

EXPANDING HORIZONS

**Pacesetters in
Adult Education for Work**

by
Forrest P. Chisman

June 26, 2009



Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy

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**From the “Adult Readiness Roundtable” Project
of the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy
and the National Center on Education and the Economy**

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD	p. iii
A. BACKGROUND	p. 1
B. SERVICES OFFERED	p. 2
C. RADICAL TRANSFORMATIONS	p. 4
D. PARTNERSHIPS	p. 5
E. PARTNERSHIP PROBLEMS	p. 6
F. GOING TO SCALE	p. 8
G. PROBLEMS OF LOW-LEVEL LEARNERS AND TRANSITION STUDENTS	P.10
H. TEACHERS	p. 12
I. BARRIERS TO GROWTH	p. 15
J. SUMMATION	p. 24
Appendix: Participants	p. 26

FOREWORD

In 2008, the National Commission on Adult Literacy's report, *Reach Higher, America*, summarized much current thinking about "adult education for work" and career pathways. The Commission found that the United States cannot create the high productivity economy it must have to prosper in the coming decades without greatly increasing the skills of our workforce. It stressed that this can only be accomplished by breaking down silos among programs and through large investments to help millions of low-skilled adults progress along career pathways to readiness for college, jobs, and job training.

For the past year, CAAL has been engaged in follow-up and implementation activities to advance these and other goals of the Commission. One strand of activity has been convening meetings around specific high priority topics. One such meeting was a joint Readiness Roundtable sponsored by CAAL and the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) over two days on April 6-7, 2009 in Washington, D.C. This Roundtable focused on the theme of college and job readiness – and specifically on learning from and helping local service providers adapt to programming that includes strong readiness components.

Expanding Horizons is one outcome of that meeting. It reports on some of the best "readiness" programs, those offered by a group of exemplary adult-education-for-work programs from around the country (p. 26 lists the participants).

CAAL Vice President Forrest Chisman is the author of *Expanding Horizons* and was co-director of the CAAL/NCEE project. He has directed most of CAAL's work in the area of transitions over the past few years. The report summarizes and interprets the main areas of discussion at the April Roundtable and offers analysis where appropriate and helpful. CAAL hopes the document will stimulate thinking and action at the state and local levels, especially among provider groups that recognize the need for new approaches to service provision.

CAAL thanks Ray Uhalde and the NCEE staff for their many contributions in making the joint Readiness Roundtable a success and for their outstanding leadership in workforce skills development generally. It also thanks its funders, whose support makes this publication possible: the Dollar General Corporation, the Joyce Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Wal-Mart Foundation, The McGraw-Hill Companies, and Harold W. McGraw, Jr. and other individual donors.

Gail Spangenberg

EXPANDING HORIZONS

A. BACKGROUND

A number of states have launched initiatives to expand adult education for work and career pathways systems. In fact, there appears to be a proliferation of these programs at the local level in both adult education and job training programs. Among the best of these efforts are the 20 programs that took part in the April 2009 Readiness Roundtable sponsored by the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL) and the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE). These programs are located in 15 states and vary greatly in size and range of service. Some serve only a few hundred students by any form of adult education, whereas others serve more than 100,000.

For purposes of the project, CAAL and NCEE defined “adult education for work” as instruction in basic skills (including English as a Second Language) and work readiness “soft skills” (such as problem solving and teamwork) that is part of a broader effort to move low-skilled adults along career pathways to occupational training and/or postsecondary education. That is, the goal of adult education for work is to provide individuals with the basic and workforce skills they need to be ready to enter and succeed in occupational training and/or postsecondary education. The ultimate goal of career pathways programs is to provide education and training that helps individuals get a job and advance to more highly-skilled and better paying jobs than they now hold, for example from entry-level to higher-level jobs in a particular occupation or industry sector.

Most adult-education-for-work initiatives are fairly new, and they take various forms. One purpose of the CAAL/NCEE Roundtable was to determine some of the elements that make for success. It also sought to identify some of the major challenges facing adult-education-for-work programs by consulting those who have the most immediate responsibility for implementing them, local program managers.

Participants were selected by extensive consultation with both state and national authorities responsible for adult education and job training. These sources recommended programs that provide outstanding adult-education-for-work service in particular states and regions. Based on the nominations, CAAL and NCEE selected a group that differs by geographical location, size, institutional auspices (including programs operating through community colleges, local education agencies, community-based organizations, and labor unions), and program design. Of the 25 programs invited to the Roundtable, 20 accepted the invitation.

Discussion at the Roundtable was structured in part around a draft version of one of two upcoming guides that NCEE has developed under a grant from the Wal-Mart Foundation.¹ One purpose of the meeting was to help NCEE refine its new guide, but the meeting also had a larger purpose: to gain insights about the practice, potential, and problems of adult education for work. Thus, the guide provided a point of departure for a very wide-ranging discussion.

As a result, this report is not a transcript of the Roundtable discussion and does not follow the order in which the topics were addressed. Rather, it is a synthesis of the more important points discussed. Creating such a synthesis necessarily requires providing contextual information that was not discussed at the meeting (in large part because most participants already appeared to have it). It also requires attributing views to the participants as a group that each of them individually may not have expressed. This is less of a problem than it might appear because the Roundtable was a high-energy, fast-moving meeting in which all participants were quick to register dissents from ideas advanced by their peers. However, this report should be read as the author's interpretation of the key meeting points covered and the issues related to them – based on participation in the meeting, careful review of taped recordings of the meeting, written materials submitted by the participants, and individual telephone conversations with many of them. CAAL's extensive work in the content areas under discussion also helps inform the author's interpretation and analysis. CAAL has tried to accurately represent the views of the participants, but assumes sole responsibility for the content of the report.

B. SERVICES OFFERED

Almost all of the programs represented at the Roundtable offer traditional “life skills” adult education services (Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, and English as a Second Language). In fact, the majority of adult education students they serve are enrolled in classes that provide these traditional services. Most of the adult-education-for-work programs offered by the participants take one of four forms:

1. **Training programs for particular occupations** (often resulting in occupational certifications) supported by basic skills instruction. In some cases these programs take a “sequential” approach – teaching the basic skills required by the occupation and only then teaching occupational skills. In other cases they take an “integrated” approach – teaching basic skills and occupational skills at more or less the same time through alternating classes in basic and occupational skills and/or through demonstrating basic skills in occupational instruction. Most occupational programs appear to use some combination of both approaches. Roundtable participants did not appear to view either as inherently superior.

¹ The two NCEE guides – tentatively titled the *Guide to Adult Education and Work: Transforming Adult Education to Grow a Skilled Workforce* and *Employer Guide to Adult Education for Work* – will soon be available from the NCEE website (www.ncee.org) along with a background research paper.

