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## Update WIA Title II to Help More Adult Education Students Gain Postsecondary Credentials and Move up to Better Jobs

by Amy-Ellen Duke and Julie Strawn

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Two facts have become clear since passage of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 1998:

- When low-skilled individuals increase their basic skills, these higher skills pay off in the labor market in the form of higher employment and earnings.
- These earnings increases are typically modest and fall short of what people need to become self-sufficient, even for adult education participants that earn a GED.<sup>1</sup>

These facts have led a number of states and localities to focus on increasing transitions from adult education to postsecondary education and training. The early results are quite promising:

- The Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training initiative (I-BEST) in Washington State pairs adult education/ESL instructors with vocational instructors to integrate contextualized remediation and English language services with occupational training. On average, I-BEST students earned five times as many college credits as other adult education/ESL students did and were 15 times more likely to complete workforce training.<sup>2</sup>
- Kentucky has encouraged and supported local efforts to dual enroll students in adult education and college remediation, enabling them to work toward their GED and complete college coursework at the same time. For example, in Jefferson County (Louisville), the adult education program has partnered with the community college and two local universities to jointly enroll over 5,000 students, enabling 88 percent of them to bypass at least one college developmental education course, saving them time and over \$400,000 in tuition costs in 2005-2006 alone.<sup>3</sup>

Adult education students benefit greatly from these programs. They can earn marketable postsecondary credentials more quickly; and by accessing free adult education remediation for their coursework below college level, they can avoid using up their limited student aid and personal resources on tuition for college remediation. Currently, WIA Title II does not reflect this new consensus on the importance of postsecondary transitions for adult education students. In fact, there is much confusion in the field as to whether services that promote transitions are encouraged or even allowed under WIA. While many more states and localities could follow the

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<sup>1</sup> For summaries of this research, see *Focus on Basics*, November 2006, <http://www.ncsall.net/?id=771&pid=1155> and Karin Martinson and Julie Strawn, *Built to Last*, Center for Law and Social Policy, 2003, [http://www.clasp.org/publications/BTL\\_report.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/publications/BTL_report.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, *I-BEST: A Program Integrating Adult Basic Education and Workforce Training*, December 2005, [http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/docs/data/research\\_reports/resh\\_05-2\\_i-best.pdf](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/docs/data/research_reports/resh_05-2_i-best.pdf). The state has now refined the I-BEST model and taken it statewide.

<sup>3</sup> E-mail correspondence with Trish Schneider, Coordinator, Jefferson County Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education, February 2007.

example set by states such as Washington and Kentucky, some are hesitant to do so without clearer guidance in this area from Congress.

The following recommendations are intended to update Title II to support state and local innovations in this critical area, which in turn will increase students' persistence in adult education, increase transitions to postsecondary programs, and help low-income adults attain marketable postsecondary credentials:

- **Make postsecondary transitions an explicit adult education goal.** Expand the purpose of Title II to include transitions to postsecondary education, including occupational training.
- **Update definitions to include transitions.** Ensure the postsecondary transition purpose of adult education and ESL services is reflected in Title II definitions by adding workforce bridge programs and postsecondary transition activities to the definition of adult education and adding definitions for each of these activities. A workforce bridge program combines workforce education for a specific occupation or occupational cluster with English language acquisition or other adult education activities, and it includes but is not limited to those programs that provide for dual enrollment.
- **Clarify that Title II does not bar transition activities.** Add language stating that nothing in WIA should be interpreted to prohibit workforce bridge programs or postsecondary transition activities, provided that there are mechanisms in place to allocate Title II resources to these activities in proportion to the amount of adult education content they contain.
- **Report postsecondary transition rates for all students.** Currently, postsecondary transition rates are reported only for students who come into adult education already knowing that they want to go to college or training. Current measurement has the effect of making transition rates look much higher than they actually are, as few students enter adult education seeing themselves as college material. It also means local providers do not get credit for one of their most important accomplishments: helping adults gain enough skills and confidence to see that they can succeed as learners and reach higher in their education and career goals.
- **Reduce the barriers to postsecondary transition by aligning assessments.** Currently, the adult education and college systems use two different sets of assessments, which imposes a burden of multiple testing on students and providers and makes it more difficult for adult education providers and colleges to work together to prepare adult education students for college without the need for further remediation. Congress should ask the Secretary of Education to convene a group of testing experts and adult education practitioners to work to align, to the greatest extent possible, adult education and college assessments approved for federal programs.
- **Expand access to quality workforce bridge and postsecondary transition activities.** Add workforce bridge and postsecondary transition activities to lists of activities that local providers may offer, and make them factors to consider in awarding provider contracts. Allow for technical assistance on workforce bridge and postsecondary transition activities.

**For full recommendations, visit <http://clasp.org/publications.php?id=7>. For further information, please contact:**

Amy-Ellen Duke, Center for Law and Social Policy, 202-906-8009, [aduke@clasp.org](mailto:aduke@clasp.org)  
Julie Strawn, Center for Law and Social Policy, 720-941-1665, [jstrawn@clasp.org](mailto:jstrawn@clasp.org)