

Forum

Your Future is Being Decided for You

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Abstract

Adult education as we know it will change dramatically over the next several months. Adult educators must take full responsibility for their collective future as well as for the future of the public policy decision-making process. It is important to understand some historical perspectives, some legislative initiatives, and the policy positions of our adult education and literacy colleagues.

Historical Perspective

Since 1966 the Adult Education Act has been the legislative “rock” that has stabilized our profession and has given us the opportunity to enhance the lives of adult learners. That rock will be gone for all practical purposes by July, 1997. Along with the elimination of the Adult Education Act comes the elimination of the National Literacy Act of 1991. Both the Adult Education Act and the National Literacy Act are to become “eligible activities” under a more comprehensive legislative initiative that will consolidate many education, training, and social welfare programs into block grants. How did we get to this stage?

In 1981 the New Federalism was a policy approach implemented in President Reagan’s administration to consolidate specifically “related” programs that enabled federal funding to be “block granted.” Funds then flowed directly to the states and to local units of government without unnecessary federal oversight. In order to obtain bipartisan support for the New Federalism, administration officials also worked extensively with state and local program providers to help them better understand the long-term impact block grants would have on their services. Although the support for the New Federalism was mixed initially, the approach capital-

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ized on strong bipartisan support at the state and local levels. All the stakeholders were actually involved in setting the agenda and participated in the goal-planning process.

In my opinion, the success of New Federalism in the early 1980s was due in part to the full implementation of an adult education model. It contributed to the initial comprehensive policy processing and the subsequent sound program management. The individual programs themselves became "eligible activities" from which state and local officials could select the specific activities that best met the needs of their constituencies. Block grants were successful because they were focused on related programs only, had the support of most state and local leaders, and included state and local service providers in the policy development, legislative, and regulatory processes. Finally, block granted funds were spent effectively on those selected eligible activities.

Now, in 1996, we face New Federalism II. There are three major differences between the first block grants and the next phase of New Federalism. First, there has been little opportunity for state and local program service providers to participate in the policy development and legislative processes. Second, these processes have become partisan rather than productive and exclusive rather than inclusive. Third, block grants are not simply focused on related programs. Consequently, the successes of the past may not necessarily be replicated within the second phase of New Federalism. The adult education model was not fully utilized by public policy makers in New Federalism II.

Legislative Initiatives

At this time there are only two major approaches being considered by Congress: U.S. Senator Kassenbaum's Workforce Development Act (S. 143) and U.S. Representative Goodling's Consolidated and Reformed Education, Employment, and Rehabilitation Systems (CAREERS) Act (H.R. 1617). No matter what compromise bill is passed, professional adult education, as we know it, will be changed forever. Are adult and literacy educators prepared for this policy change and its programmatic ramifications at the state and local levels?

Adult educators must understand the importance of their participation in the public policy debate and to individually and collectively let their positions be known at the local, state, and federal levels. In general, the Workforce Development Act takes over 90 programs, including all adult education and literacy programs, vocational education programs, numerous

training programs, and selected welfare programs, and puts an amount less than their combined funding into one big “grab bag.” This proposed Act is an example of New Federalism II. Since S. 143 combines unrelated programs, there is little collective ownership at the state and local levels within the policy development and legislative processes. Consequently, those state and local constituencies with the most political clout will win the lion’s share of funding. Adult education and literacy programs, without regard to cost-effectiveness and the positive impact on adult learners’ lives, will merely become an “eligible activity” for others to decide whether or not to fund to any substantial extent.

On the other hand, the CAREERS Act offers a better block granting approach by simply consolidating related programs into a block grant. This proposed Act is an example of the original New Federalism approach. All adult education and literacy program funding would be one block grant while vocational education and rehabilitation programs would constitute other block grants. In H.R. 1617 adult education constituencies would have the opportunity to determine which eligible activities are most meaningful given certain local situations.

With respect to the CAREERS Act, implementation of the adult education model made the policy development and legislative processes less politically motivated. Although the CAREERS Act offers a better approach, we should still expect funding decisions to be bitterly contested at the state and local levels. Therefore, we cannot afford to let certain public policy makers make “uninformed” decisions on programs impacting adult learning.

