Strengthening State Adult Education Policies
For English as a Second Language Populations
Barry Shaffer

INTRODUCTION
As noted by the Population Reference Bureau, the nation is becoming bigger, older, and more racially and ethnically diverse. In the interplay of increased births, decreased deaths and increased immigration, the most significant demographic change in recent years has been the influence of immigration on both the size and the age structure of the US population and workforce.

As the nation’s demographics and economy continue to change, the need for a skilled workforce grows in importance. America’s growing immigrant community is a critical and significant part of the labor force. As such, it is essential that immigrants, along with all workers, have the opportunity to obtain the education and skills needed to become productive workers who contribute to a strong and competitive economy.

Many immigrants in the United States are English language learners and understand that English proficiency is the key to a better economic future. Younger first and second generation immigrants in particular often lack workforce skills or lag significantly behind their nonimmigrant peers in terms of high school graduation, college access, and postsecondary degree completion.

In 2012, almost 19 million adults aged 18-64 were identified as having difficulty speaking English, but the federally and state funded adult basic education and literacy system served less than a million of them. Further, a 2014 study conducted in Georgia observed that state educational system policies and practices do not sufficiently support opportunities for English language learners to gain the education and skills they desire. This is particularly true with regard to state laws that prevent undocumented immigrants’ access to some postsecondary institutions.

All states are experiencing the demographic shifts and barriers to progress noted above and are looking for ways to help their economies to grow and their residents to prosper. The Working Poor Families Project (WPPF) supports the efforts of organizations to develop and strengthen state policies that help low-income workers achieve economic security and become productive citizens. WPPFP encourages states to focus...
efforts on educational and workforce policy actions and programs that target populations in need, including individuals and families for whom English is not their native language.

Considerable policy and program attention should be focused on the state’s immigrant population—and more precisely, the integration of the immigrant population—as an essential contributor to economic prosperity. In addition to demographic and economic implications for increased attention to adult English proficiency needs, the recent passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act offers an immediate opportunity for new policy and program directions targeted to this population.

This paper addresses existing and needed state level, adult focused educational policy actions targeting populations that lack the English and employability skills to become fully integrated into a vibrant, growing workforce. The paper is structured to examine ESL demographics and needs, provide an overview of current ESL adult education programming, and recommend policies and actions for strengthening state adult education and literacy programs.

**Adult ESL Demography and Needs**

According to estimates from the 2012 American Community Survey (ACS), the US immigrant population stood at almost 40.8 million, or 13% of the total US population of 313.9 million. One-third of the 40.8 million foreign-born people residing in the US in 2012 entered between 2000 and 2009, 7% entered since 2010, and the majority (63%) entered before 2000. In 2012, the top five states in terms of numbers of immigrants were California (10.3 million), New York (4.4 million), Texas (4.3 million), Florida (3.7 million), and New Jersey (1.9 million). Immigrant population growth is evident in all states and in some, like New York, it accounts for much of the state’s recent population growth.

The Census Bureau assumes net immigration by 2050 will total 68 million. These future immigrants plus their descendants will add 96 million residents to the US population, accounting for three-fourths of future population growth. The immigrant share of the population will reach one in six US residents by 2030, a new record, and nearly one in five residents by 2050.

**English Proficiency and Income Status** – In 2012, there were 25 million Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals aged five and older in the United States, accounting for 8.5% of the 294 million people aged five and older. Spanish speakers accounted for 64% (16.1 million) of the total LEP population. The next two languages most commonly spoken by LEP individuals were Chinese, including Mandarin and Cantonese (6.5%) and Vietnamese (3.3%).

According to WPFP data generated from the 2012 ACS, showed there were 10.6 million working families below 200% of the federal poverty level. Of that group, almost one-third (27%) reported that at least one parent in their family spoke English “less than well.”

**Definitions**

“Foreign-born” and “immigrants” are used interchangeably and refer to persons with no US citizenship at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylees, persons on certain temporary visas, and undocumented immigrants.

“Limited English Proficient” refers to any person ages 5 and older who reported speaking English “not at all,” “not well,” or “well” on the ACS survey questionnaire. Individuals who reported speaking only English or speaking English “very well” are considered proficient in English.

“ESL” is an acronym for English as a Second Language. Related acronyms include: ESOL, ELL, EL, EFL, ESOL.
The states with the highest percentage of families in this category (low-income working plus limited English) included California (55%), Texas (42%), New Jersey (39%), Nevada (39%), New York (37%), Arizona (34%), Illinois (32%), and Massachusetts (32%).

