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## **The Year 2000 in Review**

Volume 3: Chapter One

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If the year 1999 was dominated by the intense efforts of the federal government to establish guidelines for compliance with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, the year 2000 was dominated by the field's efforts to implement plans to meet those guidelines. In addition to engaging in this time- and labor-intensive work, the field witnessed four significant events that influenced adult basic education (ABE) across the country: a national

summit to develop an action agenda for the field; developments in federal appropriations, including the emergence of English literacy and civics funding in state grants; rekindling of discourse among the parties involved in national research and evaluation projects; and changes in leadership at the national level. This chapter provides an overview of these events.

## **CONTINUING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT**

The year 2000 marked the second year of WIA implementation, and federal and state adult educators continued to grapple with their new roles. Under previous federal legislation requirements, practitioners at the state and local levels had been responsible for following a sometimes complex set of national regulations. The WIA limited federal regulation and, in its place, asked states and local practitioners to set

performance standards, to collect and report data on the extent to which students meet the standards, and to improve the quality of program services. In addition to the performance standards established to comply with the WIA, the two major literacy volunteer networks, Literacy Volunteers of America and Laubach Literacy Action, accredited the first local programs during 2000 using their own performance standards.

Initially, the field reacted positively to the initiative, but state directors quickly learned that it can be much easier-if less rewarding-to enforce someone else's regulations than to create your own plan and follow it. Many found themselves reading back over the ideals proposed in their state plans and contemplating the harsh realities of putting them into operation, especially given that 89 percent of their teachers are part-time, that they depend on thousands of volunteers to provide significant

services, and that many of the directors themselves also provide vocational education, supervise federal programs, and perform other duties on top of their ABE responsibilities. In addition to the challenge of training staff to comply with the rigors of the new system, there is the inherent challenge of keeping track of a student population that is often transient and of whom 40 percent are considered to be limited English proficient (LEP). Social Security numbers allow for data matching with employment systems, but many LEP students don't have Social Security numbers. Survey follow-up with undereducated native-born and LEP students has met with limited success. Though many adult educators nationwide still support the intentions of the WIA, they remain challenged to provide the data Congress needs to confirm that adult basic education is having an impact on students' postenrollment employment and

postsecondary participation nationally.

Another WIA implementation task facing state and local adult educators was the establishment of standards for the three performance indicators in the law: literacy level advancement; postprogram activities in job training, job advancement, and postsecondary education; and secondary credentials (high school diploma or certificate of General Educational Development [GED]). Standards came to be defined based on the student's intent for enrollment. For example, students who enrolled in order to get a job fell into the cohort intending to achieve that goal. This process included having each student claim a clear goal upon enrollment and following up on that student after the program to determine if the goal had been achieved. Neither the goal-setting process nor the follow-up procedures had been in place prior to passage of the WIA, and state and local

programs committed themselves to developing the procedures and training practitioners to provide the data, analyze the performance reports, and make program adjustments at state and local levels to improve the quality of the services-quite a feat for the first year of operation.

The challenge of meeting the provisions of the WIA was further complicated by the high turnover rate in state director positions. During 1999 and 2000, nearly half of the state director positions were vacated and refilled. Thus, in 2000, half of the directors were relatively new to the job. As a result, they were faced with learning their new assignments while preparing the local programs for a difficult transition from regulatory to performance-driven systems. Did the WIA create this turnover? Or was it a coincidence? Was it easier to move on to another job than to design and implement a performance-based system?

Will the influx of new directors benefit or limit the transition to the WIA system? These questions can be answered only in time to come.

## **NATIONAL LITERACY SUMMIT**

In 1989, Forrest P. Chisman of the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis and Associates published the document *Jump Start: The Federal Role in Adult Literacy*, which was to serve as a road map for advancing the ABE field. Much activity then resulted in a refocused National Literacy Act of 1991, a document that by its nature was limited to the national level. The act had a limited impact on state and local governments, which had no such plan for themselves.

A decade later, a new road map was needed, and this time the agenda was to activate the field at the national, state, and local levels. The National Institute for Literacy engaged a group of national

partners supported by planning grants from Time-Warner and the Lila Wallace Foundation to take on this task. The planning partners included the Division of Adult Education and Literacy of the U.S. Department of Education (DAEL/DOE), the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC), the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), the National Coalition for Literacy (NCL), and the Commission on Adult Basic Education (CoABE). Their goal was to engage practitioners from all sectors of the profession in the development of an action agenda for ABE. With this agenda in hand, the diverse field would be able to speak with one voice and move forward.