2. **Incumbent worker programs**² that are customized to meet the needs of particular employers for upgrading the basic and occupational skills of their workers – usually in response to particular problems the employers have encountered. In some cases these are very short-term “brush up” courses to help employees master new workplace procedures; in other cases they are more extensive courses to prepare workers for promotions or postsecondary education in fields where employers have a shortage of qualified staff.
3. **Postsecondary transition or “bridge” programs** that prepare students with limited basic skills for enrollment and success in academic credit programs. Usually these are offered to adults with high school degrees or equivalents but still lacking the academic skills that postsecondary institutions require. They also often include “college readiness” components such as orientations to academic culture, resources, and study skills. In recent years, a growing number of transition programs have adopted some form of the “co-enrollment” system exemplified by Washington State’s I-BEST model. In this model, adults who have not yet obtained high school credentials are enrolled in adult education and postsecondary education at the same time (i.e., in integrated programs).
4. **Career or academic orientation programs** that incorporate elements of occupational or academic preparation throughout the standard adult education curriculum. Examples of this are providing career pathways orientation to all adult education students, and a strong emphasis on workforce “soft skills” (e.g., workplace etiquette and problem solving) and/or on the academic skills colleges require (e.g., writing) to students at all levels of basic skills proficiency.

Based on the information provided by Roundtable participants, most of their adult-education-for-work students appear to be enrolled in occupational training programs or in programs that prepare them for this type of instruction. Although the information provided about incumbent worker training was incomplete, it suggests that many of the institutions represented at the Roundtable provide extensive service of this kind. Fewer participants offer transition and career/academic orientation programs – but some only offer transition programs while others offer all four types of service. In some cases, adult-education-for-work-programs consist of one or a series of defined courses or course sequences. In other cases, they take the form of a combination of education, training, and human services. In either case, the duration of these programs differs greatly among provider agencies – from a few weeks to a year or more.

² Incumbent workers are both recent hires and long-term employees.

C. RADICAL TRANSFORMATION

Some Roundtable participants see adult education for work as traditional adult education extended to support workforce preparation. But most have increasingly come to see it as a radically different kind of service in both its goals and means.

Whereas the goal of traditional adult education is to improve academic or language skills for multiple purposes, adult education for work is targeted specifically on using adult education to help students succeed in job training or transitions to postsecondary education. Success for traditional adult education consists of GED or general learning gains, while success for adult education for work consists of completing occupational programs and obtaining better jobs that result in improved incomes.

Compared to the traditional adult education continuum of basic skills, adult education for work is “non-linear.” The level of skills required for a successful program is the level required for a particular occupation or transition. This may include relatively high or low levels of reading, writing, math, and English proficiency depending on what skills students need to prepare for a particular occupation or to make transitions to particular institutions. Traditional adult education is often a process of long-term lifelong learning. Adult education for work tends to be a configuration of fairly short-term courses that have near-term payoffs in terms of employability. These form a continuum in the sense that students can enroll in sequential programs that allow them to ascend career pathways – often with intermissions between the enrollments. Importantly, adult education for work places as much emphasis on the “soft skills” (or “SCANS” skills) required by the work environment, as on academic skills.

Because different occupations and transitions require different configurations of basic, soft, and occupational skills, programs of adult education for work are less standardized than traditional adult education programs. “Model programs” or curricula tend to be industry-specific at their most general, and most often occupation-specific or even employer-specific.

From the perspective of traditional adult education, the unifying instructional model behind adult education for work is a strong commitment to contextualized instruction. Participants believe that students learn basic skills faster, retain their learning longer, and have higher rates of both persistence and program completion if they learn basic skills through the application of those skills to particular occupational tasks, *and* if they can see the near-term benefits of learning in terms of mastering an occupation or making a transition. *They cite persistence, completion, and transition rates on the order of 50 to 90 percent – far higher than those of traditional adult education programs.*

Taking into account these and other features of adult education for work, most participants view it as what one called a “radical transformation” of adult education. Although only a relatively small percentage of the students in most programs are presently enrolled in adult-education-for-work programs, participants believe that this type of service can and should grow to become one

of the dominant forms of adult education instruction, perhaps *the* dominant form. They cited tangible benefits to learners, greatly improved retention, clearly demarcated measures of program completion as well as high completion rates, and a strong demand for this type of service both by individuals and the community as factors supporting their belief. One participant expressed it this way: “Adult education has long been handicapped by a lack of real world goals around which to design programs and attract students. Adult education for work solves this problem in a way that seems to satisfy many of the stakeholders involved.”

The appeal of this “radical transformation” is so great that a growing number of traditional adult education programs are beginning to adopt at least some aspects of the occupational or academic preparation models of adult education for work described above. Also, some programs that have not previously offered any type of adult education – particularly community colleges – have started providing adult education for work.

D. PARTNERSHIPS

Just as contextualized instruction is the hallmark of instructional design in adult education for work, partnerships both within and outside provider institutions are the hallmark of its program structure. Roundtable participants were quick to point out that effective contextualized occupational training programs are impossible to design without an understanding of both the basic and vocational skills required by different occupations, as well as labor market information about the demand for different types of workers. Likewise, it is impossible to design effective postsecondary transition programs without an understanding of the academic requirements for success in college and, ideally, articulation agreements between transition and credit programs. Finally, incumbent worker programs inherently require a partnership between educational institutions and their corporate clients to define instructional needs and the best ways to meet them.

At the very least, therefore, adult education for work requires a partnership between adult educators, providers of occupational instruction (such as the occupational programs of colleges, local One-Stop Career Centers and Workforce Investment Boards, vocational institutes, and union training programs), and sources of labor market information – particularly the business community.

These programs also require other types of partnerships. They require guidance and counseling services to (a) help students understand the potential benefits of adult education for work and what this system of instruction will demand of them, (b) make informed choices about what programs are right for them, (c) navigate what may seem to be complex sequences of instruction, (d) find jobs that take advantage of their new skills, and (e) ideally to return for instruction in higher-level occupations that will help them progress along career pathways. And because many adult-education-for-work-programs make use of high-intensity instruction (20 or even 40 hours per week), they often also require *support services to help students overcome*

barriers to participation created by personal responsibilities and economic problems. A number of Roundtable participants characterized the support services required as a “case management” approach to helping students progress along career pathways. Although few, if any, participants believe they have the staffing, expertise, or resources to provide the level of case management called for, they try to form partnerships with other organizations that can supplement their efforts.