Educational Attainment – About one-third of the foreign-born population have not attained a high school diploma, compared to 11% of the native-born population. However, Table 1, including both native-born and foreign-born LEP adults, reveals that 44% or 8.2 million of these combined populations have no high school diploma or equivalent. About one-third of this population has either some college or a college degree compared to over one-half of the general population.

Workforce – Immigrants accounted for more than 16% (25.7 million) of the 157.6 million workers in the civilian labor force in 2012. Between 1970 and 2012, the percentage of foreign-born workers in the civilian labor force tripled, from 5% to 16%. Over the same period, the foreign-born share of the total population grew from almost 5% to nearly 13%.

Immigrants and their children are vital to replenishing the jobs lost due to retirement. Over the next 20 years, 59 million replacement workers are needed. Of that number, projections by the Center for American Progress indicate that 51 million jobs will be filled by native-born persons, leaving a shortfall of over seven million jobs. Without the immigrant population, the nation’s workforce would not be sufficient to replace retiring workers.

Between 2010 and 2030 over 90% of US workforce growth will be accounted for by immigrant workers. By 2030, one in five workers will be an immigrant. Investing in their skills—including English proficiency—is critical to building and maintaining a skilled workforce, according to a 2014 report by the Brookings Institution’s Metropolitan Policy Program. The Brookings report provides data from 89 US metropolitan areas on the languages spoken, educational attainment, employment status, income, and other characteristics of the ESL population.

Job growth will occur for workers at all educational and experience levels, but over 85% of new jobs will require postsecondary education and/or technical skills. By 2020, the highest concentrations of jobs will be found in occupations such as professional and technical work (12.3

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**Table 1. Educational Attainment of LEP Adults (Native-Born and Foreign Born)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>No High School Diploma or Equivalent (HSD/HSE)</th>
<th>HSD/HSE</th>
<th>AA/ Some College</th>
<th>BA/ Higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEP Adults Age 18-64</td>
<td>18,714,900</td>
<td>8,248,700 (44%)</td>
<td>4,881,100 (26%)</td>
<td>2,987,900 (16%)</td>
<td>2,597,300 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEP Adults Age 18-30</td>
<td>4,241,900</td>
<td>1,746,100 (41%)</td>
<td>1,240,900 (29%)</td>
<td>796,200 (19%)</td>
<td>458,600 (11%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Migration Policy Institute tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s pooled 2010-2012 American Community Surveys
million), the service sector (12.6 million), office and administrative support (7.4 million), sales (6.5 million), installation and repairs (2.0 million), and transportation and material moving (3.6 million).14

Working-age ESL adults earn 25 to 40 percent less than their English proficient counterparts. In general, LEP individuals experience worse labor market outcomes than those who are proficient in English. While lower educational attainment among ESL adults accounts for some of this difference, English proficiency is correlated with better earning outcomes at all levels of education.

Proficiency in English makes the greatest percent difference in earnings for those in the middle of the educational attainment range (high school diploma or some college). Their median earnings are 39 percent higher if they are English proficient ($40,000) than not ($28,700). Among those with a bachelor’s degree, non-LEP individuals earn $65,000 annually compared to $50,000 for LEP individuals, a 30 percent difference. English proficiency makes the least difference in earnings for those with the lowest levels of education, a sign of the poor labor market for those who have not completed high school. LEP persons with less than a high school diploma earn 24 percent less ($22,600) than their non-LEP counterparts ($28,000).15

Research reported by the Immigration Policy Center shows that immigration reform, including legalization of undocumented immigrants, would add at least $1.5 trillion in cumulative US GDP over 10 years, and lead to increasing wages for all workers. Further, the data suggest that an increase of personal income would generate consumer spending to support 750,000 to 900,000 jobs, resulting in an estimated $5.4 billion in tax revenues annually.16

Immigration Trends and Related Policy – Continuing a trend beginning in 1965, the past decade saw a large increase in the foreign-born population. Between 2000 and 2011 the immigrant population grew by 30%, from 31.1 million to 40 million. Approximately one million immigrants lawfully enter the US each year. Of the roughly one million new immigrants in 2012, 46% were an immediate relative of a US citizen, 20% entered through a family-sponsored visa petition, and 14% entered through an employment-based visa. Another 15% were classified with refugee or asylee status, and 4% entered through the diversity visa lottery program.17

