

20th Anniversary Volume

This Is Our Time: Renewing Adult Education for the 21st Century

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This is a critical and exciting time for adult education. I have been an adult educator for 35 years, and I am thrilled to be in the Obama administration now, at this defining moment, working with the U.S. Department of Education. It is truly our time.

Our work is central to President Obama's economic agenda and to his jobs agenda and, as Secretary Duncan articulated in his historic address to the 2010 National Meeting for State Directors of Adult Education, we are central to the Department's agenda as well. The Office of Vocational and Adult Education's (OVAE) mission is to improve the quality of education for every adult education, career and technical, and community college student in America. As a field, we have a chance to accomplish real change and to expand educational options for everyone. This change requires consensus, commitment, and bold action from all of us—especially from educators working with adults and families every day to create programs and solutions that break down the barriers to their success. This is our moment.

Why is Adult Education so Important Now?

Adult education has taken on a new importance in helping adults and families improve their lives in this decade. The days of well-paying jobs that require little to no education are numbered. By 2016, four out of 10 new jobs will require some advanced education or training (Solis, 2010). Thirty of the fastest-growing fields will require a minimum of a bachelor's degree (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). A skilled workforce is a key factor in regional and metropolitan growth in per

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capita income and worker productivity (Jobs for the Future, 2010).

Low-skilled jobs almost always mean low wages, and today more than half of all jobs in the U.S. are poverty-wage or low-wage positions. Despite the current recession, America's fastest-growing market sector is in "middle skills" jobs that require more than a secondary school education but less than a bachelor's degree (Holzer & Lerman, 2007). The U.S. will need 22 million new workers with college degrees by 2018—but projections indicate that we will fall short by at least three million college degrees. More than half of stimulus jobs funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) require some college experience. High school dropouts are eligible only for approximately 25 percent of the remaining jobs. At a time when every job is precious, this shortfall will mean lost economic opportunity for millions of American workers and their families (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010).

The Department is committed to increasing the literacy skill levels of a multitude of learners to support economic recovery. That includes addressing educational skill demands of employers to fill "middle-skill" jobs. These types of jobs are likely to remain robust relative to supply because roughly half of all U.S. employment occurs in middle-skill occupations. The Department is just as equally committed to helping learners transition to postsecondary institutions.

Lower-skilled workers have been disproportionately impacted by the economic downturn. In November 2010 (the most recent month for which seasonally adjusted statistics are available) the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) determined that unemployment rates were:

- just over 5 percent (6.1 percent) for workers with a bachelor's degree and higher,
- nearly 9 percent (8.7 percent) for those with some college or an associate degree,
- 10 percent (10.0 percent) for high school graduates with no college, and
- nearly 17 percent (16.7) for those with less than a high school diploma (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).

Yet even in this historically deep recession, jobs go unfilled because of the mismatch between the skills and experience of job applicants and those in demand by employers. The U.S. Department of Labor is predicting a shortage of more than 35 million skilled and educated workers

over the next 30 years. Add to this the 70 million Americans expected to retire by 2020, and we face what some analysts are calling a “skills recession” (Alssid, 2010).

More than in earlier decades, adult education is a key provider of the basic reading, writing and math skills adults need to meet the hiring criteria for available jobs. States under pressure to address deficits are planning to reduce funding for adult education. More often than not, adult education programs lack the requisite resources to further improve quality and expand capacity. Too often, demand for adult education services far exceeds state’s ability to provide those services.

Our nation is more aware than ever that education is the foundation of a strong economy and the best means to deliver on the promise of the American dream. President Obama, Secretary Duncan, and the administration are acting decisively to address these issues. They have outlined a comprehensive vision for “cradle-to-career” reform (Obama, 2009a). They are aiming to reclaim America’s position as the best educated workforce in the world.