Roundtable participants form these partnerships in many different ways. Large, multi-service community-based organizations (CBOS) and union training programs are often structured around partnerships between educators, business, and social service agencies. For these types of institutions, creating effective adult-education-for-work programs consists of focusing their existing partnerships and staff on service to low-skilled individuals and filling gaps in existing instructional programs with contextualized adult education instruction. For other types of institutions, such as colleges or local education agencies, a key first step is designating a program coordinator in adult education for work or transitions to build both internal and external partnerships. Few programs appear to achieve the full range of partnerships they believe would be optimal. In most cases, they find support from only a few key partners. For occupational training, these are often business advisory councils or leadership companies in their communities, TANF programs, or independent CBOs. For postsecondary transition programs, the key partnerships are usually between adult education programs (often in the non-credit divisions of colleges) and credit academic programs.

The Roundtable participants have been remarkably effective in creating the partnerships they need, but their methods of doing so differ significantly depending on the nature of their institutions and the opportunities available in their particular state and community. Because the Roundtable met for only two days, it was not possible to explore many of the partnership strategies the participants have adopted. But it was possible to establish that programs of all sizes, operating under a variety of institutional auspices, in many parts of the country can establish the partnerships needed to implement viable adult-education-for-work programs.

E. PARTNERSHIP PROBLEMS

Participants identified several types of partnerships that they had difficulty forging in adult-education-for-work programs. Two of these appeared to be particularly problematic: partnerships with local One-Stop Career Centers/Workforce Investment Boards and transition partnerships with the credit divisions of postsecondary institutions.

One-Stops/WIBS. Many participants said they have encountered difficulties in trying to form partnerships with One-Stop Centers and Workforce Investment Boards. They believe that many low-skilled individuals who seek assistance from One-Stops would benefit from referrals to adult-education-for-work programs, but these referrals rarely occur. Career pathways students come from a variety of sources. Some are adult education students seeking career opportunities;

others are individuals seeking to enroll in particular career programs who have basic skills problems; and still others are referred by TANF or social service agencies of various kinds. *But very few are referred by One-Stops.* In addition, Roundtable participants said they would like to draw on One-Stops for information on labor market trends, analyses of the academic and soft skills required for employment in particular occupations, pre-employment training modules, assistance in guidance and counseling, and income supports for at least some students. But this assistance is rarely forthcoming.

Roundtable participants do not think there is any inherent reason why closer partnerships should not be forged with One-Stops/WIBs. In fact, a number of participants are engaged in highly successful partnerships with these agencies. For example, Macomb Community College in Michigan is part of a partnership with its local Workforce Development Board and TANF agency to provide basic skills and vocational training to welfare recipients. In this partnership, the Workforce Board provides not only assessment, counseling, and referral services but also pays a large part of the program's cost. Indeed, the major impetus for expanding adult-education-for-work service in Michigan appears to be coming from the state's Department of Energy, Labor, and Economic Growth. Partnerships between WIBs and providers of education to low-skilled adults appear to be more common in Michigan than in most other states, although state policy in Arkansas also encourages these types of partnerships.

Roundtable participants who face difficulties in forging partnerships of this kind said that they assume the fundamental difficulties are due to policy and financial barriers affecting One-Stops/WIBs that are beyond their control. They hope these can be overcome, because they see a great deal of potential in sharing resources and expertise between the nation's adult education and employment and training systems.

Postsecondary Partners. Some participants who have built, or are attempting to build, transition programs to postsecondary education reported *a combination of indifference and resistance on the part of community college credit faculty and administrators.* This indifference/resistance is particularly strong to transition programs that aim to place students in college for-credit academic programs. Often colleges are reluctant to provide credit for either the academic or applied skills students gain in non-credit programs, even though these are often similar to the skills taught by credit courses. Participants believe this problem may arise in part from a perception that effective transition programs would supplant at least some developmental education programs from which colleges receive both tuition and, in some cases, higher rates of state reimbursement than they get from non-credit adult education programs. In part, it may be due to the fact that many colleges are under severe financial pressure and not seeking new categories of students. Finally, some participants hypothesized that adult education students seeking to make transitions are more likely than other community college students to enroll in short certificate programs – on which some community colleges place less value than on transfer programs to four-year institutions. Academic politics peculiar to particular institutions also pose barriers.

Some programs have found that these difficulties can be overcome by a combination of college presidential leadership and state policies that support transitions. It is not accidental that states such as Washington, Oregon, and Kentucky, where the governance of adult education and colleges is unified or closely allied, have especially strong transition programs – although even in these states those programs are stronger at some institutions than at others.

The difficulties of finding acceptance for transition programs at some community colleges may be one of the reasons why adult-education-for-work programs more commonly take the form of occupational or incumbent worker training than postsecondary transition programs.

F. GOING TO SCALE

Although adult-education-for-work programs enroll only fairly small numbers of students even at most of the institutions that offer them, Roundtable participants were unanimous in believing that there is no inherent reason why they should not be greatly expanded.

A major reason for this belief is that the demand for these programs is very high. In the words of one participant, “We can’t sign up people fast enough.” Another reason is cost-effectiveness. Participants agreed that it costs significantly more to develop adult-education-for-work programs than to develop traditional adult education programs – in part because virtually all adult-education-for-work programs are in some degree custom made to local circumstances (including partnership opportunities). They also tend to be more expensive to operate – in part because they usually require more classroom hours and counseling/supportive services. Participants cited costs on the order of \$4000-\$6000 per student for some year-long occupational training and transition programs that provide the full array of services they believe contribute to success in adult education for work. This is, of course, many times the annual cost per student usually estimated for traditional adult education programs.

Participants believe, however, that this version of financial accounting is myopic. It fails to take account of the economies of scale of adult-education-for-work programs once they have been launched. More importantly, it fails to take account of the dollars spent without any significant educational gain, due to high dropout and low multi-year persistence rates in traditional adult education programs. *Students in adult-education-for-work programs are far more likely to persist and complete their programs than are students in traditional programs.* And if they return for further instruction, it is more likely to be for instruction in higher level occupations than to repeat classes they did not complete the first time.

Roundtable participants also discussed a number of factors they believe can reduce the costs of adult education for work. One of these is improved use of instructional technology. Most of the programs represented at the Roundtable already use computer applications for instruction, that use taking many different forms – such as helping students practice basic and applied skills; providing instruction in “smart classrooms;” offering guidance, counseling, and peer support online; and providing entire courses by distance learning. Many adult-education-for-work

programs include modules that teach students how to use computers, partly to provide access to the benefits of instructional technology, but also because the programs consider computer literacy to be a basic workforce skill that all students must master if they are to successfully pursue career pathways. Roundtable participants hope that more and better applications of technology for instruction will reduce their costs considerably. They also believe that costs can be reduced by more and stronger partnerships. Partnerships create economies of scale by avoiding duplication of services in a community and allowing each partner to provide the components of adult education for work for which it is best qualified.