We already know that the importance of adult education and literacy programs transcends what actually happens in the classroom. Since the adult learning environment also includes the workplace, the community, and the home, adult educators knew their programs were critical to revitalizing the nation. However, it was not until the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) indicated that nearly 50% of the nation’s adults are within the lowest two of five literacy levels that the importance of what adult and literacy educators do was finally acknowledged. Essentially, the NALS report means that nearly 90 million Americans are at or below the basic skill levels. Those Americans are at risk. If this nation is to compete globally, we must not overlook the positive economic impact of improving the nation’s workforce, including the education and training of at-risk adults. If this nation made a commitment to spend only \$10 a year on every adult who is at risk, it would spend nearly \$900 million annually. Last year the Congress appropriated \$279 million for certain adult education and

literacy programs, that is, \$3.10 for every at-risk adult.

Tragically, without adequate funding for adult education and literacy programs, adults who are at risk will only have three career options: crime, welfare, and unemployment. Since most "at-risk" adults constitute the nation's working poor, adult education and literacy programs have become their last best chance to improve their education and training levels. Because 86% of all adult and literacy educators work part-time or are volunteers (according to the U.S. Department of Education), we should consider adult education and literacy programs the nation's most cost-effective prevention programs. Although adult educators have an important role to play in the revitalization of this nation and can help to resolve many social problems, it is apparent that most public policy leaders have not yet arrived at the same conclusion. Therefore, it is increasingly important for the field to actively advocate for itself. Let's not be embarrassed to let our successes be known. We must become our own champions in the policy development and legislative processes.

Policy Positions

The American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) continues to be a leader advocating for adult educators and adult learners. AAACE took the initiative to combine the advocacy efforts of the National Coalition for Literacy (NCOL) and the Coalition of Lifelong Learning Organizations (COLLO); this collaboration has resulted in the creation of the Adult Literacy Policy Working Group (ALPWG). The ALPWG was able to reach agreement among NCOL and COLLO members on eight essential elements for adult basic education legislation. Those essential elements are 1) to retain the broadest possible definition for ABE program purposes; 2) to assure that adult education and literacy programs are managed by state education agencies; 3) to enhance professional development and program development opportunities; 4) to have representation on boards, commissions, and any other bodies that have an impact on the field; 5) to secure fund-matching provisions for such programs; 6) to ensure a federal role for certain overarching support efforts (e.g., research and technical assistance); 7) to improve fiscal accountability, adult learner assessment, and program evaluation; and 8) to have adequate funding for adult education and literacy programs. The ALPWG has provided selected public policy leaders with a side-by-side comparison of S. 143 and H.R. 1617 to show graphically the impact of each of these bills on these essential elements along with specific policy positions for

each element (Figure 1). It is critical for the field to speak with a uniform voice. This bill comparison and position statement offers an opportunity for this consensus to occur among adult and literacy educators.

Further, Congressional staffs have also completed an extensive 600-page comparative analysis of the Workforce Development Act and the CAREERS Act. Given this Congressional comparison, the ALPWG did another 18-page analysis on 34 issues that would have an impact on the field. To summarize, the ALPWG specifically makes ten recommendations to the House and Senate conferees as they begin to negotiate a compromise bill. In these negotiations, the ALPWG recommends that the conferees accept the following four House Bill (H.R.1617) provisions: 1) require separate authorization for adult education and literacy programs, 2) expand the definition of adult education to include family literacy and ESL, 3) require a 25% match from state and local funds, and 4) authorize training and technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Education. Further, the ALPWG recommends that the conferees accept the following six Senate Bill (S.143) provisions: 5) fund programs through a state education agency, 6) provide for state literacy resource centers, 7) include "maintenance of effort" language, 8) reserve 20% of state funds for professional development and technical assistance and 5% for program administration, 9) require adult education representation on workforce development boards, and 10) provide "for-profit" opportunities within public-private partnerships only. It is important that the compromise bill include these ten aforementioned provisions. Since our elected officials are not mind-readers, it is imperative that we share our concerns and recommendations in a professional and timely manner.

Conclusion

At the 1995 Annual Adult Education Conference the AAACE general membership approved a resolution, the text of which follows this article, that encourages all public policy leaders to consider the positions of adult and literacy educators when making decisions on adult education and literacy programs. This resolution was sent to all the administration and congressional leadership. Since time is running out on influencing the legislative initiatives currently before Congress that will dramatically change the field, we will need to continue being pro-active. Public policy leaders need to know the importance of what the field does. Therefore, we must be willing to make the time to share our accomplishments. Public policy leaders should become aware of general concerns about the field

and its importance relative to the education and training of adult learners, be given specific essential elements for quality adult basic education, and be given opinions of the legislation now being considered.

In summary, the consolidation of programs and the block granting of funds will become a reality. Although there will be funds to provide certain services for adult learners, will the existing adult and literacy educators be part of the new systems that will provide the necessary services? We cannot afford to let others decide the future of the field, our own professional futures, and the futures of adult learners across the nation. Be involved now in the policy development and legislative processes at both the state and federal levels.

