

**New Innovations and Best Practices under the Workforce Investment Act  
Testimony for the  
House Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and  
Competitiveness  
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts on the reauthorization of Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). My name is Dr. Donna Kinerney and I am the Instructional Dean for Adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) & Literacy – GED Programs at Montgomery College in Maryland. As a teacher and program administrator for adult English language programs since 1989, I will focus my remarks on my own experiences, research, and insights gathered as a leader in the adult education interest section of Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), the global professional association for English language educators. You've heard of these English programs referred to adult English as a Second Language (ESL) or adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs.

You have undoubtedly met some of our adult ESOL students in your travels. One of the most challenging and fulfilling aspects of serving adult English language learners is bringing appropriate services to the broad needs of our students. For example there is, Maria from El Salvador, who wants to read to her grandchildren in English, but she's one of the 19% of all immigrants who never made it to high school in her country and who struggles with basic English literacy here in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). There is also Lan from Vietnam, who wants desperately to go to college and become a nurse but is like the 2.4 million immigrants, ages 17 to 24, who need more English in order to begin postsecondary education (McHugh, Gelatt & Fix, 2007). And there is Tekle, from Ethiopia, who works as a parking lot attendant, but would give anything to become an engineer again as he was in his native country, just like the more than 1.3 million other college-educated immigrants who are unemployed or working in unskilled jobs many because of their limited English (Batalova & Fix, 2008).

Like these students, 5.8 million legal permanent residents in the U.S. need additional English if they are to fully participate in U.S. civic life and/or pass the U.S. citizenship test (McHugh, Gelatt & Fix, 2007). Learning English takes time; it takes an estimated 85-150 hours of instruction to advance a single level under the National Reporting System, the framework used by federally funded programs (McHugh, et al., 2007). Unsurprisingly, as indicated by the most recent available data, 44% of participants in federally funded adult education programs are in ESOL classes. That represents just over a million students, a mere drop in the bucket in terms of need (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). It's no surprise that waitlists for adult ESOL have exploded across the country - a 2006 survey by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials found numerous programs reporting waitlists from a few weeks to more than three years. And in fact, Massachusetts reported a waitlist of over 16,000 for ESOL across the state (Tucker, 2006).

My program at Montgomery College is like many others. We offer life skills ESOL, English Literacy and Civics, and Adult Basic Education-GED and assist with family literacy programming.

In FY 08, we provided over 10,000 seats to almost 5000 learners, with 82% participating in ESOL or Civics instruction. However, English language learners are not only in ESOL programs, as they make up the largest demographic in our program and represent 57% of our ABE-GED students, a traditionally native English speaking population in other geographic regions. We share in the national need for expanded services – we are in a suburb of Washington DC, not in a state with enormous immigrant population like California or Texas, and yet our current waitlist for ESOL classes is well over 1000. As is the trend in some regions, our program was administered for many years by the local public school system, but in 2005, as part of a local effort to better serve the education and workforce training needs of adult learners, our program moved to the community college where we are housed under the College’s Workforce Development and Continuing Education Unit. In our new home at Montgomery College, we have partnered with Montgomery Works, our local one-stop, to provide an ESOL for Customer Service Jobs program that incorporates extensive advising and job search support because most adult ESOL learners have only a limited understanding of employment and training services in the U.S. We have learned much about interagency partnerships, workforce training, vocational assessments, and case management services along the way and have used that knowledge to pilot new contextualized ESOL and vocational training for building trades and healthcare career pathways that will transition our learners into other noncredit vocational training programs at the College. In need of highly qualified teachers, we are currently piloting our TESOL Training Institute, a series of four intensive courses, to help new teachers enter the field and veteran teachers improve their skills. In addition, to further extend our hand to the community, we work closely with the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy, a nonprofit for community-based ESOL service providers to professional development opportunities and guidance for programs that are outside of the federally funded system. But we could not begin to offer this level of service without the hard work of a group of highly qualified and enormously skilled full-time staff and part-time teachers.

From around the country, I hear of programs too numerous to mention here that are meeting the needs of adult ESOL learners by developing many promising practices. Increasing numbers of programs like those in Oregon and Washington are creating career pathways and models that provide streamlined ways for adults to learn English and receive workforce training. Programs like Yakima Valley Community College are creating bridge instruction to move ESOL learners to adult basic education and GED programs and beyond. Other programs such as AVANCE family literacy programs in Texas and Dorcas Place Family Literacy Center in Rhode Island along with affiliates of the National College Transition Network have learned, as have we, that ongoing advising and social service supports are critical to for learners and their families to succeed at all levels including the transition to postsecondary education and training. Finally, many programs nationwide, including the City College of San Francisco and the College of Lake County in Illinois, find, as do we, that ongoing professional development for teachers and administrators is absolutely critical in order to implement quality programs and develop new curricula.

Given these experiences, I would like to propose three broad areas of recommendations on ways to improve WIA:

- 1. Authorize the EL/Civics funding program, and expand the scope of Title II to acknowledge the diverse and specific training and employment needs of English language learners.**

The current Title II funding formula does not take into account the English language learner population yet ESOL services are a primary function under this statute. Instructional programming should support adult ESOL earners with career pathways and transitions to postsecondary programs. To do this well, we must include in Title II advising and case management services because adult ESOL learners are unfamiliar with education and employment systems in the U.S. and often have social service needs that limit their participation. To maintain and increase our accountability for this expanded version of Title II, we should create more relevant performance measures supported by improved vocational and academic assessments that better monitor the progress of ESOL programs and learners.

**2. Increase state leadership funds under Title II and encourage states to provide training for adult ESOL instructors, administrators, and curriculum designers and support adult ESOL teacher credentialing and certification.**

Adult education is chronically underfunded and issues of quality are of constant concern. In 2003-2004, only 36% of adult ESOL learners moved up to the next proficiency level (McHugh, Gelatt, & Fix, 2007), and in any year, it is estimated that only 10% of adult ESOL learners transfer to certificate or degree programs (Chisman & Crandall, 2007). If we don't want to leave children behind, then we shouldn't leave adult students behind either. Particularly in states that are experiencing increases in immigration, teachers may not have had extensive training or experience in working with English language learners (Crandall, Ingersoll, & Lopez, 2008; Schaetzel, Peyton, & Burt, 2007). With limited budgets and most classes meeting in the evenings, full-time instructional positions are rare and so are career pathways for adult ESOL teachers. All of this means that is a challenge to find and retain qualified and skilled adult ESOL instructors and curriculum developers, particularly for vocational ESOL instruction, even for a program like mine that is in a major metropolitan area.

**3. Create a research center dedicated to adult education that specifically includes a focus on adult English language and literacy acquisition and instruction.**

Given the piecemeal nature of existing research on adult English language and literacy learners, we desperately need a comprehensive center that will undertake these efforts if we are to meet learner needs. We lack, for example, an in-depth understanding of how to best teach English literacy to adult ESOL students who have limited literacy skills in their native languages. We do not yet have complete information on how to help adult ESOL learners persist or transition to other training. And yet, we are called everyday to implement programs that do just these things and we must do so without the benefit of a solid research base.

Thank you again for the invitation to speak today. We in adult ESOL programs hope to participate at every table where adult education and workforce training are being discussed. We look forward to an even brighter future serving our students, Maria, Lan, and Tekle, and the millions of others waiting to learn English.

Respectfully submitted by:

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