Finally, participants cited the tangible benefits to students and local economies of adult education for work. This is most evident in incumbent worker training where employers usually contract with adult education programs because they believe they have a need for instruction that affects their bottom line. Contract training also generates income for education providers, which often is not calculated in estimating the costs of building an adult-education-for-work infrastructure. A few programs have taken the logic of employer demand a step further. They have reached agreements with some local employers in which the employers agree to give preference in hiring to the graduates of their occupational programs in return for a seat at the table in determining what form those programs will take.

It might be argued that, because most adult-education-for-work programs do not presently enroll large numbers of students, their enrollment comes from a fairly small pool of highly motivated and qualified low-skilled adults. If this is the case, their growth will stall when this pool is exhausted. Obviously there is no way to know whether it is the case. But most Roundtable participants do not appear to be concerned about a reduction in demand for adult education for work. Several participants observed that high-quality programs with proven track records sell themselves and that demand for them grows by word of mouth. A number of participants in the Roundtable said they think that awareness of the importance of improved educational credentials is now very widespread. The example of union training programs that systematically provide progressively higher levels of training to large numbers of workers – many of whom have fairly modest traditional educational credentials – suggests the untapped potential for other types of adult education for work. A number of participants observed that demand for programs of this kind is likely to diminish *only* if low-skilled workers are not aware of the availability of user-friendly training systems that allow them to pursue career pathways. That is, *any shortage of demand for adult education for work services is likely to be a marketing problem*. Participants who addressed this issue believe they can solve marketing problems by stronger partnerships and other means.

Taking all of these considerations into account, Roundtable participants believe that adult education for work has only begun to reach its potential in terms of the number of low-skilled adults it can serve. They believe it merits a far larger investment to demonstrate its benefits. They do not think that it should be the only form of adult education. They are more than willing to grant that “survival English” or citizenship courses for immigrants, family literacy programs,

and adult education for personal enrichment are worthy public investments. But they believe adult education for work merits at least as large an investment as these traditional services, and that it can and should be the predominant growth sector of adult education.

G. PROBLEMS OF LOW-LEVEL LEARNERS AND TRANSITION STUDENTS

Low-Level Learners. Most roundtable participants agree that the major structural problem in their existing adult-education-for-work programs is that they do not easily accommodate learners with very low basic skill levels. Because this includes a large portion of the ESL population enrolled in adult education programs, the problem must be addressed.

The problem arises because virtually all occupational and transition programs require a threshold level of basic skills and/or English language proficiency that would be rated somewhere in the intermediate level by most assessments. Below this level, *most adults with limited skills are not trainable workers for high-opportunity occupations by the instructional models now in use*, and below the highest levels they are not prepared to make transitions to postsecondary education. Participants are concerned that low-level learners will not persist long enough in traditional adult education courses to reach these levels. In the words of one participant: “The problem is getting them onto career pathways training to begin with.”

Roundtable participants do not believe they have a wholly satisfactory solution to this problem, but they are implementing a number of solutions that they believe lead in the right direction. Among these are:

- Providing information about career pathways to even the lowest level learners from the time of their first enrollment and repeatedly demonstrating to them how mastering elementary basic skills can lead to better employment opportunities. In some cases, career orientation of this type may include giving the low-level learners with information about vocational options, peer mentoring, meetings with employers, and work experience opportunities, such as job shadowing.
- Working with low-level students to establish career goals and individualized learning plans and the steps required to achieve them.
- Using contextualized instruction at all levels of adult education, including employment-related tasks as a large part of the context.
- Teaching soft skills (such as punctuality, appropriate dress, seeking information, taking responsibility, problem-solving, workplace etiquette, use of technology) to all students, in part by structuring classroom expectations and instructional tasks to simulate the expectations of employers.

- Advancing low-level learners as quickly as possible through short instruction modules, individualized portfolio assessments, and high-intensity, managed enrollment. These techniques not only accelerate learning but also give students a sense of achievement by setting short-term specific goals the students can attain.
- Providing supplementary individualized tutoring.
- Taking account of important individual differences in designing instruction – especially the different approaches needed to serve ESL students with differing levels of prior education and students with different learning styles, as well as the services required by special needs students.
- Taking account of specialized applied skills students may already have (e.g., cooking, using machinery, child care, or organizing materials) and building both basic skills instruction and career plans on these strengths as appropriate.

Perhaps the most important insight about low-level learners offered by Roundtable participants was that these students might benefit if even the lowest-level classes avoid a rigid adherence to the traditional continuum of academic basic skills. That is, participants suggested that students should be advanced to workforce training based on the particular skills they need for that training, rather than mastery of the full range of academic skills. In addition, some students may benefit from training for entry-level jobs that require fairly limited basic skills or from internships and apprenticeships if these jobs start them on career pathways that encourage them to return for more advanced training.

Roundtable participants believe that large numbers of individuals have or can readily attain the intermediate skill levels required to benefit from adult-education-for-work programs. But they also think that special efforts should be made to incorporate low-level learners into these programs. Many of the measures suggested would constitute a “transformation” of lower-level adult education instruction, just as adult-education-for-work instruction would constitute a transformation of instruction at higher levels.

Transition Students. Participants did not discuss at length the problems of transition students. Their primary observation was that *the greatest barrier adult education students face in making successful transitions is mastering college-level writing*. In their experience, traditional adult education and GED preparation usually do a better job of helping students acquire the reading and math skills they need to enter and succeed in college than they do the necessary writing skills. Participants recognized that inadequate writing skills are a barrier for many high school graduates as well, but this provides little comfort. The mainstream adult education programs of some Roundtable participants are placing greater emphasis on writing, and in some cases they have established “capstone” programs for GED students or graduates that focus primarily on writing.

Some participants said that the GED can complicate the process of helping students make transitions. It may provide them with a false sense of confidence that they have mastered the skills required to succeed both in college and in the workplace. Students are often reluctant to continue to improve their basic skills after they have passed the GED, and, furthermore, it is not clear to most participants whether public funds are available for further instruction to those who have high school diplomas or their equivalent. Participants believe that too many students who obtain GEDs score at fairly low levels on the GED exams. They believe that these students do not have the skills – particularly in writing – required for successful transitions to college. Some suggested that the passing score for the GED should be set at a higher level, or that an alternative “college readiness” credential should be established. Others suggested that there should be an assurance that public funding can be used for post-GED instruction.

H. TEACHERS

Roundtable participants agreed that adult-education-for-work programs require special skills and knowledge on the part of the teachers who work in them. This is because these programs are not monolithic. Teachers and program administrators must understand how to adapt adult education theory and practice to the needs of a wide range of occupational and postsecondary contexts. This requires working with occupational training, postsecondary, and business partners to understand the basic skills students need to succeed in these various forms of career pathway instruction as well as how to blend basic skills with job training and postsecondary course content. Adult-education-for-work teachers must often help faculty in different fields and/or employers understand the fundamentals of adult education in order to open up meaningful dialogues with them about basic skills needs and form collaborative partnerships in providing service. In fact, many adult-education-for-work programs consist of some type of “team teaching” by adult educators and occupational/postsecondary instructors. The teaching challenge is compounded by the fact that the curricula and teaching methods of occupational and postsecondary programs differ among institutions, and even among instructors at the same institution. The expectations of employers also differ greatly.

