacy conference** in Chicago for the Midwest that usually attracted several hundred providers and companies. She gave it up because there was a lack of funding or other leadership to keep the subject visible.

I thought that was the end of it until I started working with community colleges some years ago. Practically every college I came across that provided adult education in any form also offered at least some workforce literacy service—some more and some less. That has continued to be my experience. They do this as contract training for companies or via Title I programs for profit, so it isn't listed in their catalogs or mentioned in the reports of their publicly-funded, free Title II programs. The programs are usually not even managed by the AE departments, but by the contract training/marketing departments. They sell the concept to companies and the AE folks provide staff from their pool of adjunct faculty. Depending on the college, curricula may be developed by the contract training (CT) folks, AE, or some combination. Some of these are canned short courses; others are more extensive. The CT guy at one college in Kentucky showed me a set of spiral binders with 50-60 canned curricula. As an example of something more extensive, the Owensboro healthcare training program profiled by CAAL in its recent publication is really a workforce literacy project; it was designed by the college to suit the hospital, paid for by the hospital with its funds and some special grant funds, and is managed primarily by the CT person. Oregon has a lot of experience with the long-term contracts that its colleges have with the hospitality industry. And it's not just colleges that are doing this. Apparently, the big vocational institutes in the Midwest do a lot of it, and some unions (especially the ones that represent the automakers) have done it for a long time.

In short, there's a lot going on out there, but one has to know where to look for it, and to put it together would be a major undertaking. Most of the people who provide mainstream AE service are only marginally involved. I have no idea of the numbers served or the amount of money invested by companies or others. Lauri Spassi spent some time trying to develop a return on investment model for workforce literacy, and as I recall she published something on this.

As a means of "lifelong learning," I don't think workforce literacy ever had much traction. A few of us found a few companies that were prepared to sign up for lifelong learning in basic skills as an employee benefit, but not many. Some of them thought it reduced turnover—and I think we tried to prove this. The unions have been more successful than anyone else on getting companies to invest in AE as lifelong learning—again considering it as an employee benefit. Cheryl Feldman in Philadelphia makes the very good point that employers are unlikely to take a

long-term view of worker skill needs, but unions are. Most economists would agree with this, I think. Alas, there are too few unions!

All of this does suggest another important point. If you and your planning team are able to get a Commission going, it should have a good labor economist on it—preferably someone who has thought about AE in any form at all. These are VERY hard to find.