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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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SPOTLIGHT ON...

USA LEARNS



[In [Reach Higher, America](#), the National Commission on Adult Literacy recommends dramatically increased use of technology and distance learning, including a national web portal. The Adult Education and Economic Growth Act (shortly to be re-introduced in Congress) contains a major technology strand. And in October 2009, CAAL issued a 65-page report by Mary McCain, [The Power of Technology to Transform Adult Learning: Expanding Access to Adult Education & Workforce Skills Through Distance Learning](#). Fortunately, we do not need to start from scratch. There are an array of existing technology programs and applications on which to build. USA Learns, profiled here, offers one promising approach. Others will be profiled in future issues.]

USA Learns is a web-based ESL program for immigrant adults with limited English skills but some literacy in their native language. It is an online tool for learning English outside a classroom. The program, which is free, gives users the flexibility to study at their own pace and time on an independent basis.

The program was originally funded in 2007 by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education with a grant to Project Ideal at the University of Michigan. Project Ideal then sub-granted to the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) which developed and piloted USA Learns and now owns it. The site was officially launched in November 2008. It has been fully operational since then under the direction of John Fleischman, Assistant Superintendent of Technology Services at SCOE and Executive Director of the Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN). Since its launch, there has been no further funding of the popular website, although program development and improvement activities cannot be carried on without it. The site is presently kept going by the dedicated SCOE staff.

The first English course available on the site is based on the video *Putting English to Work I* developed by adult ESL educators at the Los Angeles Unified School District and reworked to fit the requirements of web-based instruction. The second English course is a reworking of the popular *English for All* online series. All instructional materials are online; there are no videos, workbooks, or materials to print offline.

Key features of USA Learns include:

- high quality video with practice activities in listening, reading, writing, and speaking, as well as skills for work and life
- topics, characters, and situations that reflect everyday challenges of immigrants in the U.S.
- animated English and Spanish introductions
- a picture dictionary with over 460 high-quality photographs and audio
- comprehension checks, scoring, and quizzes
- help screens and other easy-to-follow devices, and simple navigation

The only computer skills needed are a mouse to click and scroll, a keyboard, and a web browser with high-speed connections. Surprisingly, almost all users have personal computers at home or access to them.

There are three program levels: First English (20 video-based beginner level units); Second English (20 video-based intermediate units); and Practice English and Reading (42 intermediate level stories and activities). There is also a separate management feature that allows teachers or tutors to set up classes and monitor their students' progress. Teachers can go to www.usalearns.org/teacher to set up a class which only their own students can access with a special sign in address. USA Learns wants to expand this element, but needs new funding to do it.

There is no formal enrollment or tracking. Students come and go as they wish. The program is not advertised but spread solely by word of mouth. Learners can use the site three ways: (1) An individual can visit anonymously and use it without signing on. The downside is that when these users return, they have to remember where they left off because the system does not keep their information--much like filling an online shopping cart without signing in. (2) Learners can register using any username and password. By doing this, they can track what has been done previously and get test results. (3) If a tutor has set up a special class as described above, their students can sign in at a site location not available to other users.

USA Learns is available on a worldwide basis. Thanks to Google Analytics, there is plenty of data about who visits the site and which pages are most popular. For example, in the 2.5 years since it started, almost 8 million people in the U.S. and 209 countries have visited the site. More than 2 million have been recorded as regular users. Seventy-five percent of users are based in the United States. Florida, California, Texas, and New York have the greatest number of immigrants and, as might be expected, are the top four users. Twenty-five percent of the use is international--the top four users are Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Colombia, and China, with Saudi Arabia at the top of the list. The site draws 9,000 page views a day and 14,000 individual users. Visitors spend an average of 26 minutes per visit and navigate 60 pages at a time.

For more information: www.usalearns.org



NEWS IN BRIEF



The National Skills Coalition organized a group letter sent on May 16 to all House Appropriations and Authorizing Committee members and various Caucuses. The statement makes the case for and urges that employment and training programs under Labor-HHS's jurisdiction be funded in FY2012 at least at FY2010 levels, and that funding be restored for programs cut under the FY2011 Continuing Resolution. CAAL was one of 53 organizations signing on. [CLICK HERE](#) for the letter.



The Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training, chaired by Rep. Virginia Foxx, held a hearing on May 11th on "removing inefficiencies in the nation's job training programs." For witness testimony, including remarks by Evelyn Ganzglass, Director of Workforce Development at CLASP, [CLICK HERE](#). In her opening remarks, Rep. Foxx noted that "In the coming months, Congress will take steps to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act, which was passed more than a decade ago to reform the nation's federal job training, unemployment, adult education, and vocational rehabilitation programs. WIA has helped integrate federal and state employment and training programs by requiring that services be provided through a 'one stop' delivery system. However, as the GAO report illustrates, there are still areas where overlapping programs or services could be further consolidated and improved." Congressman Hinojosa, Ranking Member of the Committee (he will shortly reintroduce the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act), observed that he and his colleagues supported consolidation of administrative structures and funding streams for the purpose of improving quality and accessibility to services. He stated that "If the process of co-locating or consolidating programs leads to a savings, I strongly believe that these resources should be reinvested into our public workforce and adult education system...and that those who are jobless desperately need our help to improve their lives. He said that "reauthorizing WIA and adequately funding our public workforce and adult education system are top priorities for me. [They] have been starved for far too long."