In short, beyond a mastery of adult education, teachers who provide adult-education-for-work service must be highly creative in adapting basic skills instruction to different contexts. And adult education programs must often take the initiative in forging partnerships to develop this type of contextualized instruction. Based on the experience of Roundtable participants, adult-education-for-work programs are most often created because adult educators see the need for low-skilled adults to gain access to career pathways and reach out to other educators and the business community. It is less common for occupational or postsecondary faculty to recognize the need to improve the basic skills of students seeking admission to their programs and reach out to adult educators for assistance. Even in the case of incumbent worker training, employers often do not have a very precise understanding of their workers’ basic skills needs.

As a result, *adult education programs are usually the prime movers and sustaining force behind adult-education-for-work programs*. In practice, this means that individual teachers must be the ambassadors to other fields of education, and to companies, in establishing and designing programs as well as in implementing them. As one participant put it: “ We’re not workforce developers, but sometimes we feel that way.”

These special responsibilities require knowledge and skills that go far beyond the usual training of adult education teachers. In fact, they often contradict the implicit premise of that training: that systematic improvement of basic skills is the first priority of this field. In the case of adult education for work, the first priority is to move students along career pathways, and this may require a good deal of adaptation of standard instruction all along the adult education continuum.

Roundtable participants agreed that adult-education-for-work teachers need specialized professional development to meet their responsibilities. Correspondingly, they were uncertain about the value of many standard professional development approaches. They agreed that teachers in this specialty must have a firm grounding in traditional adult education. But they were dubious about the value of most forms of teacher certification or credentialing based on mastery of traditional adult education knowledge and skills alone. For example, programs with large language minority enrollments would gladly have teachers with various TESOL credentials on staff. At the very least, these and other forms of certification add an important sense of professionalization to any adult education program. But participants pointed out that the teachers who are most proficient by traditional standards may not be the most effective teachers in meeting the multiple needs of students, other educators, and employers in adult education for work. In fact, teachers who are less highly skilled by traditional standards may be more flexible, and the demands of adult education for work may lead them to improve their traditional adult education skills.

Likewise, participants were ambivalent about the value of standardized curricula and learning plans. On the one hand, they welcomed the idea of an “open source” database of instructional models from which they could derive new ideas about how to improve their programs. On the other hand, they emphasized that contextualized instruction inherently takes very different forms in different circumstances, and teachers must be able to adapt their course content and techniques on short notice.

Evaluating the performance of adult-education-for-work teachers poses special problems as well. Classroom observation is important. But one of the usual metrics for teacher effectiveness – the skills gains of students – is only partially useful. The most important outcomes for adult education for work are the success of students in training programs or postsecondary education and their subsequent earning gains. Adult education teachers in these programs must keep these goals in mind, but they cannot be held fully accountable for them. Other participants in adult-education-for-work systems – such as occupational instructors and employers – play as large a role (or larger) as adult educators do in determining the extent to which students succeed or fail

by these measures. Overall, Roundtable participants seem to feel that the best they can do in evaluating teacher effectiveness is to monitor as much of the adult-education-for-work system as they can and try to determine which teachers are most effective working in this context.

The low salaries paid to most adult education teachers are a major barrier to hiring the staff needed to implement adult-education-for-work programs and to offering the professional development required. At low pay levels, it is difficult to attract the best teachers and to encourage good teachers to invest in developing their professional skills. Both of these barriers are especially true for part-time adjunct faculty, who comprise the majority of the teaching force. Although many adjuncts are highly skilled, they are usually paid only for contact hours and they may not have the security of employment that justifies a large enough investment in professional development, either from their perspective or from the perspective of the program that employs them.

Interestingly, participants from a few programs that are able to pay unusually high salaries reported that they have relatively few problems with staff development or performance. In fact, one program extends the idea of “career ladders” to faculty: teachers get pay raises based on a combination of the professional development they obtain and how they apply what they learn in the classroom.

Roundtable participants use a variety of professional development approaches to support adult education for work. Some of these are variations on fairly standard models of adult education professional development – such as providing a certain number of released days for staff training each year, hiring consultants who specialize in adult education for work to provide special training sessions for teachers (and sometimes on-going coaching), and establishing “train the trainer” systems by which a few full-time teachers are given leave to participate in extended workshops or “academies” and then expected to mentor other faculty. A number of participants reported that their education-to-work programs have implemented even more extensive professional development for teachers. These consist of several weeks of paid time over the summer. In many cases, most adult-education-for-work teachers attend these summer institutes as a team, regardless of whether they are full-time staff or adjuncts. The training includes coursework, explanations or demonstrations of different contextualized courses, and mentoring by both peers and expert consultants.

One participant in the Roundtable made a distinction between professional development and on-the-job training. Most adult-education-for-work teachers hone their skills primarily by on-the-job training. But there is a great need for more systematic professional development – accompanied by a need for better salaries. Some participants expressed the hope that the education departments of universities will eventually begin to train teachers to provide adult education for work. Others observed that universities are unlikely to believe they can attract very many students to programs of this kind until the problems of a shortage of full-time jobs and the low salaries in adult education are addressed.

I. BARRIERS TO GROWTH

Roundtable participants believe that adult-education-for-work programs are serving more students than they did in the past and that they can and should serve far more. In fact, *many believe that this type of service should be the primary growth area of adult education in the years to come.* But even at the institutions represented by Roundtable participants only a fairly small numbers of students are enrolled in programs that combine basic skills with occupational training or lead to transitions to postsecondary education. Participants identified several major barriers to the future growth of this service and suggested ways that at least some of those barriers can be overcome.

The principal barrier to growth is that adult education for work does not fit neatly into any of the traditional categories of education or related services or into the institutional structures and funding streams constructed around them. As noted above, it differs from traditional adult education in its goals and, importantly, in its departure from the traditional basic skills continuum. It also differs from traditional occupational (or vocational) education, because it contains components aimed at serving low-skilled adults. And it differs from postsecondary education, because adult-education-for-work transition programs aim to remedy the basic skills problems of students before they enroll in college rather than serve them with developmental education programs after they have enrolled. Most forms of adult education for work have more in common with customized incumbent worker training programs than with traditional forms of education and training. But the aim of most adult-education-for-work programs is to help students eventually progress up career ladders, and this exceeds the short-term aims of most employer contracts for incumbent worker training.

In short, adult education for work does not have a natural home. It is inherently a partnership between a number of traditional forms of education and training. Breaking down the silos between these traditional service systems can prove difficult at best.

