

Issue #11, November 3, 2010

Each issue of the E-News reports on CAAL's programs and publications, including follow-up activities related to the National Commission on Adult Literacy. Occasional feature articles are offered, along with news about complementary work by other groups.

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HOLIDAY GIFTING THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

When you shop for the holidays, you can also help CAAL by choosing gifts from the websites listed below. For two months--November and December--these vendors have pledged a portion of all purchases made through this newsletter link to CAAL. Click the images below to see their selections. **More merchants will be added in December!**



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NEWS IN BRIEF

▶ In mid-November, CAAL will revisit Senate and House leaders to get their post-election take on reforming and reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act, including incorporation of the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act. It is expected that the new WIA bill, which has advanced quite far on the Senate side through a bipartisan effort, will move forward for public comment by Spring. As of now, there is no reason to think that changes in House committee leadership as a result of the election will put the bill's reauthorization in jeopardy.

▶ [The August 24 issue of the CAAL E-News](#) reported (in *Reforming the NRS*) on an OVAE meeting of state ABE directors and, in an observer capacity, several national organizations. That meeting discussed six proposed non-legislative changes in the National Reporting System. Through an online survey geared to the state ABE directors, OVAE recently invited further comment to flesh out the likely impact of their proposed changes on state ABE programs. Several national attendees including CAAL, the National Coalition for Literacy, and ProLiteracy have also offered further input. CAAL indicated that, in general, the changes proposed would be to the good, as long as they eliminate the problematic goal-setting function and there are no "exit" criteria. However, CAAL suggested that a number of issues need further consideration, and we noted that to work, the changes "will require significant data tracking and state agency coordination" which the government and the NRS may need to require.

▶ In May 2010 CAAL's Senior Research/Policy Associate, Jim Parker, represented CAAL at a Roundtable meeting sponsored by the [Corporation for a Skilled Workforce](#) and other groups. The meeting--called "Promoting the Advancement of Hispanic Immigrant Workers in America's Workplaces"--provided a forum in which to learn about the latest research in this area, hear from a panel of employers, and explore policy for advancing Hispanic workers. Following the discussions, several participants were interviewed on specific topics related to workforce policy and programs.

View Mr. Parker and the other participants on [YouTube](#).

▶ [ABE Career Connections: A Manual for Integrating Adult Basic Education into Career Pathways](#), from MPR Associates, was produced under a U.S. Department of Education contract to MPR. This 46-page report is based on five career pathway/college transition projects funded by OVAE nearly four years ago. The project ended in November 2009; the report was issued in February 2010. The project sites were Bluegrass Community and Technical College (Lexington, KY), Instituto del Progreso Latino (Chicago, IL), Jewish Vocational Service (San Francisco, CA), Madison Area Technical College (Madison, WI), and Montgomery College (Wheatland, MD). The manual gives an overview of career pathways and approaches used at the institutions to align basic skills training and partnerships with local career pathways.

▶ [The Income Gap](#), an op-ed piece in the October 8th [Boston Globe](#) discusses the growing discrepancy between America's rich and poor, particularly in Massachusetts (which ties for first place with Arizona as the state with the widest gap, according to the article). Written by Andy Sum, Director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University and Greg Torres, President of Mass INC and publisher of *Commonwealth Magazine*, the column discusses what is behind this widening gap, its political implications, and a declining belief in the "American Dream" (where each generation believes the next will do better). Mass INC plans to have Andy Sum do major research on this topic in the future.