According to the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Immigration Statistics, an estimated 11.5 million undocumented immigrants resided in the United States in January 2011. This number of undocumented immigrants living in the US has stabilized since the end of the Great Recession and shows no sign of rising, according to new Pew Research Center estimates. The marked slowdown in new arrivals means that those who remain are more likely to be long-term residents, and therefore, investments in their skills and training are likely to have longer-term benefits and payoffs.18 The largest shares of these immigrants resided in California (25%), Texas (16%), and Florida and New York (6% each).19 About 5.2% of the US labor force consisted of undocumented immigrants in 2010, even though they comprised only 3.7% of the US population.20

Congress has failed to pass legislative initiatives such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Act21 and the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act22 that would have provided alternate routes to residency and educational benefits. However, many states have passed similarly themed legislation.

As of November 2013, 16 states have passed their own versions of the DREAM Act, which deal with a variety of residency issues and typically include in-state tuition eligibility and financial aid access for state colleges and universities. These DREAM Act states include: CA, CO, IL, KS, MA, MD, MN, NE, NJ, NM, NY, OR, TX, UT, WA, and WI. Also, in November 2014, President Obama announced an expansion of DACA and other immigration changes that the Migration Policy Institute estimates could benefit as many as 5.2 million people — nearly half of the 11.5 million undocumented US immigrants.23

**English Language Educational Services and Outcomes for Adults**

Under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), all states provide ESL services to out-of-school individuals in need of English literacy, regardless of legal status. This funding mechanism provides considerable flexibility for state policy makers to design and implement...
programming for this population. This section gives an overview of the AEFLA ESL services and related outcomes for participants.

AEFLA, which is Title II of the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, provides federal funding and services to every state that supports an adult basic education system including ESL instruction. Under AEFLA, states have the flexibility to determine how adult education is administered. While 23 states administer the program through their K-12 state agency, over half administer it through their postsecondary system (14 states) or their workforce system (13 states).

Approximately 1.8 million adults received services during 2011-2012, of which 40% (734,000) were classified as English Literacy students. States are required to collect performance data under the National Reporting System (NRS) for adult education, which includes measuring English literacy learning gains on standardized tests.

Table 2 shows the federal investment under AEFLA for 2010-2011 and the amount of federal allocation and state funding for selected states during that year.

The major areas of support under the AEFLA funding are Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, and English Language Acquisition. These programs emphasize basic skills such as reading, writing, math, English language competency, and problem-solving. During 2011-2012, 40% or 734,000 of AEFLA participants classified as ESL; of these, 64% were Hispanic or Latino, 17% Asian, 9% White, and 8% Black or African American.

Table 3 illustrates the scope of the unmet educational service need with regard to the number of low-income families with limited English proficiency and the number of individuals without a high school diploma as compared to the level of annual participation in AEFLA programming. Nationally, 2.8 million or 27% of low-income working families (earning less than 200% of the federal poverty level) include one or more adults who speak English less than well and 24.5 million or 12% of US adults 18 and older who

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Federal $</th>
<th>State $</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>State % of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>$617,216,000</td>
<td>$1,653,901,000</td>
<td>$2,271,117,000</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>$92,269,000</td>
<td>$653,666,000</td>
<td>$735,935,000</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>$6,909,000</td>
<td>$3,008,000</td>
<td>$9,917,000</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>$5,315,000</td>
<td>$40,508,000</td>
<td>$45,823,000</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>$20,342,000</td>
<td>$12,777,000</td>
<td>$33,119,000</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>$45,347,000</td>
<td>$83,292,000</td>
<td>$128,639,000</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OH</td>
<td>$15,236,000</td>
<td>$10,802,000</td>
<td>$27,038,000</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>$55,548,000</td>
<td>$18,550,000</td>
<td>$74,198,000</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>$9,106,000</td>
<td>$44,583,000</td>
<td>$53,689,000</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Adult Basic Education Funding, 2010-2011
do not have a high school diploma or equivalency and are in need of adult education. However, during 2011-2012 only two million adults received adult basic education or ESL assistance through AEFLA programming.25

