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UPDATE ON PIAAC

The American Institutes for Research held a second invitational meeting in Washington, D.C. on March 13th to give a progress report and explain the key features of PIAAC, the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. Representatives of several workforce development groups were attended. Irwin Kirsch of Educational Testing Service (ETS is the lead contractor in this international effort) gave a slide presentation to promote better understanding. The presentation is [available in PDF from the CAAL website.](#)

The Assessment findings will be released internationally this fall, along with an online resource that will enable organizations, states, and other entities to assess the competencies and skills of specific populations in real time. [CAAL's E-News of December 2012](#) provides details.

Some interesting highlights of the March meeting follow:

- The Departments of Education and Labor plan to work closely to make full use of the PIAAC results. Important interconnections and communications are being developed between

these two departments and other federal departments. Education and Labor officials noted that the PIAAC data will be "a galvanizing force for federal planning and action" and "help us form a bold ambitious plan to transform adult education and learning."

- A PIAAC research conference will be held in D.C. in November, including a two-day tutorial on how to use the online self-assessment resource. In the meantime, field testing of the online assessment tool will take place in various settings during June, and several focus group sessions are planned.
- The PIAAC assessment design was complicated. Among other things, through multi-stage adaptive testings and the use of "testlets," it was able to measure a much broader range of competencies and skills. It could do automatic scoring in real time, and will generate trend data with ties back to the IALS of the 1990s and the ALL of 2002-03.
- PIAAC is the first study that has tested Reading across languages -- the PIAAC component specifically designed to provide a better understanding of people at the lower end of the competency/skill scale. It will also be able to show how much literacy is needed for certain purposes, such as problem solving, with data provided in a way that will help programs build service interventions.
- PIAAC will make it possible to compare skills by educational levels, on a country-by-country basis, and will be "strong on what it means to be at a certain point on the scale."
- PIAAC's scope and results will be geared more to the private sector (e.g., recruiters and employers) than earlier assessments.
- The PIAAC may explain more about the nature of wage inequality in the U.S. and abroad than former tests. For example, the U.S. probably has more temporary contracts for its employees, which may be one explanation for its high inequality ranking.

For information on the PIAAC background questionnaire, its history and design, and other aspects of this unprecedented international project (more than 22 countries are involved), [visit the website of the National Center for Educational Statistics.](#)



CIAW REVISITED

[The Campaign to Invest in America's Workforce](#), of which CAAL is a member, continues to present Congress with position papers, policy statements, and letters on the Workforce Investment Act and workforce investments and programs generally. On March 21, CIAW urged Congress to support the FY2014 Senate budget resolution offered by Budget Committee Chair Patty Murray, which takes a balanced approach to deficit reduction in contrast to the House resolution that would cut an additional \$1.1 trillion from defense and non-defense discretionary programs. CIAW's

website reports on this and other activity and provides copies of its member documents, as well as opportunities for reader interaction. One section of the CIAW website offers guidance on what you can do to help support legislative efforts on behalf of workforce investment. A Quick Fact section presently notes that 52% of U.S. employers report being unable to fill current openings due to skills gaps. It also notes a 248% increase in participation in WIA Title I since 2009, and reports that 62% of job openings in the decade ending 2018 require some postsecondary education.



ADVANCING WIA

Yesterday, a senior member of Senator Patty Murray's staff met with CIAW representatives to report on the status of WIA reauthorization. Apparently, a WIA bill will be reintroduced in this Congress, although the timetable is uncertain because of the HELP Committee's presently heavy agenda. It is encouraging that the starting point for the new bill will be the "staff" draft developed in 2011. That draft was bipartisan in nature and enjoyed substantial review and input from key leadership groups in adult education and workforce skills development.

Senator Murray (WA) and Senator Isakson (GA) were two of the core sponsors of last year's Senate WIA draft. For the past few months, they have been talking through its workforce issues. If this discussion continues to go well, the circle of discussants will eventually include HELP Committee Chairman John Harkin and HELP Ranking Member Lamar Alexander. [It should be noted that Senator Alexander, Secretary of Education at the time, hired the first director of the National Institute for Literacy (Fran Kennedy Keel) following enactment of the National Literacy Act and instructed her to implement the Institute and find it a home. Although it cannot be taken as a given at this stage, Senator Alexander may be predisposed to support adult education/literacy, the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act, and WIA.]

The ground rule from last year, that no new programs are to be recommended due to economic constraints, will remain in effect. It is possible that the nature of union involvement in workforce boards will remain an issue in this year's discussion -- although the field recognizes unions as one of the important stakeholder groups at all levels because of the success and high quality of union worker skill upgrading programs. In addition, while some form of consolidation is likely for the Senate version of WIA, it will not be in the form proposed in HR803, the Republican House WIA bill that was recently approved despite lack of support for it among adult education and workforce development organizations and experts.

The Senate's WIA process is not currently inviting outside suggestions, but input will be sought in due course. There is recognition on the part of both Senators Murray and Isakson that serving youth is different than serving adults, and also that the GAO report has been misused and even willfully misinterpreted. Both senators are committed to proceeding in bipartisan fashion.