To accomplish this, the president has set one simple goal: by 2020, the U.S. will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates worldwide. As the president stated, “America cannot lead in the 21st century unless we have the best educated, most competitive workforce in the world” (Obama, 2009b). To reach the president’s goal, we must move our combined rate of two-year and four-year college degree-holders from 40 percent to about 60 percent. We need 3 million graduates from four-year colleges and 5 million from community colleges.

Adult education plays a critical role in reaching this goal. The State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) found that only 30 percent of the gap in degree attainment will be closed by traditional-age students (SHEEO, 2010). Adults are crucial in achieving the president’s vision—we cannot succeed without them. If roughly 70 percent of new students attaining degrees will come from the population of those in the workforce and other non-traditional and adult learners, we must dramatically improve their transitions from basic education to college.

Yet as of 2003 (the last year for which data are available), some 93 million adults in the U.S. lack the basic literacy and numeracy skills necessary to compete for these middle skills jobs. Of these, 13.5 million have such low levels of literacy that they are unable to complete the simplest literacy tasks, such as reading and understanding a newspaper or short health-related instructions. Another 35 million have difficulty locating information in pamphlets and answering simple questions about

short readings (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). To meet the 2020 goal, we need a two-pronged strategy that addresses basic literacy skills and creates opportunities for incumbent and dislocated workers to return to school to gain the skills and credentials they need to secure and advance in good jobs. More fundamentally, we need a paradigm shift: from the traditional view of education as a one-shot opportunity to a lifelong pursuit.

How Has the Federal Government Been Involved in Adult Education?

The federal government has played a role in providing funding for adult education services since civil rights provided a framework for social legislation in the Kennedy and the Johnson administrations. The Economic Opportunity Act, signed into law in 1964 as Title II-B of Pub. Law 88-452, created the first federal assistance for adult basic education as a grant to states and outlying areas. This 1964 federal legislation established a state and federal partnership to improve the most basic educational skills for adults who had not completed secondary education. Funding for states the first year was \$18.6 million. In 1965, 37,991 adults enrolled nationally in what was known as ABE (adult basic education). The federal role in supporting programs to increase adult literacy skills has continued in legislation. In 1991, the National Literacy Act (Pub. Law 102-73) was signed by President George H.W. Bush. The act added a focus on workplace literacy, addressed correctional education, established state literacy resource centers and created indicators of program quality to improve program services. The Workforce Investment Act (Pub. Law 105-220), containing as Title II the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), marked a new recognition of the role of adult education in workforce preparation and the extent to which coordination of job skills training with basic education could benefit workers (Eyre, 2010).

How Much Funding is Available for Adult Education?

Appropriations for the Adult Education State Grant Program have remained around \$560 million annually, allotted to 57 states and outlying areas for the last five years (*New Innovations and Best Practices Under the Workforce Investment Act*, 2009). This AEFLA funding is distributed

by formula to state agencies designated by governors. Looking at how governors made that designation nationwide, we find that 31 states provide these funds to state education agencies (SEAs), 18 states provide the funds to their community college or technical college systems, two states provide the funds to state technical education or workforce agencies, and six states provide the funds to their state labor departments (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b).

The law requires states to contribute at least 25 percent in nonfederal funds of the total amount spent for adult education services in the state. Every AEFLA dollar allocated leverages an average of \$75 in state spending on education for adults who need to learn English or whose basic literacy skills are too low to obtain family-supporting employment (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

State agencies designated to receive AEFLA funds must by law distribute them competitively to eligible providers, including local school districts, postsecondary institutions, and community and faith-based organizations. Federal dollars appropriated under AEFLA support adult learning through more than 3,682 providers nationwide. Slightly more than half (54 percent) of providers are local education agencies. Somewhat less than one-fifth (19.8 percent) are postsecondary institutions—primarily community, junior or technical colleges. Among smaller providers, less than one-fifth (18 percent) are community-based organizations, and about 2 percent are faith-based organizations. Reports also indicate that nearly 3 percent of all providers are correctional institutions and one percent are libraries (U.S. Department of Education, 2009c).