Over the past two decades ESL programs have been the fastest growing component of the state-administered adult education programs. During 2011-2012, 40% of the participants in AEFLA programs were enrolled in ESL services as compared to 33% in the early 1990’s. About one-third of the ESL participants were enrolled in Beginning ESL classes which are in the two lowest skill levels of a six-level NRS performance system. With regard to performance, during 2012-2013, 46% of all ESL participants increased at least one performance level during the program year.26 Just over half (56%) of the ESL students who also had self-identified a postsecondary goal went on to enroll in a postsecondary program. However, this percentage has been declining in recent years and many of the ESL students going on to college are required to enroll in remedial, noncredit programming.27 Unfortunately data is not systematically collected and analyzed to determine whether ESL students (as a separate population category) who are served under AEFLA enroll in postsecondary or succeed and complete their postsecondary programs of study or short-term certificates.

According to research conducted by the Center for Applied Linguistics, English language programs in the US are very diverse and no one program model has proven to be consistently effective. English language acquisition rates are most directly affected by both personal and program-related factors, such as the availability of classes, learner motivation, attendance, and persistence.28

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**Table 3. Need vs. Service Levels: U.S. and Selected States, 2011-2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Family in Poverty + Speaks English Less Than Well</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No Diploma (N.D.) (of U.S. Total Population)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Served Thru ABE</th>
<th>% of N.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>2,838,495</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>24,514,000</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2,012,163</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>752,420</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>4,169,565</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>392,918</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>43,895</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>330,200</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12,873</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>22,465</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>195,720</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>25,924</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>74,695</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>880,440</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>64,668</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>221,105</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>1,591,360</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>122,833</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OH</td>
<td>23,185</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>708,715</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>41,692</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>479,865</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>2,833,295</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>99,333</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>54,075</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>440,910</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>61,392</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
POLICY OPTIONS IN ESL ADULT EDUCATION

States have a wide number of options for focusing resources and developing policies that specifically target ESL adult programs and programming. This section of the report identifies 10 options under three main categories:

1. Basic ESL Programming Content
2. ESL Program Delivery and Quality Improvement
3. Career Pathways

These three broad areas can help focus on policy actions designed to improve opportunities for the ESL population to improve their education and employability.

CATEGORY 1: Basic ESL Programming Content

PROMOTE TRANSITIONS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Policies requiring English literacy curricula to include curricula that promote the concept of aspiring to postsecondary education would help ensure that students are prepared for further education and skills training. State adult education agencies have program approval authority over local provider applications and typically specify some amount of required programming content in their application process. Although transition (to postsecondary) content is often a discretionary part of ESL programming, a policy action to ensure consistency and statewide delivery of postsecondary readiness content is recommended.

There are numerous topics that may be integrated into English literacy curricula as stand-alone courses or as contextualized content within the language skills curricula. Examples of transition to postsecondary content that could be required through state policy action include:

- Career awareness information
- Career planning
- College entrance information
- Financial aid information/assistance
- Study skills
- Interview skills
- Labor market information (LMI)
- College testing opportunities
- Career pathway exploration
- Computer/digital literacy

ALIGN ESL CONTENT WITH POSTSECONDARY STANDARDS

States can facilitate discussions and take action to align adult ESL programming with postsecondary standards and course content; this is especially useful in linking with career and technical education programs. For example, many state adult education agencies are adopting or adapting college and career ready standards using the federally developed College and Career Ready Standards for Adult Education. A guide to establishing standards is available that suggests ways to include a set of ESL standards into the process. This “system alignment” ensures that adult education students are receiving curricula and content that will better prepare them for college-level courses.

College welcome centers are growing in number across the nation and most centers offer an array of services to current or prospective students. Some centers like the one at Westchester Community College (NY), offer specific informational sessions for ESL adults and include tours of the facilities and program areas. Policy action at the state or local level is needed to establish welcome centers at adult education or postsecondary institutions and to incorporate a variety of transition services for limited English proficient adults.

Another way to ensure that adult ESL students are college ready is to test their skills with the same assessment instruments that are used to place them in developmental (noncredit) or for-credit courses when they enroll in college. Diagnostic assessments are available for widely used Compass® and Accuplacer® assessments. Some states (e.g., MN, FL, WA) have promoted this assessment alignment by funding opportunities for adult education students to take classes and practice tests that align with their local college placement assessment. Another comprehensive strategy for adult ESL and postsecondary alignment is through career pathway development which is discussed under Category 3, Postsecondary Pathways options.
PROMOTE CAREER AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Providing content on career awareness and exploration in ESL programming, as well as employability skill development, can be established as state policy. Many instructional resources exist for these knowledge and skill areas and can be applied separately or contextually within ESL curricula.

