



NCSDAE National Council of State Directors of Adult Education

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The Ability to Benefit Provision turns back the clock on accelerated adult education and training programs.

Background: On December 23, 2011, President Obama signed into law the Omnibus Appropriations bill.

One provision of this law would permanently amend the “ability to benefit” provisions of the Pell Grant program to require anyone seeking a Pell Grant to have a high school diploma, a GED or to have been home schooled unless they were enrolled prior to July 1, 2012.

Issue: For many adult education students, this would adversely affect their ability to move forward and gain the education and skills they need to obtain and retain employment.

Career pathways programs, integrating education and skills training to accelerate student achievement, bring together adult education instruction with community college occupational training. The old model was to finish high school first and then go to the community college. That linear model takes too long when a family is out of work. By integrating the adult education with the occupational training, the process is accelerated.

Since many adult education participants are low-income or unemployed, they use Pell Grants for these integrated programs. Career pathways programs are growing across the United States and provide an effective method of combining Title I and Title II of the Workforce Investment Program to the benefit of program participants. This change to the Pell Grant program could inhibit many of these individuals -- especially those who have been laid off jobs -- from participation in these programs.

Additionally, some adult education programs work with students to enable them to achieve their high school diploma or a GED at the same time they are taking classes at a community college or other institution of higher education. Similar to career pathways programs, most of these concurrently enrolled students would be unable to afford college tuition. Without a Pell Grant, their path towards higher education would likely be blocked and their motivation to move forward greatly diminished.

Impact: While this change to the law will not be implemented until July 1, 2012, we are already hearing about the problems this will cause to adult education programs across the United States. For example:

***Washington State**, through our Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program, has led the nation in developing teaching and learning models that successfully transition pre-college students to college-level courses and credential completion more quickly and efficiently than ever before. We have also been a leader in training other states to succeed in the same endeavor. The I-BEST program was cited by President Obama as one of the “innovative initiatives that have a record of success in boosting enrollment and graduation rates...” and was named a Bright Idea by Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government. Washington continues to work with other states across the nation to implement I-BEST-like programs.

The proposed Pell Grant eligibility changes will decimate I-BEST programs throughout the nation. In Washington State alone 3,342 I-BEST students will potentially be denied a chance to acquire necessary skills and credentials essential for filling high demand jobs competing in the current challenging labor market.

*We have a successful and growing program in **Virginia** called PluggedInVA. It has a co-enrollment feature that the Pell regulations would basically eliminate. Our governor has allocated a line item in his budget for the expansion for PluggedIn, and we are in talks with the community college system and the local programs about solutions, but a waiver for students in bridge/transition programs that feature co-enrollment would be enthusiastically welcomed at this end. Otherwise, we end up in the same old linear system that discourages learners.

***Pennsylvania** offers the Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma based on 30 college credits. About 1200 Pennsylvania residents enroll in community college or a postsecondary program at a career and technical education center each year and gain credit toward the diploma. These students achieve associate degrees or credit toward such degrees, or postsecondary vocational certificates while they build the credits needed to meet the requirements of the State Board for this type of high school equivalency. This change would close the door on this GED® alternative for adults receiving ... benefits as they will not be enrolled in a “GED” program. These individuals would have to first complete a GED program, and then enroll in postsecondary education which would cost them valuable time.

The 30 college credit credential is one of the building blocks of Career Pathways efforts in PA. We have seen the number of adults who have taken advantage of this opportunity rise from 200 in 2004 to 1200 in 2011. I anticipate that as we build stronger partnerships with technical education side of community colleges that more individuals will benefit.

| The publication entitled *Adult Education Supporting the President’s Workforce and American Graduation Initiatives*¹ documents similar integrated education and training activities across the country including many that utilize dual enrollment and Pell Grants to provide support

¹ National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, *Adult Education Supporting the President’s Workforce and American Graduation Initiatives*, 2010, <http://www.ncsdae.org/State%20Alignment%20Initiatives%20-%20FINAL%202.2.10.pdf>

during retraining. Since this publication in 2010, the number of such programs has continued to grow.

The Waiting Lists: The waiting lists in adult education programs across the country² complicate the issue further. Even if an individual wanted to follow the linear track of diploma or equivalency to community college, he or she will likely have to wait months to find a seat in an adult education class.

Recommendations:

Restore the ability to benefit provisions for Pell Grants for program models such as career pathways and other strategies where adult students are co-enrolled in adult education and occupational training or college coursework. These models report significantly higher student persistence, completion and credential rates.

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² National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, Adult Student Waiting List Survey 2009-2012, <http://www.naepdc.org/publications/2010%20Adult%20Education%20Waiting%20List%20Report.pdf>