

Success from the Session: State Funds for Adult Education

By Frank Waterous



Rep. Rhonda Fields and Sen. Rachel Zenzinger flank Gov. John Hickenlooper as he signs HB 1085. Alison Suzukamo of the Bell is left of the American flag, and Frank Waterous is to the right.

Sometimes, receiving funding through the legislative process is about more than just the money. Sometimes, it's about making history.

House Bill 14-1085, the "Adult Education and Literacy Act of 2014," signed by Gov. John Hickenlooper today, makes history by providing \$960,000 in state-appropriated funding for Colorado's programs that serve low-literacy, low-skill, low-income adults. It also breaks important new ground by refocusing these programs on helping more adults move along the pathway from skills acquisition to post-secondary credential attainment and employment.

But, in fact, the bill's signing means so much more than that.

It means that Colorado is no longer the only state in the nation that does not provide state-funded support for education and literacy programs that improve not only the lives of the adults they serve but the families of those adults as well.

It means that Colorado has joined all the other states in acknowledging that adult education and literacy programs are key public policy components in poverty reduction, educational attainment and workforce development strategies that strengthen our state and benefit us all.

It means that Colorado has taken another critical step, as we say here at the Bell, in becoming a "state of opportunity" for all Coloradans.

And even more than all of this, it means that adult-education programs and the low-literacy, low-skill, low-income Coloradans they serve will no longer be without a face or a voice in the legislative process. Because of the bill's passage, they now are recognized through state statute. They now have a voice through the state budget.

Since its founding, the Bell has advocated strongly for adult education and literacy programs. This has also been one of my personal priorities since joining the Bell more than eight years ago. Regardless of the issue, speaking for those without an official face or voice in the public policy arena is both deeply humbling and immensely rewarding. The best possible outcome is when those for whom we advocate have their own faces seen and their own voices heard. That's what passage of HB14-1085 is really about. I am grateful we've finally turned this corner, and honored to have played a part in making it happen. There is still more to be done, but this is an important achievement.

The success of the Adult Education and Literacy Act of 2014 owes much to the bill's prime legislative sponsors, Rep. Rhonda Fields and Sen. Rachel Zenzinger, who were true champions in this effort. Its success is also the result of the continuing hard work and active engagement of the Skills2Compete-Colorado coalition, of which the Bell is a proud member.

Thanks to all of you for making history – and so much more.



Terry Scanlon of the Colorado Center on Law and Policy, Gov. Hickenlooper and Frank Waterous of the Bell.