Specific industry sectors may be targeted as was done in Texas in the Texas Industry Specific ESL curricula (TISESL). As established in Texas law, TISESL is a comprehensive set of instructional resources designed to introduce beginning and intermediate English language learners to employability skills as well as vocabulary in three industry sectors: health care, sales and service, and manufacturing. TISESL responds to the needs of adults with limited English proficiency and the needs of three industry sectors in which many adults seek entry-level employment. The curricula are modular in format and “bundle” skills together in thematic contexts that include English language learning, related math and technology, and employability.32

A 2014 report by the Seattle Jobs Initiative identifies numerous educational and training strategies for their ESL population to gain language and employability skills. The report encouraged greater investment by both education and industry in a range of programming options from basic career awareness for low-level ESL to more comprehensive pathway development that leads directly to employment.33

The July 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides basic grants to states to fund their adult education systems and reauthorizes an El-Civics set-aside program targeting ESL students. Although some states like Minnesota previously focused their El-Civics grants on English in the context of careers and employment, the new WIOA law mandates that approach. WIOA Section 243 states that the new goals of the El-Civics grant are to:

1. Prepare adults who are English language learners for, and place such adults in, unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

2. Integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to carry out the activities of the program.

States will need to explain in their 2015 State Plan how they will focus their adult education funds on these new design requirements.

States have the discretion to set ESL priorities in their WOIA state plan.

CATEGORY 2: ESL Program Delivery and Quality Improvement

TARGET FUNDING FOR ESL PROGRAMMING

State initiatives should establish priorities for funding ESL programming within the federal or state adult education funding streams. There is currently no federal mandate to prioritize or to designate specific amounts of AEFLA funding among program types or client groupings. However, states have the discretion to articulate and set ESL programming priorities in their WIOA State Plan for Adult Education. For example, California and New York established funding policy for ESL learners in proportion to the ESL demographics of the state’s regions. California also established a separate state funding stream for ESL programming. California and Oregon have created policies to help fund ESL remedial education at postsecondary institutions.34

Using a combination of state and federal adult education funds, Minnesota developed a three-year priority system for targeting high need programming areas. For example, during 2002-2005 they focused additional resources on Family Literacy, and in 2005-2008 on workforce education. Funds for these targeted efforts came from increases in adult education revenue, so ongoing efforts were not reduced. Rather, funding generated new and expanded the service capacity of adult education providers, and significantly broadened services system-wide.
All local adult education providers had access to the additional, targeted funds allocated by formula under this system. Targeting state and/or federal funds in this manner ensures a greater level of program or population-specific programming. ESL programming around the program quality concepts noted in the previous section could easily fit this priority allocation model.

Given that many who need ESL service are already in the workforce, it also may be useful to dedicate or target funding to current workers. As previously cited, the Investing in English Skills report from the Brookings Institute includes four recommendations that support targeted funding for ESL individuals already in the US workforce:

- Increase funding for ESL instruction in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
- Design and support more employer-initiated ESL programs in industries with the highest numbers of immigrant workers
- Support targeted outreach into ESL programming for ESL workers
- Identify and support on-site innovative instructional methods that target ESL workers including online opportunities and mobile device programming

These program activities can involve employers or employer associations, creating an opportunity to leverage private resources to help support this work.

**ESTABLISH STATE GOALS FOR ESL TRANSITIONS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION**

Setting state goals for postsecondary enrollment of ESL students is another way to focus attention, improve student performance, and increase resources for this population. Under the National Reporting System (NRS), all state AEFLA programs are required to project and report on transition to postsecondary goals on the aggregate, all-participants level. States could refine and enhance this goal setting process to establish transition to postsecondary education sub-goals for their ESL participants.

For example, a state could set a specific annual percentage goal of postsecondary education enrollment by AEFLA intermediate and advanced level ESL participants within one year of exiting the ESL program. Tracking and reporting on ESL student transitions to postsecondary education using existing data—known as pipeline analysis—is a good way to start the conversation about the need to set state goals.

**IMPROVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM DELIVERY AND QUALITY**

Research indicates that it takes 500-1000 hours of instruction for adult ESL students to gain English skills necessary for workplace functioning and between 100-150 hours for students to advance one NRS level. Due primarily to historical underfunding of adult education programming, many programs do not offer sufficient intensity of instruction and ESL learners progress very slowly or drop out. State policies and delivery models can be reformed to create or promote more intensive learning opportunities for students.

For example, a “managed enrollment” (also called the cohort model) strategy for ESL instructional delivery provides more time-on-task for students. Managed enrollment typically consists of courses or modules that have start and end dates and do not accommodate open-entry open-exit attendance. States (e.g. IL, CO, KY) engaging in managed enrollment strategies report experiencing increasing attendance, persistence, and learning gains as well as a greater sense of learner community and cohesiveness. Changing adult education funding models through state policy action to reward increased instructional intensity is another, more specific program quality strategy.

Insufficient funding in adult education greatly influences the quality of instruction and the skill development of adult educators. Most teachers are part-time and many lack the certification or the training necessary for instructional quality. States could invest more in professional development and focus training on best practices in ESL instruction. A resource collection of online professional development courses, best practice lesson plans, and other resources is available through the federally established English Language Learner University.

In addition to professional development, states could implement a variety of ESL program quality initiatives or policy around the following program quality topics:
• Engaging business and industry in program design
• Using data to inform program improvement
• Aligning assessment with curriculum
• Using diagnostic assessments that align to postsecondary placement tests
• Contextualizing ESL with content from career/technical occupational programs
• Increasing the use of instructional technology
• Providing digital literacy instruction for all ESL students
• Improving ESL program accountability through evaluation

DESIGN WORKPLACE LITERACY PROGRAMMING FOR INCUMBENT WORKERS

Workplace education programs for incumbent workers focus on the literacy and basic skills training that workers need to gain new employment, retain present jobs, advance in their careers, or increase productivity. Curricula are typically developed by adult educators working with employers and employee groups to determine what reading, computation, speaking, and reasoning skills are required to perform job tasks effectively. Successful efforts to institute workplace education programs require strong partnerships among educators, employers, and employees. Workplace literacy programs typically occur at the workplace as the training content is contextualized to the needs of the business or industry. Employers might provide work-related incentives to employees such as paid or unpaid release time.

The California based program ADVANCE, administered by the Building Skills Partnership, provides ESL instruction using job skills curricula for low-skilled immigrants. According to its return on investment report, ADVANCE works with ESL individuals at over 30 large corporate employment sites on work paid time, ensuring high attendance and graduation rates of over 80%.39

The newly passed WIOA gives local workforce investment boards the opportunity to implement incumbent worker training programs using up to 20% of their Adult and Dislocated Worker program funds. The ESL population may be directly targeted under that provision of the law.

States also can use other state policies and programs to develop initiatives that promote and support workplace literacy programs, delivered through the state adult education system, in businesses and industry sectors that employ large numbers of workers with limited English skills. State economic development incentives for business such as tax credits or training funds could be targeted to stimulate these types of education and business partnerships.

For example, Massachusetts has established an Unemployment Insurance (UI) diversion fund (a surtax) to support work-related ESL. Programs of this nature typically result in measurable positive outcomes for the employee, the business, the local community, and the state. In collaboration with Pitney Bowes, ProLiteracy has recently developed a comprehensive guide to the design and implementation of workplace literacy programs.40

EXPLORE HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY OPTIONS

The difficulty of acquiring a high school diploma or equivalency is often a barrier keeping foreign-born adults from entering postsecondary education or obtaining employment. Securing a high school diploma through the normal K-12 process is often not possible for these individuals due to their age or lack of English proficiency. Until recently, the General Educational Development tests (GED®) have been the main option for achieving high school equivalence. Several other options are now available.

In 2014, a completely updated GED® exam was implemented, featuring alignment to national college and career-ready standards for secondary education. Also, changing the GED® to a computer
based testing format means examinees must have basic computer literacy skills to take the test. As a result of these changes to the GED® and other concerns about costs and access to GED® test centers, many states have endorsed totally new options for attaining state-approved high school equivalency.

Two new high school equivalency tests – the TASC and the HiSET – are popular options to the GED® in many states. Both tests have paper-pencil options that may benefit students with limited digital literacy skills. Although there is no ESL-specific high school equivalency test, the GED®, TASC, and HiSET each offer their test in Spanish. While the GED® is endorsed in 40 states, the TASC is endorsed in seven states (CA, IN, NV, NJ, NY, WV, WY) and the HiSET is endorsed in 12 states (CA, IA, LA, ME, MA, MO, MT, NV, NH, NJ, TN, WY).