The American Council on Education recently issued [Crossing the Bridge: GED and Postsecondary Educational Outcomes](#) (September 2010). The report indicates that more than 17,000 GED graduates from 2003 have since earned a college credential. This and other significant findings are based on a comparative analysis of 2003 data in the GED Testing Service's International Database with 2009 data in the National Student Clearinghouse. The report shows that when given enough time, most students who passed the 2003 GED Test with postsecondary education goals (71.5 percent) actually followed up on those goals. This speaks to the continuing importance of the GED, especially its role in bringing about successful transitions to college, a desirable goal for many considering that research shows a strong link between job readiness and some college attainment. Also check out a follow-up report titled [GED Tests Passers in Postsecondary Institutions of Up to Two Years: Enrollment and Graduation Patterns](#).



The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) has issued a simple 2-page policy brief titled ["New Path to Federal Student Aid for Those With No High School Diploma or GED"](#). It discusses the new federal policy that permits students without a high school diploma or GED to qualify for student aid for college if they successfully complete six credits, "in lieu of passing an Ability-to-Benefit test." And it notes that basic skills bridge programs could be designed to help students earn these credits.



Jobs for the Future recently issued [Achieving Ambitious Goals: Case Studies of Scaling-Up Programs for Advancing Low-Skilled Adults](#). The report is part of JFF's "Breaking Through" initiative, which aims to improve community college access and success for low-skilled adults. Five colleges in the program got small grants from the Gates Foundation to "scale-up" their programs, and JFF presents them as case studies of how institutions can move low-skilled adults along pathways to jobs and college. Each college is discussed in terms of the approach and strategies it uses, its main

program goals, the target population served, key elements of innovation, strengths and weaknesses, and lessons for the field. The colleges are Durham Technical Community College (NC), Lake Michigan College (MI), Owensboro Community & Technical College (KY), Pamlico Community College (NC), and Tacoma Community College (WA). Based on the accumulated experience, JFF presents "eight elements of scale." One is to get collaboration from multiple departments in the college so as to develop ownership and shared responsibility. Another is to develop long-term goals for sustaining the program, because student growth occurs over a long time.



McGraw-Hill Research Foundation stresses urgent need to invest in adult education in a new report titled [*The Return on Investment \(ROI\) from Adult Education and Training: Measuring the Economic Impact of A Better Educated and Trained U.S. Workforce*](#). The 26-page report draws heavily on the work of the National Commission on Adult Literacy and other national leadership groups, including the Working Poor Families Project, the Alliance for Excellent Education, The Brookings Institute, CLASP, and NAAL. It is written by Lennox McClendon (NCSDAE), Debra Jones (Adult Education Administrator, CA), and Mitch Rosin (McGraw-Hill School Education Group). The paper quotes from [*Reach Higher, America*](#): "[A] decade into the 21st century, America faces a choice. We can invest in the basic education and skills of our workforce and remain competitive in today's global economy, or we can continue to overlook the glaring evidence of a national crisis and move further down the path to decline." The paper's core point is that investments in adult education and workforce skills programs are among the most cost-effective ways to improve economic conditions across the states and the nation.



National Council of La Raza has issued [*PLUGGED IN: Positive Development Strategies for Disconnected Latino Youth*](#). The report focuses on Latino young people (aged 16 to 24) who face barriers to jobs and college because they are high school dropouts, at risk of dropping out, and/or lack the basic skills they need for access and success. By 2018, according to the report, only 28 percent of jobs will be available to people with just a high school diploma. Yet some 30 percent of Latino students drop out of high school, and their unemployment rate was 34 percent in 2008 (and is certainly higher now). In an effort called the Escalera Program, NCLR examined several community-based intervention programs to identify promising approaches to meeting the needs of these young adults. It discusses elements and funding of three exemplary initiatives: [*HELP - New Mexico, Inc.*](#), based in Albuquerque, serves regions with very large Hispanic populations (83 and 84 percent) and offers programs in Las Vegas and Espanola. [*AltaMed Health Services Corporation*](#), a comprehensive health care center in Los Angeles, serves disconnected youth from the Boyle Heights and is Escalera's largest site. [*American YouthWorks*](#) in Austin, TX serves at-risk youth from south and east Austin. All three programs offer a range of education, outreach, and job placement services, with an array of supporting services to help ensure success.



The Office of Vocational and Adult Education of the U.S. Department of Education has published (February 2011) [*Community-based Correctional Education*](#). According to this report, corrections spending is the second largest expense of many states. In an effort to reduce costs, some states are putting more offenders under community supervision as an alternate to incarceration. (Average costs are \$3.42 per day for parolees and \$7.47 per day for probationers, contrasted to \$79 per day for incarcerated people.) However, research shows that community supervision by itself is not effective in lowering the rate of recidivism and unless certain education features and other supports are introduced into these settings, the states will not save in the long run

and nonviolent offenders who could turn their lives around will not qualify for jobs that pay a living wage. Some 40 percent of parolees and probationers lack basic skills and other basic necessities, the report says. Strategies are needed to make it possible for people to engage in educational activities that will qualify them for jobs and make it more likely that they will serve out their community service sentences without jeopardizing public safety. This very timely publication (31 pp) is based on data gathered from conversations with 15 community-based correctional education programs in 10 states, some of which are profiled in detail. The report urges more policy work at all levels of government and discusses such issues as outcomes, instructional approaches, and links between correctional programs and other education entities to provide continuity and better planning.

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