In February 2000, 150 ABE practitioners and partners met in Washington, D.C., to craft a draft agenda. The resulting document was disseminated across the



country, stimulating a host of local, state, and regional get-togethers to refine the agenda. These responses were integrated into one document, *From the Margins to the Mainstream: An Action Agenda for Literacy* (National Institute for Literacy, 2000), which was published in summer 2000 and launched at a congressional event in September. The event featured presentations by former U.S. Democratic senator Paul Simon of Illinois, Reps. William Goodling (R-Pennsylvania) and Tom Sawyer (D-Ohio), and a panel of partners Web-cast from the House Chamber across the country. The national action agenda, focusing on three themes-resources, access, and quality-was distributed across the country with group discussion guides (Nash & Smith, 2000) as a call to action for state and local groups to embrace the agenda and develop action steps to move it forward. The agenda focused on three major areas-resources, access, and quality-and a number of strategies were discussed to

address the needs associated with each. The goal was to prompt every local, state, and national ABE and literacy organization to adopt one or a number of these strategies as a part of their year's work. Together the field would then advance the profession toward increased resources, greater access, and improved quality of service.

In the fall, the Division of Adult Education and Literacy of the U.S. Department of Education and the National Institute for Literacy took the lead in providing funds for the National Coalition for Literacy to hire staff members to support national, state, and local engagement in advancing that agenda. Contrary to the Jump Start experience, the goal is to engage practitioners at the local and state levels as well as at the national level, supporting hundreds of organizations in identifying action agenda items they will commit to advancing.

Adult basic education is a rich conglomeration of public and private organizations and agencies at the national, state, local, and community levels. Because of that diversity, the field has suffered from disjointed vision and advocacy. It is hoped that the action agenda will help the field speak with one voice to move itself forward.

## **APPROPRIATIONS**

The National Coalition for Literacy has set a federal ABE appropriations goal of \$1 billion. During 2000, progress was made toward that goal. Congress debated through October, past the presidential election in November, and, finally, in December approved the fiscal year (FY) 2001 funding. A surge of \$90 million brought the state grants for ABE and literacy past the half-billion-dollar mark to \$540 million. A large part of that surge was contributed by the \$70 million for English Literacy/Civics (EL/Civics)

Education. The final FY 2001 appropriations are listed in Table 1.1.

One of the big winners in the appropriations process, as indicated in the table, was Even Start. Congressman Goodling began the process with the introduction of HR 3222, Literacy Involves Families Together (LIFT), a family literacy bill. Typical of Congress's orientation in fall 2000, LIFT merged bills of similar ilk to produce more comprehensive legislation. Many of the LIFT components were included in new language for FY 2001, which included renaming the Even Start program as the "William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program," after its founder. Not only was funding increased by \$100 million, it was approved for another five years.

A second winner in the appropriations process was the EL/Civics Initiative funds, which more than doubled from

\$25.5 million in FY 2000 to \$70 million for FY 2001 as a part of the State Grants for Adult Education and Literacy. Thus most of the \$90 million increase in state grants came from this designation.

Contrary to the WIA climate, in which it was thought desirable to avoid federal set-asides and let the states decide how to target funds, a movement emerged in the Clinton administration to address English literacy needs throughout the country. In FY 1999, the U.S.

Department of Education Division of Adult Education and Literacy managed a national discretionary grant program for EL/Civics services for the provision of "integrated English literacy and civics education services to immigrants and other limited English proficient populations." The National Coalition for Literacy took the lead in getting the FY 2000 funds-\$25.5 million-assigned to the state grants. To avoid small grants, a minimum grant was established and, as a

result, thirteen small states did not receive funds.

During summer 2000, discussions began regarding the provisions for EL/Civics in FY 2001. An ad hoc coalition of a dozen or so interest groups-including representatives from several Asian and Spanish-speaking organizations as well as the NCL, the Center on Applied Linguistics, and NAEPPDC-met to discuss the expansion of EL/Civics funds and services. They felt that funds should go directly to community-based organizations rather than through the state grants. The resulting position papers and discussions solidified the support for the EL/Civics efforts.

As support for expansion of EL/Civics grew, the ABE state directors, who supported the congressional preference to continue channeling funds through state grants, proposed three principles to guide the discussion:

- Ensure that EL/Civics funding is an additional allocation to states and not supported from limited existing state grants.
- Avoid small grants to ensure that each grant is sufficient to have an impact on the state and will make it worthwhile for the state to run a competitive solicitation process.
- Ensure that no state receives an FY 2001 grant below its FY 2000 level.

As the year 2000 came to a close, the 2001 budget was approved, increasing funding for EL/Civics to \$70 million, including provisions for each state to receive a minimum grant of \$60,000.