Overall, eleven states have adopted other high school equivalency options. For example, the National External Diploma Program (NEDP) is available in a variety of locations in six states and is recognized by those states as a legitimate high school diploma. Wisconsin offers a Wisconsin High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED) that can be obtained through any of five ways:

- Pass the GED® and complete five additional requirements
- Obtain 22 high school credits (half are required, others are optional and may include postsecondary credits)
- Complete 24 semester or 32 quarter postsecondary credits
- Obtain state approval for a foreign high school diploma and take some additional English credits
- Pass a state approved competency-based test

Options such as the TASC, HiSET, NEDP, and the Wisconsin alternative give foreign-born adults and their instructors an opportunity to select the most efficient and practical route to a high school credential. Program and policy developers working with ESL populations should understand what options their state offers for high school equivalency and which options are most suited for their particular population or subgroups.

**CATEGORY 3: Career Pathways**

**DESIGN ADULT CAREER PATHWAYS THAT TARGET ESL ADULTS AND PROMOTE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION**

Defined as a framework, career pathways are a series of connected education and training programs and support services that enable individuals to secure employment within a specific industry or occupational sector, and to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in that sector. When applied to the ESL population, a career pathways framework focuses on adults whose educational backgrounds are varied, whose need for academic and personal support services is considerable, and whose lack of preparation for college-level work is extensive. These efforts are commonly referred to a career pathway bridges; bridge programs typically link basic academic skills development efforts with postsecondary credit-based courses that most often emanate from career and technical education programs.

The WIOA strongly emphasizes the development of career pathways and each state must develop a unified State Plan that describes their current and new pathway activities. As mentioned earlier, opportunity exists for state adult education agencies to target federal and state career pathway funds for their ESL populations.

Additionally, philanthropic organizations have sponsored many large-scale, multi-site initiatives supporting career pathways and related strategies including: Bridges to Opportunity (Ford), NGA Pathways to Advancement (Lumina), Breaking Through (Charles Stewart Mott, North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline, Ford, Bill & Melinda Gates, and Wal-Mart), Accelerating Opportunity (Bill & Melinda Gates, Joyce, W.K. Kellogg, Kresge, and Open Society), and Shifting Gears (Joyce). Some of the efforts funded under these initiatives target ESL populations and provide models for ESL-specific career pathway bridge programs.

The Illinois Community College System has been implementing career pathway bridge programs for adult education and ESL students for nearly a decade and has developed a comprehensive guidebook for the design of bridge programs. Policies and practices targeting the ESL population could be developed that include these typical bridge strategies:
• Combine English skills and career-technical content, including general workforce readiness skills, pre-college academic and English language skills, and specific occupational knowledge and skills, all supported by comprehensive student services.

• Contextualize basic skills and English language content to the knowledge and skills needed in specific, in-demand occupations.

• Change how ESL classes are delivered, using such strategies as dual enrollment in linked basic skills and occupational courses: integrated, team-taught basic English skills and occupational courses; and enrolling students in cohorts (also known as learning communities or managed enrollment).

• Support ESL student success through comprehensive services, often including a contact person who helps students navigate through college advising and financial aid services, connects them to other public benefits, and works with them to solve problems that could derail progress.

• Connect to local employer and community needs by engaging key partners in design and implementation of bridges, such as employers, unions, workforce development boards, community-based organizations, and foundations.

States have developed a variety of career pathway policy actions that support postsecondary success for low-skilled adults including ESL individuals. Since 2009, Portland Community College in Oregon has offered English language learners the opportunity to earn college credits and an occupational certificate through dual enrollment in contextualized English language classes and college-level career pathways certificate courses. Currently, ESL students with a high school diploma (from either the United States or their home country) or GED can earn a credit based Basic Computer Applications certificate or an Entry-Level Accounting Clerk certificate. Each certificate is embedded within a full career pathway at the college. Through policy actions, states can facilitate such partnerships as well as the alignment of curriculum and assessment between basic education and postsecondary programs.

