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# Blueprint for Opportunity

No. 21

## Implementation Memo

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TO: Governor Ritter  
Members of the 66th Colorado General Assembly

FROM: The Bell Policy Center – Frank Waterous, Senior Policy Analyst

DATE: January 16, 2007

**RE: Implementing Bell's Blueprint recommendation No. 21  
to expand adult education opportunities**

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In the 2006 Blueprint for Opportunity, the Bell Policy Center recommends:

### **Expand adult education opportunities**

The legislature should significantly increase state support for adult basic education by appropriating at least \$1 million each year to match the state's federal grant and to expand and improve basic services. This investment will help more adults get GEDs, learn English and become literate.<sup>1</sup>

We should also make additional strategic investments in community colleges and vocational educational institutions so all Coloradans have access to affordable training to expand and update their job skills and take courses leading to college degrees. (see *Blueprint*, page 30)

This memorandum briefly discusses the issues surrounding this proposal, describes steps for implementing it, outlines some of the factors to consider and lists sources for additional information and resources.

If you are interested in pursuing this issue further, we are prepared to work with you. Please contact the author of this memo directly at (303) 297-0456 or [waterous@thebell.org](mailto:waterous@thebell.org), or Rich Jones, director of policy and research, at (303) 297-0456 or [jones@thebell.org](mailto:jones@thebell.org).

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### **Overview of the issue**

Education is a key to increased earnings and self-sufficiency in our society. On average, a worker with a high school diploma earns almost \$8,000 per year more than one without a high school diploma. A person who attains a certificate or degree beyond high school can expect to earn significantly higher income, with actual earnings on average rising with each stage of education. In addition, unemployment rates decline with each higher level of education.<sup>2</sup>

Adult education opportunities can often be the starting point for many low-income individuals and families trying to get ahead. Various forms of adult education help those with low literacy

levels to acquire basic skills, help dropouts earn high school equivalency credentials, help immigrants learn English, and help parents become more literate so they can help their children do better in school. In addition, adult post-secondary education opportunities at community colleges and vocational institutions help workers hone existing skills, acquire new skills, keep pace with changing technology and take courses leading to college degrees.

The majority of funding for Colorado's programs related to adult basic education, adult secondary education, and English literacy instruction comes from the federal government under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA). For FY 2006-07, Colorado's federal



AEFLA allotment was about \$5.6 million, with an additional \$750,000 specifically provided for English literacy and civics education services. Thus, the total federal allotment to Colorado for AEFLA-related programs was almost \$6.4 million.<sup>3</sup>

Colorado's own investment in AEFLA-related programs has been minimal. In fact, until the legislature appropriated \$200,000 to the Family Literacy Education Fund in 2006, the state invested no state funds in these programs, relying instead on gifts, grants, and donations to make up the required 25 percent match for federal funds received.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the hard work of many adult education providers, Colorado's programs serve only a small percentage of the eligible adult population. In 2004-05, 15,011 adult learners were served, representing only about 4.6 percent of the state's adult population without high school degrees.<sup>5</sup>

Adult education opportunities in post-secondary career and technical education (CTE) are also important for helping individuals get ahead. Federal funding for these programs is provided through the Carl D. Perkins Act, which is a \$1.3 billion program nationwide.<sup>6</sup>

In Colorado, the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education is responsible for statewide CTE policy at both the secondary and post-secondary levels. It exercises this responsibility through the Colorado Community College System, which oversees more than \$17 million in Perkins funding. Currently, the state provides \$900,000 a year to match administrative costs associated with Perkins and for other CTE-related activities.<sup>7</sup>

Perkins funding is a necessary foundation for the CTE opportunities available to Colorado students, and especially for those adult learners who are seeking new or updated career and technical skills. For example, in 2003-04 there were almost 19,000 post-secondary CTE student enrollments in 800 programs at 13 system community colleges, two local district colleges, and four area vocational schools in Colorado.<sup>8</sup>

## Implementation steps

In order to expand adult education program opportunities in the state, and to support career and technical education in Colorado, several policy actions could be taken by the legislature and the governor.

