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Evaluation Report

Linking Adult Education to Workforce Development in 2018-19: Early Implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act at the Local Level

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March 2023

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Linking Adult Education to Workforce Development in 2018-19: Early Implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act at the Local Level

March 2023

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NCEE 2023-001r
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Many adults need help with basic skills like reading, writing, mathematics, and English proficiency to succeed in the American workforce. Congress has long provided resources to help individuals address these educational challenges, most recently through Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014. But WIOA includes new requirements and incentives to strengthen the link between adult education and the overall workforce development system, to move adults into and along a career pathway. This report from a national evaluation of Title II examines the extent to which local adult education providers' instructional approaches and coordination with other agencies reflect this link and highlights the challenges providers experience in collecting related performance data. The report describes providers' reported experiences in program year 2018-19, the first year when the more than 1,600 providers receiving federal Title II funds were expected to operate under WIOA's rules and before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted provider operations.

Key Findings

- ***Providers widely reported offering the types of instruction WIOA encourages to link adult education to workforce development in 2018–19, but learner participation in these offerings was less widespread.*** Many providers indicated that they offered instruction that links the teaching of basic and occupational skills, but only in a modest share of courses in which relatively few adult learners were enrolled, based on study calculations. Fewer providers reported offering Integrated Education and Training (IET) instruction, a specific form of linked instruction favored under WIOA, with estimated participation of less than 10 percent of adult learners. Instruction designed to help transition or "bridge" adults to further education or occupational training was more broadly available than linked instruction on basic and occupational skills and had higher levels of estimated learner enrollment, although less than half of learners participated in it.
- ***Consistent with WIOA's emphasis on collaboration as a way to improve the workforce development system, the majority of providers reported coordinating with workforce partners to provide instruction and transition services, although challenges existed.*** For example, more than a quarter of providers reported that partnering to provide occupational skills training was very challenging, and 15 percent of providers indicated that partnering to provide transition services was very challenging.
- ***Some providers reported challenges with performance-reporting requirements that make adult education accountable for learners' workforce development outcomes.*** Although WIOA prioritizes the use of program performance data by expanding requirements for states to collect and use those data in funding decisions, just a little more than half of providers indicated that aspects of collecting data on workforce-related outcomes were very challenging. For instance, nearly a third of providers reported that having enough information to match learner data with employment outcomes was very challenging.

Education and training beyond the high school level are increasingly required for success in the American workforce, yet many adults in the United States face barriers to attaining them. More than 25 million adults have not yet earned a high school diploma or its equivalent. Even among those with a high school credential, a lack of basic skills in areas such as reading or English proficiency can create barriers to postsecondary education and high-paying jobs. More than one fifth of U.S. adults struggle with low literacy,[1] and more than 12 million are not English proficient.[2]