How is Accountability Ensured?

The Department is committed to ensuring the availability and transparency of performance accountability information to Congress and the public. The Adult Education State Grant Program is one of the first federal education programs to build a national system that gathers performance information on the programs states fund with federal assistance in order to determine the return taxpayers are getting for their federal investment. Our National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS) collects, monitors, and makes available data on adult education student outcomes. States have worked with the Department to validate the NRS framework, identify student outcomes, and agree on definitions. Sub-

sequent annual collections of NRS data have been available to states online.

The Adult Education State Grant Program participated in an Office of Management and Budget review process designed to assess and improve program performance, and identify program strengths and weaknesses. The Adult Education State Grant Program was one of four Department programs to achieve an “effective” rating in 2006 (the last year for which data are available). The Department has assisted states and local programs in using their data to develop publicly available, easy-to-understand report cards representing state and local performance on student achievement. Many states use report cards to share performance data with state legislators, funders, students, and the public.

To motivate local adult education providers to improve the quality and effectiveness of their services, states are adopting performance-based funding (PBF) models to allocate both federal and state adult education funds. At least 21 states use some form of performance-based funding in making decisions about funding adult education providers, and at least 10 more have plans on the drawing board. To assist states in implementing performance-based funding, OVAE is funding a national project that targets interested states for training and technical assistance on performance-based funding. Twenty-three states attended two OVAE-sponsored national training workshops on PBF and 12 states received or currently are receiving technical assistance from the project. These 12 states are: Alabama, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Texas (R. Spacone, personal communication, June 17, 2010).

Who Does Adult Education Serve?

Adults eligible for services funded by AEFLA are at least 16 years old, beyond their state’s age for compulsory school attendance, not enrolled in high school, and lacking sufficient mastery of basic educational skills, without a secondary school diploma (or its equivalent) or unable to read, speak, or write the English language (U.S. Congress, 1998a).

More than 2.4 million students are enrolled in adult education programs nationwide—44 percent in English language learning (ELL), 42 percent in adult basic education (ABE, identified as reading and math levels below the 8th grade), and 14 percent in adult secondary education (ASE, identified as reading and math proficiency at between the 9th–

and 12th-grade levels) (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a). Adult education programs serve a varied but a substantial youth population. More than one-third or 871,573 of the total adult education enrollment comprises youths between the ages of 16 and 24. Hispanics or Latinos represented the largest race or ethnic group enrolled in adult education, at 43 percent, followed by Whites at 26 percent, African Americans at 20 percent, and Asians at just 8 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2009b).

How Well do Adult Education Programs Perform?

Over the past five years, adult education programs nationwide enrolled nearly 4 million adult learners who have made great gains toward “demonstrated improvements” in literacy skills in reading, writing, and speaking in English and problem-solving to increase their self-sufficiency.

Highlights from the NRS five-year aggregate data show that:

- 575,883 learners who set a goal of obtaining employment found and entered employment after they exited the program;
- 809,185 learners who set a goal of obtaining a GED (or its state equivalent) received a GED;
- 568,047 employed adult learners who set a job retention or employment goal succeeded in obtaining work after leaving the program and were employed at the end of the third quarter after completing their studies;
- 234,895 learners who set a goal of enrolling in postsecondary education successfully entered postsecondary education or training after completing the program;
- 2.6 million adult learners succeeded in improving basic literacy skills; and
- 2.1 million immigrants improved their writing, reading, and oral proficiency in English (*New Innovations and Best Practices Under the Workforce Investment Act*, 2009).

The Department’s work in partnership with the states has produced significant accomplishments and helped learners achieve their education and employment goals. Many challenges still exist, particularly in the job market, where the “bar” for literacy skills that are required for family-supporting employment is being raised constantly.

Why Change Adult Education?

