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IT'S A BIG DEAL: WIOA Introduced in Congress

A group of eight Senate and House leaders have been working together for months to craft the "bi-cameral, bipartisan" **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act** that was introduced as a total replacement for WIA on May 21st. It was signed, in a Statement of Managers, by **Senators Tom Harkin, Lamar Alexander, Patty Murray, and Johnny Isakson** and by **Representatives John Kline, George Miller, Virginia Foxx, and Rubén Hinojosa**.

Although WIOA doesn't contain all of the provisions for Adult Education that CAAL considers to be important, it is a remarkable Congressional achievement. And the influence of the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act and earlier field-supported versions of WIA is evident. WIOA strongly resembles the Senate version of 2013 (S.1356) while incorporating key elements of the approved House version (H.R.803). It is likely that the Senate and House will take up the bill in the very near future, the Senate possibly within the next couple of weeks. Although Adult Education and Workforce Development leaders are analyzing the bill to identify specific concerns and areas for future action, they are likely to strongly support WIOA in its current form to help ensure its passage.

Assuming that the bill will go forward as is, a [CAAL letter of support was submitted on May 23rd](#) on behalf of its Board and the National Commission on Literacy. A joint [Congressional press release and related material](#) has also been placed at the CAAL website for easy reference by our E-News readers. It includes links to a one-page Summary and a 27-page signed summary, as well as the full bill.

Title II of WIOA is a major and very timely move in the right direction for Adult Education. It gives higher emphasis to a redefined role (more college and job readiness services), distance learning, comprehensive planning that includes involvement of business leaders, representation of adult education on local workforce investment boards, more accountability, more relevant performance criteria, required activities for National and State Leadership, an allowance for states to increase funding for correctional education, and alignment to shared Title I goals.

Unfortunately, funding for the new and larger role that Adult Education is called upon to take is far from adequate considering the size of the job and the fact that the system operates at starvation level now. Leaders at the state and national level will have to keep working this issue in the coming months and years. They will also have to pay close attention to numerous substantive problems and concerns as the enacted bill is implemented.

Most national leadership organizations (e.g., [CLASP](#), the National Coalition for Literacy, and the [National Skills Coalition](#) to mention just some) have posted reactions to WIOA or will soon do so. To enhance understanding in the field, NSC will host a webinar on June 3rd aptly named "Unpacking WIOA." A panel of experts will make presentations and answer questions with respect to Titles I and II, youth service, and data and accountability. Those wishing to join can [register](#) at the NSC website.

Some of the issues on CAAL's list for the future are the following:

The lack of a NIFL-type research entity...lack of a strong and funded technology component in its own right...clarifying inconsistencies and mistakes in language...clarifying the role of the NRS and need for recognition of work-ready certificates and other non-academic outcomes... and tie-ins between the state common core standards and workforce outcome expectations. Moreover, CAAL has pressed consistently in the past few years for "integrated" approaches, meaning both concurrent enrollment and sequential learning (the latter being the predominant form of Adult Education service now). The notions of integrated and sequential are missing from WIOA. In the vital ESL area, one part of the bill changes the meaning of integrated English Language and civics (Section 243, p. 545) by dropping the word "civics" -- so that outcome evaluations for that section would be determined solely by how well participants do preparing for or succeeding in the job market.

Another top CAAL concern is that some of the bill's provisions or lack thereof may motivate program planners to turn away from providing services to the lowest skilled adults who take longer to move to college and job readiness, or to adults who may be pursuing adult education for legitimate reasons other than readiness for jobs and college. All stakeholders need to keep a vigilant watch on this.

These are real and important concerns for "next phase" attention. But for the present, WIOA, as it is, is a giant step forward -- a substantial much-needed, long-overdue reforming of the Workforce Investment Act. It is vital that we all get behind it. CAAL urges its readers to weigh in quickly with

their own support letters, and to familiarize themselves with WIOA's challenges and considerable strengths.

Passage of WIOA, as the bill is now crafted, will be a victory for Congress, for Adult Education and Workforce Skills Development, and for the nation.



OTHER NEWS

▶ **The Joyce Foundation's Employment Program** aims "to help underprepared adults learn the skills they need to get good jobs and advance in their careers." The emphasis is on reforming public systems, employer partnerships, and demonstrating innovation. Two new reports have just been released as a result of the Program: [*Pay for Success in Workforce Development: What We've Learned and What's Next*](#) (the Nonprofit Fund) and [*Implementing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act: Impacts on the Frontlines of Caregiving*](#) (CareerSTAT). A brief statement about a third publication, [*Shared Vision, Strong Systems: The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Framework*](#), is available from the Center for Law and Social Policy now and the full publication will be ready at the CLASP website in late June.

▶ **The CCR Research Network** is a new program of the American Council on Education. A first meeting in June will convene an invited group of top researchers and policymakers including CAAL to help ACE begin to think about research needed to inform the future development of its GED testing program. The effort recognizes that the traditional purpose of the GED and alternate diploma assessment programs needs to be expanded beyond high school completion to include job and college readiness. The Network does not yet have a website presence, but for further information contact Darya Razavi, Center for Policy Research and Strategy, ACE, drazavi@acenet.edu.

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