Barriers to growth are created in several different ways:

(1) Funding

Most funding streams for adult education and training are linked to traditional service forms. As a result, it is not surprising that the institutions responsible for traditional service systems are slow to devote their limited resources to expand what can often be a fairly expensive service that departs from traditional models.

For example, traditional adult education programs receive federal and state funds that allow them to provide basic skills instruction up to the intermediate level, at which most occupational adult-education-for-work programs begin. They also receive funds to provide instruction up to the high school equivalency level, the level at which most transition programs begin. But they do not receive funding to provide instruction in the strictly occupational skills that are coordinated with

basic skills in adult-education-for-work programs. And it is not clear if federal and state funding policies allow them to use adult education funds for the levels of academic instruction and support services required by effective transition programs. Because most programs believe they have inadequate funds to provide even traditional basic skills services, most are reluctant to press these funding boundaries very far. In particular, they are reluctant to devote their limited discretionary program improvement funds to support the large costs of developing adult-education-for-work programs or to absorb the per-student costs required to offer this type of service over the long term.

As a result, adult-education-for-work programs are developed and supported by haphazard funding streams at most institutions. In some cases, partnerships between adult education and occupational or postsecondary programs in the same institutions (such as community colleges) can result in multiple partners contributing to program development and in long-term implementation costs. Sometimes institutions keep an accounting of different contributions, and in some cases collaboration takes place on an informal basis. In other cases, program development is supported by special grants from private foundations or government demonstration programs. In still other cases, some funding is provided from training funds from One-Stop Career Centers, presidential discretionary funds at colleges, Pell Grant funding, or governors' discretionary funds for programs supported by Title I of the Workforce Investment Act.

But these miscellaneous sources of funding are rarely large enough to develop very many adult-education-for-work programs at any one institution or in any one community, or to support those programs over the long term. Moreover, special grant programs that play an important role in supporting the development of this service usually require ad hoc negotiations among partners and/or with funding sources that consume substantial administrative time. Too often the patchwork way in which adult-education-for-work programs find financial support is a barrier to growth because it relies on such ad hoc partnerships, rather than on a systematic approach to program development. And too often it results in patchwork patterns of growth for this service that do not necessarily meet the highest priority needs of either students or communities.

Based on the experiences of Roundtable participants, the institutions that are most successful in engineering sustained growth of adult education for work are large, multi-service CBOs and labor union training programs. Institutions of these kinds often have most of the elements of adult education for work in place. Although the elements are usually supported by multiple streams of funding, their overall budgets are under the control of a central management. And they usually combine public funds with private sources of financial support that have fewer restrictions on their use. These factors appear to allow enough flexibility for large CBOs and union training programs to plan for combining different program elements into adult education for work with fewer administrative or financial difficulties than other institutions face. The extensive Division of Adult and Career Education of the Los Angeles Unified School District has

many features similar to CBO and union programs. As one Roundtable participant put it: “The key to creating these [adult-education-for-work] programs is to establish budgetary control over all of their elements in a central management.”

But by far the most effective solution to breaking down the silos that separate different elements of adult education for work is to create public funding streams that support this service in its own right, rather than as a combination of traditional models. The best-known example of this solution is funding by the state of Washington for the I-BEST transition program at community colleges. Other states, such as Oregon and Kentucky, also provide funding streams that support at least some types of adult-education-for-work programs, and still other states are considering this possibility.

To date, however, the funding available from most states for these purposes is fairly limited. The present economic downturn has led to cutbacks for most forms of educational funding and appears to be creating structural deficits at the state level that will persist for many years. As a result, *it appears that adult education for work will require some other source of funding if it is to even begin to reach its potential in the foreseeable future. The only feasible source of this funding appears to be the federal government.*

Although Roundtable participants did not discuss federal funding options at length, several expressed the view that any federal funding should be targeted on adult education for work as a distinctive service, and that it should provide support on a continuing basis. They noted that much federal and private funding for this service in the past has taken the form of demonstration programs. Although this funding model has been helpful in program development and building expertise in some areas, participants observed that the greater need is for stable funding streams that will allow adult education for work to go to scale. As one participant noted: “It’s time to take the training wheels off.”

(2) Accountability

Whatever form public funding for adult education for work may take, Roundtable participants believe that the growth and effectiveness of this service is presently being subverted by accountability systems that are ill suited to measure its performance. They were particularly critical of the federal government’s National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS). Because most state accountability systems are based on the NRS in some way, their criticisms extend to the state level as well.

From the perspective of adult education for work, the fundamental problem with the NRS is that it primarily measures how well programs advance students along the traditional adult education basic skills continuum using standardized tests. Participants believe this provides a poor measure of the success of adult education for work, because improving basic skills is not in itself the primary goal of these programs. The primary goal is using basic skills instruction to help students advance up career ladders. This means that adult-education-for-work programs may not

follow the traditional adult education continuum and that both they and their students will score badly if measured by it.

Moreover, the standardized tests on which the NRS is based primarily measure life skills applications of adult education and do an inadequate job of measuring the “soft” workforce skills essential to adult education for work, let alone the ability of students to apply basic skills in occupational training, postsecondary education, or workplace settings. And they fail to capture the benefits of short-term, targeted basic skills instruction in incumbent worker training, as well as the higher level of academic skills required for successful transitions. Finally, although the NRS asks programs to report placement in employment and transitions to postsecondary education, it does not provide any means for them to report whether or how contextualized basic skills instruction contributes to these outcomes or whether students achieve earning gains.

The accountability measures used by programs that may partner with adult education have equally serious problems. Programs supported by Title I of WIA or TANF are rarely held accountable for the learning gains of participants who may be enrolled in adult-education-for-work programs. They are also rarely held accountable for whether students successfully complete training or postsecondary programs, whether they succeed in the careers for which they are prepared, and if they move up in career ladders. These partnership programs are primarily held accountable for rapid job placement and short-term persistence in employment.

Roundtable participants observed that programs place primary emphasis on the functions for which they are held accountable. As a result, existing accountability systems contribute to the reluctance of both adult education providers and their potential partners to invest in adult education for work. In practice, programs that provide this service evaluate their effectiveness relative to outcomes other than those established by standard accountability systems. But in doing so, they are swimming against the tide of the funding streams that support them and the institutions in which they operate.

The participants believe that the NRS, in particular, requires major modifications. They agree that there is value in reporting learning gains, but they believe those gains should be measured relative to the skills required to achieve the goals of different adult education programs – such as employment, job training, transitions, parenting, and citizenship – rather than solely to the traditional academic goals of life skills programs. More fundamentally, they believe that the NRS for all purposes should place far more emphasis on the tangible outcomes of basic skills instruction. In the case of adult education for work, these would include entry into occupational training or postsecondary education, persistence and success in those programs, placement and earning gains resulting from educational programs, and eventual movement along career pathways through subsequent education and training.