Adult education has made significant strides in the last several years, based on the work of dedicated educators, volunteers, and of course, adult students themselves. Nevertheless, WIA has not been reauthorized since it was initially passed in 1998. More than a decade ago:

- the national unemployment rate was 4.5 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1999);
- the Congressional Budget Office reported that the federal budget had a surplus; and
- the economy was operating at historic levels (Greenspan, 1998).

The present economy and demands on our public workforce system have changed dramatically. As our economy continues to strengthen and recover, the administration will be working with Congress to promote innovation in the workforce system, build on its strengths, address its weaknesses, and update and better equip the system.

As part of that process, OVAE recently conducted a nationwide WIA Community Conversations Tour that secured broad customer perspectives on priorities for reauthorization. OVAE facilitated 20 WIA Community Conversations in seven of the Department's administrative regions, visiting eight states (California, New York, New Jersey, Tennessee, Illinois, Texas, Massachusetts and Rhode Island) and the District of Columbia.

These Community Conversations directly involved more than 600 participants, representing over 870,000 adult learners, employers, adult education and workforce development practitioners, administrators, and policymakers from all 50 states. Dozens of responses were sent to OVAE's WIAConversations@ed.gov e-mail address. OVAE received more than 20 position papers from national, state, and local organizations. OVAE also facilitated a series of electronic conversations on the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) discussion lists, reaching more than 9,000 practitioners.

Some of the most perceptive thoughts and ideas came from students enrolled in adult education programs. Suggestions included:

- free classes, larger classrooms, additional instructional hours, and classes at different times of the day;

- child care and other support services;
- teachers who think and care about students;
- more teachers (better grouping of students) and more teacher time in and outside of the classroom;
- grammar, social studies, science, and conversational English classes;
- new computers and computer instruction, textbooks and learning materials;
- information on and help with going to college;
- help in identifying a career, and training opportunities and job services; and
- services for immigrant professionals so they can work in their occupational fields, such as credential review and transcript recovery services.

A dozen broad themes from the Community Conversations have been integrated into OVAE's thinking about reauthorization:

- Purpose of adult literacy programs
- Career Pathways and other key program strategies
- Support services
- Teacher quality and effectiveness
- Professionalization of the field
- Technology
- Innovation
- Alignment and interagency collaboration
- Data systems and their use
- Accountability
- Research
- Funding

How Can Adult Education be Improved?

Feedback from OVAE's Community Conversations focused the Department's WIA reauthorization priorities on five broad activity areas:

1. *Provide incentives to spur innovation in the delivery of adult education services, particularly as it relates to the integration and expansion of technology.*

More than 30 federal programs provide job training services. Yet today, workers and young people looking for effective training must navigate a maze of programs with little information about how well these programs operate. Leveraging funding from the WIA formula programs, the president's 2011 budget sets aside \$194 million for the Workforce Innovation Fund, which will encourage innovation and identify the best approaches to improving service delivery (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d). This approach of providing real incentives to spur innovation is a hallmark of the Obama administration and promises to stimulate reforms that will improve educational opportunities for our learners.

The fund would include \$45 million from DOL's adult formula grants, \$62 million from DOL's Dislocated Worker Formula Grants, \$30 million from the Department's adult education program, and not less than \$56 million from the Department's vocational rehabilitation program.

The innovation fund will generate strategies that achieve better outcomes for individuals, particularly the most vulnerable populations, by breaking down bureaucratic silos. To be eligible for assistance, projects would need to have strong evaluation strategies that would help build evidence of what works and allow replication of the most effective approaches.

The funds will be used to issue competitive grants for projects that propose strategies for delivering services in a manner designed to improve the basic skills and employment outcomes of individuals, particularly those from the most vulnerable populations. These grants will encourage state and local agencies to eliminate fragmentation and to work together to build and share evidence of what works. They will identify and validate effective strategies to improve program delivery and outcomes for adult learners (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d).