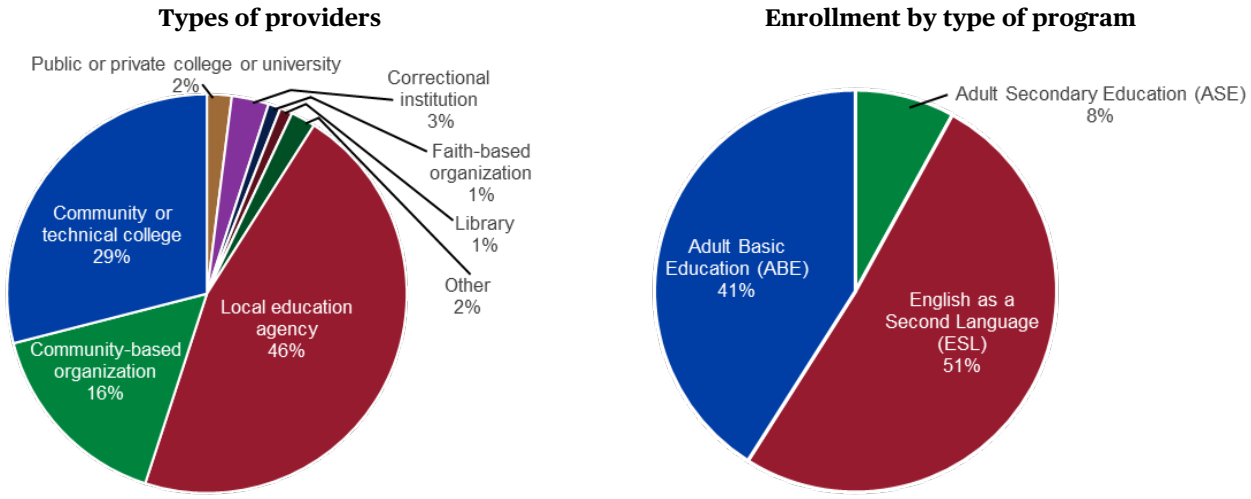
For more than 70 years, the federal government has supported efforts to improve adult literacy and other basic skills.[3] Beginning in the late 1980s, federal policies increasingly sought to focus basic skills programs on improving learners' career prospects. The shift was most evident in the passage of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998—which brought adult education, as well as job-training and employment services programs, under one federal umbrella to coordinate, consolidate, and improve them. For the first time, adult education providers were required to report on the number of past participants who transitioned to the next step in their workforce preparation (postsecondary education or training) or entered employment, but for only a subset of those participants.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) brought additional changes to cement this priority.[4] These changes include new requirements and incentives for implementing three key strategies:

1. providing instruction that links the learning of adult basic skills to workforce development;
2. coordinating services with other workforce development partners; and
3. collecting and using an expanded set of workforce preparation and employment outcomes.

The implementation of these strategies is supported by state agencies but is carried out by local adult education providers funded under Title II of WIOA—formally known as the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program.[5] Although these funds can be distributed by states to a variety of organizations, nearly half of the providers funded in the 50 states and the District of Columbia in the 2018-19 program year were local school districts (exhibit 1 and appendix table B.1).

Exhibit 1. Types of adult education providers and enrollment by program under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 2018-19



NOTE: Details may not sum to totals because of rounding. Estimates are based on providers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Study of the Implementation of Adult Education, 2019-20.

Local providers served more than 1.2 million adult learners in 2018-19 in one of three types of programs. The programs are Adult Basic Education (ABE) for those with skills below the grade 9 level, Adult Secondary Education (ASE) for those with skills at the grades 9-12 levels, and English as a second language (ESL) for those needing English language acquisition instruction.[6] In 2018-19, half of learners served were enrolled in ESL and most other learners were enrolled in ABE. The lowest enrollment was in ASE (exhibit 1 and appendix table B.2). This diversity in types of

providers and programming can make it hard for policymakers to pinpoint challenges in implementing legislation or to target needed assistance, without more detailed information than annual grant reporting can provide.

Examining this complexity in the implementation of adult education under WIOA and the effectiveness of its key strategies is the role of the National Assessment of Adult Education, an independent evaluation of Title II programs required by Congress and conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES). This report focuses on local implementation of key strategies linking adult education to workforce development under WIOA. The report's findings draw on a survey of local providers regarding their practices and experiences in 2018–19 (exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Summary of the study design

What data were collected?

- ***Provider survey.*** A web-based survey collected information about 2018–19 practices and experiences from providers in all states and the District of Columbia that had received Title II grants that year and were still receiving funds a year later, when the survey was conducted. The survey began in October 2019 and concluded in March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began to affect provider operations. A response was received from 1,407 of 1,635 providers (86 percent).
- ***Existing administrative data.*** These data were used to describe the characteristics of providers; adjust survey findings to represent all 1,635 providers, including those who did not respond; and create subgroups of providers to see if their answers to the survey questions differed in important ways.
  - ***State adult education agency data.*** Information about each provider was obtained from state agencies for program year 2018–19. These data included provider contact information, provider type, enrollment numbers, and information on funding.
  - ***Geographic data.*** Information from the National Center for Education Statistics' 2019 Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates database was used to categorize each provider as serving an urban, rural, or suburban area.[7]

How were study data analyzed?