In addition, they think that accountability measures, like funding streams, should break down silos between different components of adult education for work. Because these are partnership

programs, all partners should be held jointly accountable for their outcomes. Several participants mentioned the example of a student who might begin in traditional or contextualized basic skills programs, progress to training that has primarily a technical or academic emphasis, and eventually succeed in the world of work. By the accountability measures in place at the present time, the progress of such a student might be counted as a successful outcome for each of the partnership programs at each step. But participants believe that the student should also be counted as a successful outcome for each of the programs that make it possible to take the successive steps each time those steps are taken. Conversely, if students do not progress along career pathways, all the partners in the career pathways system should be required to examine what they can do better, individually and collectively, to improve student outcomes both at every step along the pathways and in terms of placing students in better jobs.

(3) Other Performance Measures

Roundtable participants also discussed the value of standardized tests that measure whether students have the skills required for particular occupations and industries (such as WorkKeys), as well as the placement tests (such as the Compass or AccuPlacer) used by postsecondary institutions. Some participating programs make use of these assessments to help guide instruction, and others do not. Most Roundtable participants did not appear to have a great deal of experience with, or interest in, using either type of tool as a primary means of student placement, curriculum development, or measure of whether students have completed programs. For these purposes they use program-specific measures. Depending on the content of the occupational programs or the requirements of particular postsecondary institutions, they construct what they consider to be appropriate curricula, and they establish entrance criteria based on their estimates of the ability of students to handle the work – often using multiple assessments, teacher recommendations, and other measures that collectively approximate portfolio assessments. Exit criteria generally consist of successfully completing coursework.

In general, participants appeared to regard standardized tests of workforce readiness or academic skills in the same way that they consider tests of traditional basic skills – as useful contextual information, rather than a foundation for programs. They appear to regard standardized tests of almost any kind as too generalized for the purpose of adult education for work. And for these reasons they do not believe that these tests would serve as good measures of accountability – at least if they are taken out of context. Many participants also expressed a wariness of using valuable classroom time and focusing students on the wrong measures of success by “over-testing.”

(4) Program Data

Roundtable participants expressed special concerns about the difficulties of obtaining and sharing longitudinal data on students. Because the goal of adult education for work is to move students along career pathways through contextualized basic skills instruction, many of the most

important outcomes occur over a multi-year period and as a result of instruction by multiple partners. For example, to understand if and how effectively low-level learners gain access to career pathways programs and how well they succeed, these students must be tracked from entry-level basic skills programs, through contextualized occupational or transition programs, and on to certification in particular occupations or postsecondary performance, job placement, retention, and income gains. It is important to understand not only how many students progress along these pathways, but the type of services they receive, how long it takes them, and what personal characteristics they have (such as need for particular support services) that may affect their success.

Finally, it is important to understand whether students who have completed adult-education-for-work programs return for instruction in higher-level occupations that allow them to continue moving up career pathways. Most programs have very little information about how often this “re-enrollment” occurs, although those who do are encouraged by what they have found. Without this information, there is no way for programs or their institutions to operate true career pathway systems or simply help students make one-time gains in employment.

In short, to create and improve adult-education-for-work programs, institutions must have a sense of how well students move through the entire career pathways system and what factors accelerate or impede their progress. Roundtable participants appear to believe that most of this information is available in student records, but it is rarely consolidated in longitudinal analyses of program performance. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that different program partners often hold the relevant information. The participants repeatedly expressed the hope that institutional research departments across the components of adult-education-for-work programs could collaborate in providing all partners with longitudinal reports on student performance. They seem to consider the absence of this data a significant barrier to building effective contextualized programs that will move students along career pathways.

Roundtable participants also expressed a need for better local labor market information. Obviously, it is fruitless to construct programs that prepare students for work in particular industries, occupations, or professions unless there are jobs available in the fields targeted by career pathways systems. Participants recognize that labor market forecasting is an imprecise art, particularly in troubled economic times. But they also expressed frustration with the difficulties of obtaining useful labor market data of any kind.

They would like to be able to turn to One-Stops or other partners for this information, but they report that they rarely obtain the types of labor market forecasts they need. Often the only information available is about immediate job vacancies. While this has some value, it does not meet the primary needs of programs that are preparing students for employment months or years in advance. The participants did not have any ready answers to this problem – in part because they identify it as a major issue for workforce development in the United States that extends beyond their immediate concerns.

In the absence of systematic labor market information, Roundtable participants turn to local employers, sometimes on an individual basis and sometimes through advisory boards or business associations such as chambers of commerce. They believe this provides them with useful guidance, but they also think it puts them in the manpower forecasting business for which they lack the expertise.

(5) Leadership and Responsibility

Participants emphasized in two ways the importance of leadership and responsibility in creating adult-education-for-work programs and bringing them to scale:

First, they observed that breaking down the silos within and between institutions is rarely possible unless institutional leaders are committed to the development of these programs. They described a number of institutions where new leadership had resulted in a substantial growth in adult education for work. Most of these were community colleges where growth in this service had been frustrated until a new president established it as a priority – by providing the financial resources to create and sustain adult education for work – and personally intervened to break down silos between potential partners both within and outside the institution. In some cases, new leadership at Workforce Investment Boards and TANF programs may have the same effect. Participants observed that despite the barriers to growth discussed above, committed institutional leaders can accomplish a great deal. And they also emphasized that even if many of those barriers were removed by policy changes or other means, a failure of leadership at the institutions providing service can be a major barrier to growth.

Second, participants emphasized that some institution or individual should have the responsibility for creating and expanding adult education for work in each community. Because this service requires partnerships within and among different agencies, either one of the partners or some other agency must take the lead in pulling together the necessary components. But most of the partners are usually too busy fulfilling their traditional missions to assume this responsibility. The old adage that “collaboration is not in anyone’s job description” applies.

Based on the experiences of Roundtable participants, adult educators are the partners who most often assume the responsibility for organizing adult education for work and other forms of career pathways partnerships. Roundtable participants do not think that adult educators are necessarily better qualified than other partners to play this leadership role in all communities. In many areas adult education programs are very small. They often lack the resources and status to serve as effective leaders. Participants cited examples of some communities where colleges, local education agencies, or Workforce Investment Boards have led in organizing career pathways systems.

But the major concern of the participants is not what type of agency is best qualified to assume a leadership role, but making sure that adult education for work is a distinctive service and that some agency has a mandate to implement that service and bring it to scale in every community.

Some pointed out that local boards or committees comprised of partner agencies and others are essential to bring about coordinated effort. But one of the partners or some other entity must act as the secretariat and moving force for such groups.

