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New Website Helps States Working to Boost Economic Competitiveness

(Washington, D.C.) The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) announces the launch of a new website (www.shifting-gears.org) designed to help states increase the number of low-income working adults who have the skills and credentials they need to compete for 21st Century jobs.

Shifting Gears is a Joyce Foundation-sponsored initiative that aims to promote regional economic growth by aligning adult education, workforce development and postsecondary education in five Midwestern states – Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. The website is intended to shine a spotlight on innovative approaches in these states and provide information about promising policies and practices that work across the nation. CLASP administers the website for the Joyce Foundation and provides technical assistance to the five states.

“This is about jobs,” stated Whitney Smith, Employment Program Manager for the Joyce Foundation. “It’s about increasing access to skills that pay off in the marketplace for low-income workers and local businesses. It’s also about working collaboratively with state leaders to develop policies that fill the labor pipeline with a skilled and educated workforce. This kind of systemic change is necessary to ensure the future economic prosperity of the Great Lakes region.”

In response to the weakening economy, Congress included significant new funding for worker training and postsecondary education in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. This boost will complement the ongoing work of Shifting Gears.

Cheryl Keenan, Director of Adult Education and Literacy, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education said: “Current anxiety with respect to the global economic situation only underscores more deeply the critical importance of assuring that we more closely align and improve the connection between adult learning and work.”

The Shifting Gears website provides national resources, state examples and other information to help states:

- Blend basic skills, English language services and postsecondary education and training;
- Increase access to postsecondary education through financial aid and other supports;
- Align federal and state programs to build pathways that help adults gain employment and advance in specific industry sectors; and
- Use data to guide state policy change.

“This website will help states make progress toward their goal to ensure that every adult has the opportunity to acquire skills and credentials for success in today’s and tomorrow’s economy”, said Inez Wildwood who chairs the Minnesota Shifting Gears initiative.

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CLASP develops and advocates for policies at the federal, state and local levels that improve the lives of low-income people. We focus on policies that strengthen families and create pathways to education and work. Through careful research and analysis and effective advocacy, we develop and promote new ideas, mobilize others, and directly assist governments and advocates to put in place successful strategies that deliver results that matter to people across America.