2. *Make meaningful advances to ensure our students have highly effective instructors and leaders, and professionalize the field of adult education.*

The need to professionalize the adult education workforce is widely recognized in the adult education community and is a theme that reoccurred throughout the WIA Community Conversations. Reauthorization provides an opportunity to begin to address this critical need.

To meet this challenge in the field, the administration is proposing:

- setting a minimum teacher requirement of a bachelor's degree;
- developing partnerships with universities to develop and strengthen teacher training programs that are specifically geared toward teaching literacy and basic skills to adults; and
- creating professional development systems that recognize the increasing demands for innovation and prepare teachers to develop skill sets needed for innovative models, such as career pathways and strategies for accelerated learning based on research and effective practice.

3. *Prepare our students for jobs in the 21st century.*

There is probably no bigger demand on adult education today than ensuring it prepares low-skilled adults not only for the jobs of today but also for the jobs of tomorrow. This will be a dominant theme in the reauthorization process.

Reauthorization will strengthen the ties between adult and postsecondary education and between adult education and the public workforce system by:

- promoting state development and implementation of career pathway programs for adults at all levels, including those with low literacy, numeracy, and language skills;
- strengthening ties to the one-stop system to provide greater access to employment-related services; and
- requiring states to implement college- and career-readiness standards.

Nearly 40 percent of adult education participants were unemployed when they enrolled in a program. Another one-third were employed but wanted to improve their employment status (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a). Both groups of adults need to improve their basic skills so that they can enroll in further education or training programs. They realize that without a basic education foundation, their chances of succeeding in their goals are greatly diminished. The use of core standards in reading, mathematics, and English proficiency that are aligned to college- and career-readiness will help to ensure the instruction that learners

receive in adult education will prepare them for success in postsecondary education and work.

Reauthorization provides an opportunity to align adult education more closely to the needs of the public workforce system so that learners can receive education and employment services they need to advance toward their goals.

4. *Build on the strengths of the adult education accountability system.*

Adult education has made significant progress in accountability. WIA reauthorization provides an opportunity to build on this work in several key areas by:

- adding new core measures for work readiness; and
- strengthening state to local accountability provisions by requiring the establishment of incentives and rewards.

5. *Codify the work over the last decade to prepare our English language learners for citizenship in this country.*

Including the English literacy/civics program in our authorizing statute, rather than in annual appropriations legislation, will ensure that the program will endure and that the work achieved by states will become a permanent part of the adult education system. The English literacy/civics program language can be expanded to make explicit the ability to serve immigrant professionals with targeted workforce services and clarify that English literacy programs may include workforce training. If immigrant professionals who are underemployed or unemployed could benefit from high-level English language instruction, in addition to other support services, they would become employable in their field or get onto an alternate related pathway.

Technology spans all five areas, and includes distance education to advance students' technological literacy, accelerate their learning, and strengthen professional development for teachers, including making technology more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Our proposal increases the amount of funds states can spend on state leadership activities from 12.5 percent to 15 percent. With the new state-wide changes we are asking states to take on, such as raising teacher quality, developing career pathway programs, and developing content

standards for adult education, it is necessary to give states added flexibility to facilitate fiscal support for these new requirements.

WIA reauthorization also affords us the opportunity to further demonstrate the administration's commitment to correctional education as an important part of addressing the needs of our adult learners. Current law prohibits states from spending more than 10 percent of their funds on corrections education, despite the body of evidence that suggests that education and workforce training have mitigating effects on crime. Our proposal removes the cap and sets a requirement for states to spend a minimum of 10 percent on corrections education. This change supports efforts to ramp up prisoner re-entry programs that are proven to reduce recidivism, including services that begin in institutional settings and continue into the community.

This is an ambitious agenda for reauthorization—one on which we hope to work closely with our many partners to make lasting improvements that will make a meaningful difference in the lives of adult learners. We must create critical links with the public workforce system across the nation. Currently, these connections are uneven and locally driven. Most low-skilled adults who are enrolled in adult education are not benefiting from employment services delivered by one-stops. We must expand the program's purpose to focus on college- and career-readiness and success. Helping youths and adults to pass the GED test is not enough and is a disservice to participants, who need to leave the program with the skills necessary to be successful in the 21st century.