- Responses to survey questions were tabulated into descriptive statistics, such as counts and percentages. Simple statistical tests were performed to ensure that differences between subgroups of providers noted in the report were not due to chance. Subgroups reported on include the types of providers (for example, local education agencies), the size of providers' 2018–19 learner enrollment (for example, 25th percentile or below), and the setting in which the providers were located (for example, in an urban setting).
- Because the survey was intended to represent the full population of federally funded adult education providers, responses were adjusted to correct for differences in survey response rates across subgroups of providers.
- Enrollment in courses that used a particular type of instruction was estimated on the basis of provider enrollment counts by program and providers' reports of the approximate proportion of courses in which the type of instruction was used. Because these estimates are based on approximate proportions, they should not be interpreted as precise.

See appendix A for more information on how the data were analyzed. Information on how the survey sample and questionnaire were developed and how responses were adjusted to correct for differences in survey response rates across subgroups of providers is available in the study's compendium report.[8]

This was the first program year during which all providers nationally were expected to operate under WIOA.[9] Thus, this report presents a snapshot of early implementation under the law. The extent to which providers report implementing the key strategies may serve as a signal that WIOA is influencing adult education practices in the way it intended. It should be noted that this report does not provide that causal link, however, and providers may or may not implement the key strategies for a variety of reasons. It should also be noted that this report reflects the state of the field before the COVID-19 pandemic. A companion report provides additional findings on local and state implementation under WIOA, as well as information on the methods used by the National Assessment to assess implementation.[10]

WIDE REPORTING, BUT MODEST SCALE SO FAR, OF BASIC SKILLS INSTRUCTION LINKED WITH OCCUPATIONAL TRAINING

One way WIOA aims to help adults develop the skills they need to thrive in the workforce is by encouraging the use of a particular instructional strategy designed to accelerate learners into and along their career pathways. This strategy is referred to here as *linked instruction*–that is, instruction designed to equip adults with both basic skills *and* occupational skills simultaneously. With this strategy, adult learners might receive instruction focused on improving their reading, writing, mathematics, and/or English language skills while also receiving training for a specific occupational field. For instance, a learner might receive English language acquisition instruction as part of the training necessary to be a certified nursing assistant, a medical administrative assistant, a welder, or an HVAC technician.

There are two main approaches to providing linked instruction. Both approaches involve basic skills instruction provided to learners while the learners also are participating in occupational training. However, what distinguishes the approaches is whether the basic skills instruction and occupational training use a shared curriculum or are taught independently of each other (exhibits 3 and 4). Linked instruction based on a shared curriculum in adult education can in turn take two forms: It can be provided by one or more instructors teaching basic and occupational skills within the same classroom (often called *co-teaching* or *team-teaching*) or through coordinated instruction in separate classrooms but during the same time frame.

Exhibit 3. Approaches to linked basic and occupational skills instruction



- **Co-teaching** (also called *team teaching*) includes basic skills instruction taught at the same time and in the same classroom as instruction with an occupational skills training partner.
- **Coordinated instruction** (also called *alternating instruction*) includes basic and occupational skills training from different partners who either take turns being in the classroom or teach in separate classrooms.

- Other forms of linked instruction, often called **concurrent instruction**, provide adult basic and occupational skills instruction during the same time frame but in separate courses.

Although encouragement to provide linked instruction is not completely new in federal policy, WIOA further emphasizes it in several ways. This is perhaps most evident through the law's focus on the development and promotion of career pathways as a means of fulfilling the purpose of Title II, and the law's provisions explicitly authorizing the use of Title II funds for occupational skills training provided as part of Integrated Education and Training (IET). IET is an example of linked instruction that is part of a career pathway, which is discussed further in the next section of this report.