[Note: In addition to collaborating with the ALPWG, NCOL, and COLLO, AAACE is working with the Vocational Education Coalition (VEC) and the National Coalition for Technology in Education and Training (NCTET) on various other issues related to adult education that will also have an impact on the field in the future; these include the Telecommunications Act, Section 127 of the IRS Code, and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act.]

**1995 Annual Adult Education Conference Resolutions on
Public Policy Leadership
American Association for Adult and Continuing Education
(AAACE)**

WHEREAS, according to the National Adult Literacy Survey, nearly one-half of all American adults are “at risk” by having, at best, the minimum best, the minimum basic skills necessary to handle entry level positions; according to the U. S. Department of Labor, all adults will change their jobs at least seven times during their work careers; and the according to adult educators, public policy leadership is required on a variety of lifelong learning issues for adult learners needing basic education and training skills to continuous professional education; and

WHEREAS, the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) is dedicated to providing leadership for the field through the work of its nearly 3,500 individual members from secondary and postsecondary education, business and labor, military and government, and community-based organizations, as well as for over 18,000 other adult educators reached through its affiliates and represented institutions; and

WHEREAS, approximately 1,000 of these adult educators having met together at the 1995 Annual Adult Education Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, November 1-5, and reviewed their accomplishments and addressed the challenges of the future; and

WHEREAS, because we recognize that dramatic changes in adult education policy and legislation are now under discussion in the nation's capitol and in state capitols around the country, we offer the following resolution to the President of the United States of America, William Jefferson Clinton; to the leaders of the 104th Congress; and to state and local leaders on behalf of our field of practice and those adult learners we serve:

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that those assembled urge careful public policy leadership consideration of the value of adult and continuing education for a productive economy and a stable society and pledge their continued leadership in addressing the lifelong learning needs of adults at all education and training levels; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that AAACE offers the breadth and depth of its experience and professional expertise, both theoretical and practical, to all elected and appointed public policy leaders at the local, state, and federal levels who seek thorough information as well as thoughtful advice concerning adult learning in the United States of America today; its impact upon the development of human potential; its implication for children and families; and its meaning for our communities, our workplaces, our nation, and our world; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that AAACE stands ready to assist our public policy leaders in any way it can, both now and in the future.

Ellen Ironside, Ph.D., President
and the AAACE Board of Directors
on behalf of the Association's membership
and the Field of Adult and Continuing Education
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Figure 1: Side-By-Side Comparison of Adult Basic Education Legislation			
Eight Essential Elements for Adult Basic Education (ABE) Legislation	"Careers Act" House/Goodling H.R. 1617	"Workforce Development Act" Senate/Kassebaum S.143	What the ABE Field Needs from These Bills
1. ABE related legislation must support the <u>broad purpose</u> of the program.	(✓) The Act focuses primarily on employability although the role of ABE/literacy for family literacy and "to participate in the civic, social and economic life of the U.S." is also defined and suggested (#411).	(✓) The Act focuses on employability although the "Workforce Education" sections do include role of ABE/literacy for responsible citizenship and family literacy (#104 & #106).	Retain strongest ABE related language from definitions and purposes (House definition of "SEA"); obtain better representation on state and regional boards that will establish priorities for services.
2. ABE is an education program, and as such, should be managed by the <u>state educational agency</u> (SEA).	✓ ABE has its own block grant. (-) funding goes to the Governor who consults with other stakeholders to determine who manages the program (except in states whose laws require education \$\$ go to the SEA (perhaps 14 such states?) (#103).	Overall funding goes to the Governor. ✓ the SEA, however, is responsible for the 25% of the funding (planning and management) designated for "workforce education" (ABE and Vocational Education services) (#103). (-) no guarantee for the ABE share of this \$\$.	In order to assure the broad purposes of this educational program continued to be served, the House should recede to the Senate so that ABE funding goes to the State Education Agency.