How is the Administration Expanding Access to Postsecondary Education?

Secretary Duncan calls the 2020 college completion goal our "North Star." With it as our guide, the Department is offering billions of dollars in grants and loans for use in the higher education marketplace. It adds up to the largest investment in student aid since the G.I. Bill (Lee, 2007). The fiscal 2010 budget provides \$129 billion in new grants, loans, and other assistance—a 32 percent increase since fiscal year 2008. More than 14 million students and their families will use this assistance to pay for college (Kanter, 2010). Federal Student Aid (FSA) has also unveiled a simplified federal student loan application and will be making further changes so it is easier to apply for student aid. Congress is considering our proposal to simplify it further.

President Obama recently signed into law the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) and Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 (HCERA). HCERA provides additional financial support to expand access to postsecondary opportunities. The new law will help working-class and middle-class students pay for college by investing more than \$40 billion in the Pell Grant Program. This funding will ensure that eligible students not only receive an award but also that their award keeps pace with rising inflation. Pell grants will rise to nearly \$6,000 a year by 2017. HCERA also provides \$2.55 billion in mandatory funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other minority-serving institutions.

HCERA will further expand postsecondary opportunities by providing \$2 billion over four years for community colleges, which enroll more than 6 million students and serve as the largest part of our nation's higher education system. Funded through the Trade Adjustment Act (TAA), this effort allows for further collaboration between the departments of Education and Labor. We look forward to working closely with our partners at DOL to use those grants to help put Americans back to work and help realize the president's 2020 goal.

How is the Administration Strengthening Family Literacy?

Let's focus for a moment on what the Department of Education is doing internally to address literacy as part of this and other important efforts. The 2020 goal is the driving force behind the administration's comprehensive, cradle-to-career vision for education reform. This plan starts by building stronger early childhood programs. It transitions to building a world-class K-12 system and tackling the dropout rate. It concludes with efforts to make college more accessible and affordable for all.

The president's goal received a historic boost through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The stimulus brought \$100 billion for education reform. Secretary Duncan wants to transform the Department from a compliance-driven bureaucracy to an engine of innovation.

Reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act presents a unique opportunity to dramatically improve K-12 education for years to come. The current version of ESEA, known as No Child Left Behind, needs to be fixed. Secretary Duncan is working with Democratic and Republican leaders to reauthorize it.

The Department recently released the Blueprint for Reform laying out the administration's plan for ESEA reauthorization. This plan includes rewarding high-performing schools, districts, and states, and those showing progress toward their goals. At the same time, the Department will be tough-minded with the nation's lowest-performing schools and schools with large achievement gaps that are not closing. Proposals to reach high-need schools, or turn around low-performing ones, will receive priority. Flexibility, accountability, and teacher- and school-leader quality are all hallmarks of this plan (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a).

To make ESEA work, President Obama is willing to invest heavily in it. His fiscal 2011 budget complements the blueprint by including a \$3 billion increase for ESEA programs—the largest increase ever proposed by a president. Once Congress has reauthorized ESEA, the president would propose an additional \$1 billion for ESEA to support rewarding excellence, improving assessments, and expanding after-school programs.

Along with the increases, this budget proposes consolidating 38 ESEA programs into 11 to give states and districts greater latitude to address the significant needs in their communities. One of these areas is literacy. The administration is proposing to consolidate six programs, including the Even Start and Striving Readers programs. With this consolidation would come an increase of about \$37 million for literacy—or a total of \$450 million in fiscal year 2011. To receive funds, states would need to develop comprehensive, evidence-based pre-K–12 literacy plans, including competitive subgrants for high-need districts. States also would need to align federal, state, and local funds, and adopt common or state-developed college- and career-ready standards. States could certainly also use funds for family literacy, library services, or other efforts.