In sum, there is progress toward reintroducing WIA in the Senate, but much work remains to be done before there is an actual bill that can pass the Senate and be conferenced with the House. Meanwhile, Senator Jack Reed (R.I.) plans to reintroduce the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act in the near future, in substantially the same form as last year. The AEEGA provides a nonpartisan, highly developed, and widely-supported framework for WIA reform and will be an important marker.



IN THE WORKS AT CAAL

The data-gathering phase of CAAL's national survey of Return-on-Investment (ROI) in adult education programs is now complete. Analysis is in process--based on an unusual response rate of 98% from state ABE directors or designates. The project report should be ready for distribution in the near future. Meanwhile, readers who have not seen CAAL's blogs on "Scaling Up" and "The Graying of Adult Education Leadership" can check them out at blog.caalusa.org.

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NEW RESOURCES

▶ **The National Coalition for Literacy** recently posted position papers on its recommendations for *immigration reform* and on its priorities for *reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act*. These documents, along with numerous other legislative and policy resources are crafted on the basis of extensive member input (including CAAL's) and [available at the advocacy page of the NCL website](#).

▶ [A Golden Opportunity: Strategies to Focus Adult Education on College and Career](#) was written for California's Learning Works, a program of the Career Ladders Project sponsored by key groups in the California Community College System. The Walter Johnson and Hewlett Foundations fund Learning Works. The report is the second in a series addressing the role and

future of California's adult basic skills system. (The first, released in early 2012, is *Rethinking Basic Skills Education in California*.) *Golden Opportunity*, written jointly by Julie Strawn of CLASP and Barbara Baran of Workforce Learning Strategies, advances a new vision for adult basic skills in California, and focuses on merging the governance of adult basic education and community colleges to help more basic skills students move into college programs. It is informed in part by interviews with leaders in several other states (IL, IN, MN, NC, OH, WA, and WI) and looks at "key structural policy levers" for moving adult education more productively into the future by aligning it more closely with 21st century needs.

➤ [Portable, Stackable Credentials: A New Education Model for Industry-Specific Career Pathways](#) is available from the McGraw-Hill Research Foundation, November 2012. This 27-page paper was written by James Austin (Ohio State University), Gail Mellow (LaGuardia Community College), Mitch Rosin (McGraw-Hill Education), and Marlene Seltzer (Jobs for the Future). The publication makes a compelling case for putting new emphasis on portable, stackable credentials to provide the education massive numbers of Americans need for employability. It argues that this would be more productive than the "bridging" efforts of the past couple of decades. The report states that "the current silos of secondary and postsecondary education systems -- and the funding streams that keep them separate -- will not prepare enough students to meet the demand for middle- and high-skilled employees. There must be...increased coordination among secondary and postsecondary institutions and the workforce to ensure smooth transitions for students between systems and to improve successful postsecondary completion and employment."

➤ Winners of the [2013 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence](#) are Walla Walla Community College (WA) and Santa Barbara City College (CA). The Program aims to recognize campus-wide practices that substantially improve student outcomes. Santa Clara won for its achievements in preparing its students for transfer to four-year colleges and for success in completing bachelor's degrees. Walla Walla was recognized for aligning its strong workforce training programs with the needs of regional employers. Eight other colleges were finalists in the Program. Former Michigan governor John Engler and former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley announced the awards last month.

➤ [Unauthorized Immigrant Parents and Their Children's Development: A Summary of the Evidence](#), by Hirokazu Yoshikawa and Jenya Kholoptseva of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, was released in March by the Migration Policy Institute. The report reviews the evidence that parental unauthorized status "harms children's development across early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence." Among the conclusions are that reform is needed that goes beyond the populations eligible for the so-called Dream Act to provide a "path out of the shadows" to all unauthorized parents with low education levels. The report also concludes that "a full worker legalization process, rather than simply expanding the E-Verify system or other means of immigration enforcement in the workplace, promises to improve working conditions, instead of driving some employers and employees further into the informal, off-the-books economy." "Improved wages and workplace conditions," the report says, "could improve both parent economic and psychological well-being as well as children's development."

➤ [Career and Technical Education: Five Ways that Pay Along the Way to the B.A.](#)

is a recent report (September 2012) by Tony Carnevale, Tamara Jayasundara, and Andrew Hanson for the Georgetown University Center on Education and The Workforce. Among other things, the report finds that 29 million jobs pay middle-class wages and don't require a four-year degree. The report's aim is to describe pathways that lead to these jobs: employer-based training, industry-based certifications, apprenticeships, postsecondary certificates, and associate's degrees. Many other publications about the relationship between jobs and education are also available from [the CEW site](#).

▶ [The Hamilton Project](#), named after Alexander Hamilton, the first Treasury Secretary of the U.S., is an ongoing initiative of the Brookings Institution. The Project has just released two publications important to planners of adult education and workforce development: [Using Data to Improve the Performance of Workforce Training](#) and [Building on Recent Advances in Evidence-Based Policymaking](#). The first paper, by Louis Jacobson and Robert LaLonde of New Horizons Economic Research and the University of Chicago respectively, is concerned with helping low-income people qualify for better jobs and enter the middle class. It makes recommendations for state action to help prospective trainees make better-informed choices about education and training programs. The second paper, by Jeffrey Liebman of Harvard University, offers strategies for government at all levels to make better use of evidence-based program effectiveness in planning budgets and policies.

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