Changes in federal performance accountability reporting are another way the law seeks to increase the use of linked instruction. WIOA now requires that providers report the number of learners who are enrolled in IET, thereby encouraging providers to enroll learners in these types of courses. WIOA also requires providers to report on learners' credential attainment and their employment and wage outcomes. These outcomes may improve—and improve more quickly—if learners receive instruction that not only improves their basic language and literacy skills but also provides them with the skills to enter or progress along a career pathway. How widely providers use linked instruction may be a signal of the law's influence on adult education practices.

Exhibit 4. Examples of programs that link basic and occupational skills instruction

A SHARED CURRICULUM WITH CO-TEACHING: *While an occupational instructor teaches a community college Construction Technology curriculum, a basic skills instructor provides in-class support to adult learners in reading, mathematics, or English language acquisition based on lessons co-planned by both instructors.*[1]

CONCURRENT INSTRUCTION: *Community college instructors provide college readiness and credit-bearing occupational instruction for a healthcare profession while the same learners are also enrolled in a course with basic skills instruction in mathematics and reading for high school equivalency testing. The basic skills instructor uses materials related to healthcare but based on an independent curriculum.*[2]

[1] Information extracted from SBAS Career Pathways description in Alamprese, J. A., & Cheng, I-F. (2021, February). *Compendium of innovative practices: Adult education bridge programs and Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs*. Manhattan Strategy Group and Abt Associates. https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/compendium-of-innovative-practices-ae-bridge-iet-programs.pdf

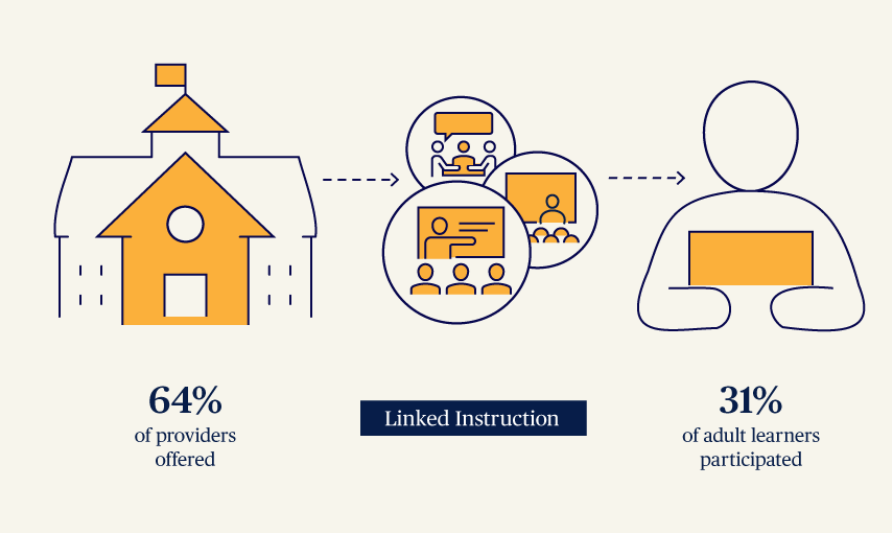
[2] Information extracted from De La Rosa, O. (2020, November 17). *The power of partnerships: Aligning with adult education to expand reach and opportunity through ATB*. Presented at Ability to Benefit Virtual Symposium. https://coabe.org/ability-to-benefit/

- ***Most providers reported linking their basic skills instruction with occupational training for at least some of their program offerings.*** As of 2018–19, nearly two thirds (64 percent) of providers said at least one form of linked instruction was available to some learners (exhibit 5 and appendix table B.3). The different forms of linked instruction were offered by about the same percentage of providers (appendix table B.3). Providers that are community-based organizations (CBOs)—such as private, nonprofit community centers—were the least likely to offer linked instruction, whereas community and technical colleges, along with correctional institutions, were the most likely to offer this instruction (47 percent compared with 74 and 72 percent, respectively; appendix table B.6). Possibly reflecting the intended move under WIOA toward more workforce-oriented programming, it is worth noting that CBOs represented a smaller share of adult education programs in 2018–19 than in the past (16 percent compared to 24 percent in 2001–02; appendix table C.1), while community and technical colleges represented a larger share (29 percent compared to 17 percent in 2001–02).