Our blueprint to reauthorize ESEA supports family engagement in a host of ways. Among them, it increases the number of schools that serve as community centers. It also provides more than \$200 million for Promise Neighborhoods, which will have excellent schools at their center and comprehensive social services, from cradle-to-career. Our proposal allows family engagement to be included as one measure of success in teacher and principal evaluations. It would define professional development of teachers and school leaders to include working with families. Finally, we're putting even more resources into this important set of activities because we need to do more—and we need to do it bet-

ter. Based on feedback the Department received about the blueprint, we propose to double funding for parent engagement—from 1 to 2 percent of Title I dollars—or a total of \$270 million. At the same time, in order to drive innovation, we will allow states to use another 1 percent of Title I dollars—about \$145 million—for grant programs that support, incentivize, and help expand district-level, evidence-based parental involvement practices. We want districts to think big about family engagement—to propose new strategies and hone in on best practices that raise student achievement.

OVAE is actively engaged in conversations across the agency to determine how to best support family engagement and parent responsibility through the Department’s ESEA blueprint.

ESEA reauthorization is a vital undertaking. At the same time, there are other efforts under way that are relevant to a renewed focus on family literacy and parental engagement. For example, the Department has launched the Promise Neighborhoods initiative, which will support projects that offer full-service programming for children from cradle-to-college and then on to career. The effort will significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children in our most distressed communities. Inspired by the success of models like New York’s Harlem Children’s Zone, Promise Neighborhoods can include provisions for family literacy.

Competitive grants will go to organizations with plans to develop a continuum of community services, strong family supports, and comprehensive education reform—and schools must be at the core of these efforts. The Department’s Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) released an application in mid-April to support 20 communities with \$10 million for planning grants. The president has proposed increasing the amount for this program to \$210 million next year so that community groups can launch their projects and others can join the planning process (U.S. Department of Education, 2010c).

At the same time, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program would provide \$1.2 billion in competitive grants for states, school districts and nonprofits to implement in-school and out-of-school strategies that provide students and, as appropriate, teachers and family members, with additional help to succeed. These plans could include strategies to redesign and expand the school day or year; provide full-service community schools; or offer services before school, after school, or during the summer. All programs would focus on improving student

achievement in core academic subjects, ranging from English-language arts, math, and science, to history, the arts, and financial literacy. These dollars could also fund enrichment activities, including greater opportunities for families to engage actively and meaningfully in their children's education.

What Other Opportunities Exist for Adult Education to Contribute to America's Renewal?

The president's State of Union Address centered on job creation, and recent legislation has focused on responding to that call. This too can be a leadership opportunity for adult education to provide program models that employ short-term, high-intensity basic skills models that are highly contextualized for the world of work.

Any legislative action on immigration will have a profound impact on adult education. Current funding for immigrant citizenship and integration programs, such as those funded by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act's Citizenship and Integration Direct Services Grant Program and Citizenship and Integration National Capacity-Building Grant Program, provide potential areas for collaboration with many adult education providers. OVAE has met with its colleagues at DHS to lend its expertise in providing English language instruction and civics education to adults.

Other opportunities for leadership for adult education include an expansion of health literacy initiatives, now that healthcare reform is finally a reality. OVAE has been working with the Department of Health and Human Services on efforts to educate our health-care workforce to meet the demands of health-care reform and to create career pathways.

Our efforts at the federal level to collaborate across agencies and departments can serve as a model for state and local efforts. However, as effective as we hope to be, our efforts are much less important than the impact that local innovative collaborations will have on breaking down silos and expanding access and opportunity for learners. Local efforts will ensure the maximum efficiency and effectiveness of our collective work.

This truly is our moment for renewal and leadership. The learners and workers of today and tomorrow are counting on us. American families of all backgrounds need the very best that our systems have to offer. Join us. Seize this moment to increase opportunities, high-quality service, and capacity for all adult and family learners.

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