<p>3. Programs must be able to make serious investments in <u>program and professional development</u>.</p>	<p>(-) A maximum of 12% can be invested in program and professional development, technical assistance and technology initiatives; this includes any support for literacy resource centers and up to +3% for administration (432).</p>	<p>✓ Professional development and technical assistance activities are allowable (#104); up to 20% of the workforce education funds may be used for these and other state-wide activities (5% of which is the maximum that can be used for state administration); (#111 & #114). ✓ Funding for the state literacy resource centers is included as part of a percentage “taken off the top” of the Act’s appropriations (#242 & #124).</p>	<p>The House should recede to the Senate in order to assure sufficient resources for professional development and technical assistance; the Senate provision for literacy resource centers appears superior to making them only an “allowable expense” from a tiny pool of funding; the House should recede to the Senate version.</p>
<p>4. Meaningful and adequate <u>representation</u> of ABE stakeholders on national, state, and regional boards.</p>	<p>(-) ABE stakeholders are <u>not</u> provided with a designated seat on regional/local workforce development boards (#106); ✓ State ABE director <i>must</i> be included in state plan development (#103). <i>{there is no state workforce development board in the House version}</i></p>	<p>✓ ABE stakeholders are provided with a designated seat on local partnerships and workforce development boards (#118). ✓ State ABE director must be included in state plan development (#101). (-) ABE stakeholders are not provided with a designated seat on the state workforce development board (#105).</p>	<p>In legislation primarily designed for “employment & training,” ABE as an education program must be at the table at every level or its concerns and priorities will be overlooked and lost; the House should recede to the stipulated ABE Workforce Development Board role in the Senate bill.</p>

<p>5. Current and additional ABE investment must be leveraged through <u>matching</u> and <u>maintenance of effort</u> (MOE) requirements.</p>	<p>(✓) A matching share of 25% is required using state and local funding (#433). (-) No MOE requirement. (✓) Other Title II & II funding “may” be used to help pay ABE programs for services provided to referred students (#432 & #433).</p>	<p>✓ Requires assurance that states “will supplement and not supplant” other public funds spent on “workforce development activities” 3 and a maintenance of effort mechanism is specified (#106). No matching requirement. (✓) Funds from other set-asides “may” be used to support ABE services for adults who must attain or be enrolled in a program leading to a high school diploma/equivalent before they can enroll in other training services (#103 & #106).</p>	<p>The matching provision from the House and the maintenance effort provision the Senate provide the strongest protection for maintaining scarce existing resources. The provisions for “funding accompanying referrals” are weak in both bills, reinforcing our need for language requiring ABE constituencies be represented on state and regional policy and oversight boards.</p>
<p>6. <u>National programs</u> require serious support for priority concerns of the field that states can’t alone address.</p>	<p>(✓) \$4.5 million is set aside for NIFL and \$4.5 million for the USDOE for coordination, evaluation and major developmental activities regardless of the level of appropriations for the Act (#441 & #442).</p>	<p>✓ The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) would be funded through a percentage set aside “off the top” of the Act’s appropriation (assuming many of OVAE’s functions, #241). (-) The Act creates a transition period during which USDOE’s, OVAE and USDOL’s Employment Training Administration are phased out (by 7/1/98, #187, #188, #191); a new government corporation, the Workforce Development Partnership is created (#181).</p>	<p>Both bills provide support for NIFL although a percentage off the top might better separate its funding from the portion going to the states for services. The Senate should recede to the House with respect to the ABE role of the U.S. DOE and funding for its technical assistance (which will be needed particularly by small states establishing accountability systems) and evaluation activities.</p>

<p>7. A clearly defined focus on <u>accountability and results</u> appropriate for ABE services.</p>	<p>Accountability is based primarily on economic/jobs related results and literacy gains. (✓) Attainment of a H.S. diploma/equivalency (#434) for which the States establish measurable goals (#433); states are “encouraged” to measure the success of family literacy programs, increased English language skills and community involvement. States must use 3% of their federal funds for performance grants to local programs starting PY 1998 (#432).</p>	<p>While the overall bill focuses on employability/getting a job, the ABE sections promote (✓) Accountability based on student mastery of the literacy, knowledge and skills needed for employment, responsible citizenship and for parents to become actively involved in the education of their children (#121).</p>	<p>Provisions for ABE related results from both bills need to be combined; even then, the combined language will be weak and could lead to an inability to demonstrate significant results in the future; the field will need to voluntarily resolve this issue by establishing a common framework for accountability and common data elements on its own!</p>
<p>8. <u>Adequate funding</u> and support for adult basic education programs.</p>	<p>(✓) Block grants all existing Adult Education Act (AEA) state and local programs into a single ABE line item with an authorization level of \$280 million (#4).</p>	<p>(✓) Consolidates 14 programs; ABE and Perkins programs are combined in a 25% set aside (#123) of the amount appropriated (with \$6+ billion total authorization, the ABE + Voc Ed “ceiling” is higher in the House, #124).</p>	<p>Support a separate ABE block grant or a minimum ABE set-aside at the higher authorization level; to maintain the broad purposes envisioned in these funds, they must go to the SEA.</p>