Landmark research conducted on college students by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges indicated that students who reach the “tipping point” of at least two semesters of credits and a credential gain a substantial earnings advantage over students who earn 10 credits or less. This research led to a Washington state policy establishing an integrated basic education delivery career pathway system known as Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST). The I-BEST model features dual enrollment for adult basic education students in postsecondary job training courses and provides multiple student supports. State-level policies for I-BEST include co-teaching using a basic education instructor and a postsecondary instructor, and a funding model that provides additional monies for I-BEST program delivery. Evaluations show that ESL students in I-BEST programming, which includes ESL-only classes and all-population classes with some ESL students, earned five times more college credits and were 15 times more likely to complete a job training program than traditional ESL students in the college system.

Minnesota’s adult career pathway model, FastTRAC, includes a pre-bridge concept for the lower levels of adult basic education and English language instruction. These activities tend to focus initially on career exploration and planning or on introducing students to broad concepts, vocabulary, and career opportunities in a specific industry sector. For example, a St. Paul FastTRAC program designed for ESL students features a health care pre-bridge that includes medical terminology and visits to health care workplaces to learn about the range of job opportunities in that sector. These types of pre-bridges tend to be delivered solely by basic skills instructors, within either adult basic education (ABE) or developmental education. State funding for FastTRAC programming began in 2012 and program leadership and administration is shared between three state systems: Education, Workforce, and Postsecondary.
Almost 60% of all students entering “open access” community colleges need one or more remedial courses. This is especially true for students needing remedial ESL courses. Given national data on the lack of success for postsecondary students who are placed in noncredit developmental or remedial education, many state community and technical postsecondary education systems have begun or are considering redesigning their systems through policy actions to improve persistence and outcomes. Oregon has implemented developmental education reform, which includes analyzing subgroup data for the ESL and GED® cohorts, to identify strategies for decreasing attrition and completion time.

Over half of the states deliver adult education and ESL instruction through their state K-12 agency or workforce agency. Collaboration between them and postsecondary ESL program providers could encourage design of clearly articulated, compatible programming for ESL learners at all levels.

For the past several years, under the previously mentioned Joyce Foundation Shifting Gears initiative, Wisconsin's technical college system has supported ESL bridge programs that tie adult basic skills programming with college career and technical credit-based courses. A recent analysis of these efforts found that basic skills students completing ESL bridge programs outperformed a comparable set of basic skills students relative to:

1. Enrolling in a postsecondary credit occupational course
2. Enrolling and completing more postsecondary credit occupational courses
3. Enrolling and completing 12 postsecondary credit occupational courses

Although this is a preliminary analysis and more work is needed to understand the findings, these outcomes suggest the potential benefits of bridge programming that provides targeted and intentional support for ESL students.

### Conclusion
A healthy and growing economy relies on the full participation of its citizens. Adults who have limited English-speaking skills and little or no education or training for employment are usually eager to find ways to achieve self-sufficiency and prosperity. They are a growing demographic in the nation’s current and future labor force, and their importance in that regard is significant. This paper has presented a number of adult education policy and practice recommendations that have been proven to increase the integration of the foreign-born population into educational pathways leading to personal and economic success. Addressing the education and employment training needs of foreign-born residents and their families is one key to a better future for all.

### Recommendations
1. Promote transitions to postsecondary education.
2. Develop ESL content alignment with postsecondary standards.
3. Promote career and employability skill development.
4. Improve English language program delivery.
5. Target funding for ESL programming.
6. Establish state goals for ESL transitions.
7. Design workplace literacy programming for incumbent workers.
8. Explore High School equivalency options.
9. Design adult career pathways that target ESL adults and promote postsecondary education.
10. Redesign ESL developmental education at the postsecondary level.

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ENDNOTES

1 Dr. Barry Shaffer is an educational consultant and the former Minnesota state director of adult education (1998-2012). He has considerable experience and expertise in the development and implementation of state-level adult basic education policy and the delivery of adult programming focused on English acquisition, high school equivalency, and adult career pathways. The Author would like to acknowledge the following individuals who have aided in the research and writing of this report: Terri Boyer, Rutgers Center for Women and Work; Jonathan Bowles, New York Center for Urban Futures; Armelle Casau, New Mexico Voices for Children; Tony Lee, Statewide Poverty Action Network based in Washington state; Frank Waterous, The Bell Policy Center; Nadia Valliani, Campaign for College Opportunity; Jenny Wittner, Women Employed; Leslie Helmcamp, private consultant; Allison Gerber, Annie E. Casey Foundation; and Brandon Roberts and Deborah Povich of the Working Poor Families Project.


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