## **DISCOURSE BETWEEN RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PROJECTS**

One item of consensus in the field is the limited funding for ABE research and evaluation projects. Furthermore, concern prevails regarding the coordination and collaboration among the few projects that are funded from the DOE National Programs, the Planning and Evaluation Service (PES), and the Office of Educational Research and

Improvement (OERI), as well as the National Institute for Literacy projects. To rectify this long-standing concern, OERI hosted a colloquium of the currently funded projects, including the following:

- Evaluation of Effective Adult Basic Education Programs and Practices, Judith A. Alamprese, Abt Associates
- "What Works" Study for Adult ESL Literacy Students, Larry Condelli, American Institutes for Research
- Pilot Study of the Crossroads Café Program, Annette M. Zehler, Development Associates
- The Adult Literacy Classroom as a Social System, Hal Beder, NCSALL-Rutgers University
- National Evaluation of the Even Start Family Literacy Program, Robert St. Pierre, Abt Associates
- Adult Learner Persistence Study, John Comings, NCSALL
- Adult Reading Components Study (ARCS), John Strucker, NCSALL
- Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning, Steve Reder, NCSALL

Two state directors, a representative from the national volunteer community, as well as the executive director of the



NAEPDC also attended. The resulting frank discussions provided opportunities for project staff members to compare issues and findings, for state directors to hear about the progress of each project, and for researchers to better prepare their findings for dissemination through the state directors and to the field. OERI intends to continue the sessions to ensure that the evaluation and research projects inform each other and build on each other's work as well as to give representatives from the field an opportunity to inform researchers as to how to best prepare their products for use in the field.

## **DEPARTURE OF KEY PLAYERS**

It would be hard to overstate the contribution that Rep. Goodling has made to education in the United States. A former public school teacher and principal as well as the founder of Even Start, Goodling served twenty-six years in the House. As chair of the House

Education and Workforce Committee, Goodling was an ardent supporter of family literacy and adult basic education. His focus on "quality not quantity" and "products not process" is reflected in the Workforce Investment Act's delegation of decision making and accountability to the states. In recognition of his devotion to education, Congress established the William Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy at Penn State University. The mission of the institute is to carry on his tradition of documenting the impact of family literacy programs. The Goodling Institute is a partner with the National Center for Family Literacy and the National Institute for Literacy.

Goodling was a champion for the cause of adult literacy in the House of Representatives, just as Senators James Jeffords (I-Vermont) and Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts) have been in the Senate. In Congress, the term

champion refers to a member who believes in and works for a given cause, who proposes supplemental funding for the cause when money is available, and who fights for it when funds are jeopardized. Goodling will be hard to replace.

With the change in administration at the end of 2000, the field saw the departure of another key supporter, Dr. Patricia "Trish" McNeal, as assistant secretary of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education. McNeal was the most accessible assistant secretary in decades. She was present at many discussions with state and local practitioners at critical times during her administration. She challenged the field to move forward and moved mountains to give states support for their work in adult literacy. She was a model for public servants at all levels.

Another important era came to an end in

the leadership of the Adult Education State Directors. A decade ago, this group established the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium to provide for the policy and professional development needs of state directors and their staff members. Judy Koloski, formerly state director of ABE in Maryland and executive director of the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education, became the first NAEPPDC executive director. She provided a single point of contact on ABE issues for Congress and the White House and provided significant national leadership for nearly a decade. She retired in 1999.

## **SUMMARY**

In the year 2000, adult educators at the national, state, and local levels got down to the practical details of developing a new working relationship, with the federal office now having significantly less regulatory authority and the states

having significantly more responsibility for their practices. The year 2001 holds much potential. The degree to which state and local adult educators adopt the action agenda in Margins to the Mainstream will determine not only the depth and breadth of the advancement of the field but also the unanimity of its voice. Adult basic education is a rich conglomeration of public and private organizations and agencies at the state, national, and community levels. Without a common focus, this diverse field's vision and advocacy can become disjointed. The action agenda holds out the promise for the field to speak in a concerted voice that could well have a positive impact on the appropriations process in the coming year, increasing the possibility that the National Coalition on Literacy's \$1 billion goal will become a reality. The field could benefit from the OERI's ongoing support for national research and evaluation collaboration. The limited research funds are served

well by that leadership. A challenge in 2001 is the search for a new champion in the House Education and Workforce Committee. On the Senate side, Sens. Jeffords and Kennedy remain committed to adult literacy issues. However, the void in the House will limit the success of policy work on the Hill.

The year 2000 has established a number of opportunities and a few hurdles. Under the banner of Margins to the Mainstream and the leadership of the National Coalition, ABE's multiple layers and levels have the unique opportunity to focus on promoting mutual interests and resolving organizational differences. The degree to which the field continues to advance will be a reflection of the degree to which that focused effort occurs.

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