A number of participants also pointed out that resources must accompany leadership. Whoever is responsible for taking adult education for work to scale will be in a much stronger position both within their own institutions and in forging partnerships if they can bring to the table at least some of the funding required for the multiple components of this service. Otherwise they will be placed in a position where they must go hat in hand to other programs or agencies that are usually operating under budgetary constraints of their own.

A number of participants observed that “innovation by committee” is rarely a very effective way to bring about progress in adult education, workforce training, or any other field. In particular, they observed that placing adult education provider agencies on Workforce Investment Boards usually does not lead to much growth in adult education for work *unless* the adult educators or some other members of the Boards have the mandate and resources required to convince these or any other coordinating groups that this service should be high on their priority lists.

(6) Credentialing

Roundtable participants did not discuss the role of credentialing in adult-education-for-work programs at length. But a number of their observations bear on this topic. First, participants appear to recognize the importance of both public and widely recognized business certifications for structuring the occupational components of adult education for work. Many of the occupational courses they offer are designed to prepare students for certifications. And it is probably no accident that many of their programs are in fields (such as health care and specialized areas of construction or maintenance) where both public and business certifications are required for most high-opportunity jobs. In this respect, labor union training programs are probably more highly structured around certifications than other forms of adult education for work, due to the certification requirements unions have created for many of the jobs their members hold. And the effectiveness of these programs demonstrates the value of a well-developed certification system.

However, participants observed that there are many areas of employment in particular labor markets where good jobs are available but no formal certification systems have been developed – although there is a growing literature on the basic and occupational skills needed for an increasingly large number of occupations. For example, they mentioned the recent emphasis on “green jobs” in the construction industry and elsewhere. As a result, it appears that Roundtable participants are reluctant to limit their adult education programs to occupations that require recognized certification and credentialing systems. In many cases, they consult with their local business communities and review the available literature to determine the occupational and basic skill requirements for areas where there are job opportunities. Based on these consultations, they

construct credentialing systems of their own – often consisting of completion of a certain course of instruction.

Some participants offer programs designed to certify students for employment in particular industries rather than specific occupations, or they provide general “employability certificates.” For the most part, however, they seem to believe that there are too few industrial certifications to cover most areas of employment, and they are uncertain whether employers value these certifications or general certificates of employability – except possibly for entry-level trainee positions. More importantly, they believe that there is a greater demand by students for occupation-specific training, and that students are more likely to persist in programs of this kind. That is, they believe that students enroll in adult-education-for-work programs because they want to find particular jobs, rather than because they want to work in particular industries. One participant said: “The greatest motivator is if students can have a clear image of their target job.”

Industrial certifications capture the idea that career pathways often consist of progressing to jobs that require increasingly higher skills in a particular industry. In that sense, they provide valuable ideas for enriching both counseling and occupational training.

Roundtable participants who offer industry-level instruction and/or certifications usually provide this component as an intermediate tier in career pathways programs. That is, their programs are structured to help students move from traditional adult education to industry-level instruction and then on to instruction in particular occupations. In this model, industry-level instruction serves as a means of providing basic skills instruction that is contextualized around workforce content. It also provides at least some instruction in both hard and “soft” occupational skills that are required in many areas of a particular industry. Importantly, it provides a means of career orientation that helps students identify the occupational specialties and career pathways they wish to pursue. In the examples cited by participants, industry-level instruction or certification does not appear to be an end in its own right. Rather, it is a means to help students make the transition to occupational or postsecondary courses.

Finally, as noted above, some Roundtable participants have concerns about how well the GED in its present form meets the needs of adult education for work. Nevertheless, many adult-education-for-work programs either require high school diplomas or their equivalent for entry into some occupational or transitions programs, or they incorporate GED preparation into the curricula of those programs. According to participants, this is partly because they recognize that many employers use completion of high school or the GED as a means of screening job applicants, and because many public and business certification systems require it. In describing its “middle college” transition program for high school drop outs, Southside Virginia Community College typified the way many programs incorporate the GED into adult education for work. According to the College: “The students simultaneously pursue a GED, a community college education, and workforce certification in a college environment.” In other words, the GED is part of a package of adult education for work services.

J. SUMMATION

Based on the discussion at the CAAL-NCEE Roundtable, adult education for work is a vital component of the nation's education and training system that contributes to meeting our workforce needs in important ways. Programs that offer this service take somewhat different forms. But they share a common vision of contextualized education that helps low-skilled adults ascend career pathways that would otherwise be closed to them, and they use many of the same methods to provide that instruction.

Because the primary focus of adult education for work is preparing students for jobs, it departs from traditional adult education in a number of important respects. This is both its greatest strength and the major limitation on its growth. The strength is that adult education for work transforms adult education and related services into an enterprise with a clearly defined goal: providing education that is closely linked to economic opportunities for low-skilled adults. The strong demand for this service as well as high levels of student persistence and completion testify to the value of this approach to adult education. Insofar as it challenges the traditional assumptions of adult educators, this challenge may well be beneficial to the field as a whole, because it may encourage others in the field to evaluate their goals and their means of achieving them.

But the distinctive features of adult education for work are also a weakness in bringing this type of service to scale. Because it departs from traditional adult education models and requires cross-agency partnerships, it does not fit well into the present systems of funding, accountability, staffing, program design, and assessment that support traditional services. As a result, support for adult education for work must be patched together from elements of traditional adult education and related services that often do not meet its distinctive needs very well. This can be a slow process, and it has been the major barrier to the growth of adult education for work. In addition, because it is a nontraditional form of adult education and requires partnerships with other public programs, private agencies, and the business community, adult education for work can only reach its potential if there is a cultural change within the adult education field and beyond – a change in the attitudes, expectations, and priorities of both leaders and front line practitioners. In many ways, adult education for work is still a round peg that does not fit well into a great many square holes.

Taking all of these considerations into account, the achievements reported by participants in the CAAL-NCEE Roundtable make a compelling case that adult education for work can and should expand to reach its full potential, and that its growth should be a large part of the growth of adult education and related programs in coming years. As the National Commission on Adult Literacy emphasized in its final report, this will require leadership at all levels, and it will require changes in public policy to break down the silos that have constrained this and other important advances in workforce development. Programs of the Roundtable participants demonstrate that leadership

initiatives at the institutional and state policy level are both possible and effective. The challenge for the future is to multiply these efforts through local and state action.

The barriers to growth of adult education for work identified by the Roundtable suggest, however, that local and state action will not be enough. Participants expressed support for the National Commission's proposals to create a federal policy structure targeted at supporting adult education for work as a priority service for meeting our national workforce needs, and for a substantial infusion of new federal funding to allow that service to realize its full potential to help rebuild the American economy over the next decade.

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ADULT READINESS ROUNDTABLE
April 6-7, 2009**

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