▶ [Transforming Michigan's Adult Learning Infrastructure](#) recommends to the state's Council for Labor and Economic Growth a set of policy reforms that will reduce by 50% the 1.7 million adults lacking the basic skills they need to get postsecondary education and good jobs. The report represents 2-1/2 years of work by the Council's Low Wage-Worker Advancement Committee, a collaboration of leaders from community colleges, literacy councils, adult education programs, community based organizations, and four state departments. It also reflects feedback from seven regional forums. Its eight recommendations are based on the guiding principles of collaboration, accountability, responsiveness, agility, contextualization, entrepreneurship, and alignment. They are fashioned to create an adult learning system that is flexible enough to meet learners where they are and help them advance from there. A key recommendation is to "create a unified state strategy and commitment to adult learning that cuts across agency boundaries and funding streams to deliver substantial and sustainable impact." The notions of collaboration and partnership are central to the Michigan plan.

▶ In September, Congressmen Dan Maffei (D-NY) and Phil Roe (R-TN) launched a first-ever Adult Literacy Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives, which will focus exclusively on adult education. "It is imperative that we raise the visibility of adult literacy and basic education in Congress at a time when job opportunities for people with low literacy are severely limited," Maffei said when the new bipartisan Caucus was announced. Of the 18 additional members to sign through September, including Rep. Ruben Hinojosa (co-sponsor of the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act), all but two remain following the election. WIA reauthorization and the AEEGA are high on the Caucus' agenda. The National Coalition for Literacy is [tracking developments and Caucus membership](#) on its website. Readers of the E-News may wish to urge their congressional representatives to join the Caucus if they are not already sponsors.



COMMUNITY COLLEGES MOVE LOW-SKILLED ADULTS TOWARD JOBS

In the past two to three years, attention has focused increasingly on the role of community colleges and postsecondary institutions in providing services to low-skilled adults. Foundations and other leadership organizations have been funding demonstration projects, developing policy recommendations to strengthen the community college and postsecondary role, listening to low-skilled adults who benefit from services, and otherwise showing the need for partnerships, more public funding, and more action on the part of the colleges. Work by MDRC, Business Champions, the Aspen Institute, the Center for American Progress, and the Working Poor Families Project reflects a wide range of leadership activities in this area.

MDRC recently released two new reports as part of the ongoing evaluation of exemplary community college programs being carried out with the National Center for Postsecondary Research. Released in March, [Scaling Up Learning Communities: The Experience of Six Community Colleges](#) looks at different learning models at the Community College of Baltimore (MD), Hillsborough Community College (FL), Houston Community College (TX), Kingsborough Community College and Queensborough Community College (NY), and Merced College (CA). Another MDRC report, released in June, is [Learning Communities for Students in Developmental Reading. An Impact Study at Hillsborough Community College](#). It focuses on one institution's experiment linking a developmental reading course and a "college success" course to test student outcomes.

Business Champions and 30 education, business, and philanthropic leaders recently submitted (on October 4) a community college action plan to the White House. [How to Create High-Impact Partnerships for Jobs & Economic Vitality in the U.S.](#) outlines specific steps that employers, corporate philanthropists, and community college trustees can take to form partnerships that will produce good jobs, more degrees, and increased economic opportunities for Americans. The plan is the result of seven meetings with members of the White House Economic Recovery Board.

The **Aspen Institute's Workforce Strategies Initiative** has released a compelling 18-minute video, [Putting Adult Learners on the Road to Success](#). It profiles the work of a few community colleges partnering with CBO's in a project called Courses to Employment. Students, college officials, and CBO staff from programs in Virginia and Texas describe their experiences and illustrate the importance and potential of these kinds of partnerships. The programs offer a blend of employment skills and college credits, and provide such support services as case management, counseling, and job internships. As always, the students are especially compelling--a good reminder of why those who operate at the national policy level do so. The video was introduced at a recent National Council for Workforce Education Conference in Washington, D.C.

The **Center for American Progress** has put out a memo by president Louis Soares, [The Power of the Education-Industry Partnership: Fostering Innovation in Collaboration Between Community Colleges and Businesses](#). The memo begins: "Business and postsecondary education have found common cause in recent decades in the preparation of a highly skilled workforce to preserve the nation's competitiveness and economic opportunity....The Obama administration has recognized

this economic imperative and set aggressive goals for postsecondary attainment in the United States and emphasized the unique role that community colleges can play in achieving them...."