- **Beginning with the 2007 Appropriations Bill (Long Bill), provide at least \$1 million in state funds annually as part of the required state match for AEFLA-related programs** including adult basic education, adult secondary education, and English literacy instruction. If possible, the legislature should consider increasing the state contribution even more. A 50 percent match of the federal allotment would be \$3.2 million annually. A 100 percent match would be \$6.4 million a year.
- **Contribute at least \$1 million more each year in state dollars to adult career and technical education programs** over and above the moneys now made available as a match for Perkins administrative costs and other CTE activities. In providing this new funding, the legislature should ensure it is used to expand programs and services, rather than for administrative costs.
- **Support continued federal CTE funding** in order to preserve the important opportunities such money makes possible for our state's citizens. Perkins continues to have strong support in the U.S. Congress, and President Bush recently signed the Perkins Act reauthorization into law, extending it through 2012. However, for the past several years, the Bush administration has proposed eliminating Perkins and shifting the money into programs more closely aligned with the academic and testing goals associated with No Child Left Behind.<sup>9</sup>

## Factors to consider

Given current trends, the most substantial growth in the U.S. and Colorado workforces is projected to be workers with less than a high school education. At the same time, technological advances and global economic competition make a well-educated workforce even more essential.<sup>10</sup>

A recent report from the National Center on Education and the Economy<sup>11</sup> proposes that the United States radically reinvent its entire education system in light of these national trends and global requirements. Among the report's several recommendations are two specifically related to restructuring adult education opportunities:

- **Enable every member of the adult workforce to acquire the new literacy skills essential for competitiveness in the global economy.** In order to meet this goal, federal legislation would be required to entitle every adult and young worker, free of charge, to the education necessary to enter college without remediation. The report notes that this would boost individual opportunity and a productive economy.
- **Create “personal competitiveness accounts” enabling everyone to get the continuing education and training they need throughout their working lives.** The federal government would create these accounts for people at birth, and contribute to them until age 16. Employers, individuals, and states could also contribute. The report proposes that money from the accounts could be used to pay for tuition, books and fees for any work-related program of study.

## Information and resources

☎ Pamela M. Smith, state director,  
Adult Education and Family Literacy  
Center for At-Risk Education  
Colorado Department of Education  
[smith\\_p@cde.state.co.us](mailto:smith_p@cde.state.co.us) (303) 866-6640,

☎ Information on career and technical  
education on the Colorado Community College  
System web site  
<http://www.cccs.edu/index.htm>

☎ Jennifer Sobanet, associate vice president  
for compliance and technical support  
Colorado Community College System,  
[jennifer.sobanet@cccs.edu](mailto:jennifer.sobanet@cccs.edu) (303) 595-1569



## End notes

- <sup>1</sup> Although our recommendation highlights adult basic education programs as a target for additional state funds, the intent is to provide these funds for all programs associated with the federal Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, including adult basic education, adult secondary education and English literacy instruction.
- <sup>2</sup> [Education and Training Pay, Postsecondary Education Opportunity](#), Oskaloosa, Iowa. Median earnings (2004) and unemployment rates (2005) based on Bureau of Labor Statistics data.
- <sup>3</sup> Telephone communication with Pamela M. Smith, state director, Adult Education and Family Literacy, Colorado Dept. of Education, Aug. 17, 2006, and [Adult Education and Family Literacy Programs Fact Sheet](#), Colorado Department of Education, Center for At-Risk Education.
- <sup>4</sup> [House Bill 06-1385](#), Long Appropriations Bill, Education section, Colorado General Assembly Bill Folders; State and Federal Issues: Adult Education, Overview, National Conference of State Legislatures, June 2002; Colorado Department of Education, Center for At-Risk Education web site, Colorado Family Literacy Education Fund information.
- <sup>5</sup> [Program Facts 2004-05](#), Colorado Department of Education, Adult and Family Literacy; Data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, [Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2005](#).
- <sup>6</sup> News release: [Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Improvement Act of 2006 Signed Into Law](#), Association for Career and Technical Education, Aug. 14, 2006.
- <sup>7</sup> [Administrators' Handbook](#), Colorado Community College System, February 2006; [Colorado Community College System Overview](#), October 2005; [House Bill 06-1385](#), Long Appropriations Bill, Higher Education section, Colorado General Assembly Bill Folders; Personal communication with Barbara McDonnell, legal counsel and vice president for legal affairs, Colorado Community College System.
- <sup>8</sup> [Providing Access to Opportunity for Success, System Facts – Legislative Binder](#), Colorado Community College System, January 2006.
- <sup>9</sup> Christin M. Driscoll, [Perkins Funding Again Threatened in Bush Budget](#), Association for Career and Technical Education; [Budget Proposal Cuts Loan Program, Community Colleges Express Dismay Over \\$1.3 Billion Reduction](#), *The Daily Californian*, Song-My Tran, Feb 22, 2005.
- <sup>10</sup> Patrick J. Kelly, [As America Becomes More Diverse: The Impact of State Higher Education Inequality](#), Colorado State Profile, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, November 2005; [Income of U.S. Workforce Projected to Decline If Education Doesn't Improve](#), The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Policy Alert, November 2005; Alice Anne Bailey and James R. Mingle, [The Adult Learning Gap: Why States Need To Change Their Policies Toward Adult Learners](#), Education Commission of the States, October 2003.
- <sup>11</sup> National Center on Education and the Economy, *Tough Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*, 2007. [Executive summary](#).