[Widening the Doorways of Opportunity: Philanthropic Efforts to Strengthen Postsecondary Education and Skill Development Systems](#) by John Quintero is the latest policy brief from **The Working Poor Families Project**. This extraordinarily useful 13-page document states that "postsecondary education or training has become the threshold requirement for access to middle-class status and earnings in good times and bad." "It is no longer the preferred pathway to middle-class jobs," the brief says, "it is, increasingly, the *only* pathway." The brief summarizes seven foundation-supported national reform initiatives that seek to move policy and practice in the right direction, and it makes recommendations for state support of this reform. The efforts covered are those of the Lumina Foundation; the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; a consortium of funders including the Mott, Ford, GlaxoSmithKline, and Walmart Foundations; the National Fund for Workforce Solutions; and the Joyce Foundation.



NATIONAL GUARD GIVES YOUNG HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS A WAY BACK

The National Commission on Adult Literacy ([Reach Higher, America](#)) recognized that the high school dropout rate significantly increases the pool of adults in need of service from the adult education and workforce skills system. Thus, as the states and federal government work to expand and redirect adult education services for 21st century needs, a parallel effort to turn around the high school dropout problem is essential if there is to be a lasting reduction in demand.

That makes the work of the National Guard compelling and important. This Department of Defense unit developed ChalleNGe as an intervention program in 1993 and piloted it in several sites around the country. In 1998, with permanent Congressional funding, the sites extended to 32 programs in 27 states and Puerto Rico. States operate their programs under a contractual agreement with the National Guard Bureau. Federal funding accounts for 60 percent of the cost; state 40 percent. The cost per participant is about \$14,000. Some 90,000 young adults have completed the program to date.

Young men and women aged 16-18 are eligible to participate if they meet certain criteria: they have dropped out or been expelled from school, are unemployed, are drug free, and are not heavily involved with the justice system.

The basic program structure is the same everywhere. The program includes a two-week orientation phase, a one-year Residential phase, and a one-year Postresidential phase. For orientation and the Residential phase, the participants live at the program site, often a military base. During orientation, candidates "are introduced to the programs' rules and expectations; learn military bearing, discipline, and teamwork; and begin physical fitness training." Those who complete this phase are formally enrolled as "cadets" and move to the Residential phase, where they take courses in leadership and "followership," responsible citizenship, community service, life-coping and job skills, physical fitness, health and hygiene, and academic excellence. Most

programs help the cadets prepare for the GED exam.

The environment is quasi-military, in that the students live in platoons and squads in barracks, have short haircuts, wear uniforms, and are disciplined military-style. At the end of the Residential period, Post-residential placements in jobs, education, and military service are arranged (though there are no requirements for military service), with regular monitoring and mentoring provided.

To evaluate the progress of these at-risk young people, a series of surveys was administered beginning in 2005-06. [*Making the Transition: Interim Results of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Evaluation*](#) reports on the second survey, conducted by Megan Millenky, Dan Bloom, and Colleen Dillon. Some 1200 participants were tracked and compared to a control group. Key findings from this interim report are that:

- Program participants were much more likely to get a high school diploma or GED and to have earned some college credits.
- Program participants were somewhat more likely to be engaged in "productive" activities.
- While young people in both the program and control groups were equally likely to have been arrested in the year prior to the survey, the former were less likely to have been convicted of a crime or to have engaged in certain delinquent activities.
- There were few differences in measures of physical or mental health.

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In the 10 years since we began, we have published more than three dozen major reports, sponsored over a dozen task force and Roundtable meetings (on ESL, community college transitions, workforce

readiness, and other topics), and spearheaded the National Commission on Adult Literacy. We remain dedicated to ensuring that the recommendations in *Reach Higher, America* translate into legislation, new thinking, and innovative projects across the country. Like all nonprofits we depend solely on grants and individual donations.

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