- ***However, only an estimated one third of adult learners appear to have participated in linked instruction in 2018–19.*** Although most providers had begun to implement linked instruction in at least some of their

programs, the majority of adult education courses offered in each of those programs did not include linked instruction (appendix table B.4). Combined with information from providers on program-level enrollment, this suggests that an estimated one-third of learners—380,000 out of the 1.2 million who participated in adult education—experienced linked instruction (exhibit 5 and appendix table B.5).

Exhibit 5. Basic skills instruction linked with occupational training: Availability and participation, 2018-19



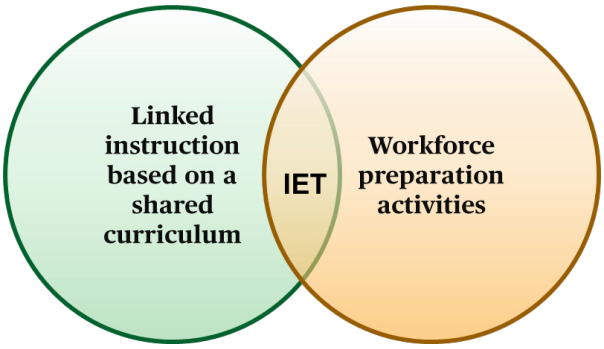
NOTE: Estimates are based on providers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Study of the Implementation of Adult Education, 2019-20.

FEWER PROVIDERS REPORTED OFFERING INTEGRATED EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSTRUCTION—A PARTICULAR TYPE OF LINKED INSTRUCTION EMPHASIZED UNDER WIOA

IET is one of only two newly defined and funded programs under WIOA.[11] IET programs include linked instruction that is based on a shared curriculum that includes workforce preparation activities (exhibit 6). Workforce preparation activities are intended to grow skills and competencies that adult learners need to be successful in the workplace, such as critical thinking, digital skills, self-management, and working with others. Workforce preparation activities might involve adapting instruction to mimic workplace expectations, such as working in groups, locating information, and using technology to learn and communicate. These competencies are often referred to as *employability skills*.

IET programs also have other features. For instance, IET programs are required to incorporate academic standards intended to prepare individuals for college and careers, focus on occupations that are locally in demand, and include support services designed to help learners enter and progress along a career pathway. Two examples of IET programs are provided in exhibit 7.

Exhibit 6. Components of Integrated Education and Training (IET) instruction



WIOA incentivizes the implementation of IET in two ways. First, it does so through a key funding change. For the first time, the legislation allows providers to use Title II adult education funds for occupational skills training, as long as it is part of an IET program. Before WIOA, if providers offered occupational training in their programs, they were required to fund it through other sources. This change gives providers more flexibility in how they fund IET. Second, as noted above, WIOA requires states to report the number of learners who participate in IET separately for each of the three main program types (ABE, ASE, and ESL). This sends a message that providers should offer IET, and that they should do so for learners regardless of their literacy, numeracy, and English proficiency levels. The extent to which adult education providers use IET with their learners is one possible signal of whether WIOA's approaches to incentivizing this type of instruction are working.

Exhibit 7. Examples of Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs

IET WITH CO-TEACHING: *An occupational instructor teaches a community college Certified Nursing Assistant curriculum, with a basic skills instructor teaching reading, mathematics, or English language acquisition for at least half the class time based on lessons co-planned by the instructors. The instruction also includes workforce preparation activities such as clinical placements and advising on course taking and career planning.*[1]

IET WITH COORDINATED INSTRUCTION: *An occupational instructor teaches an entry-level welder curriculum at a local school district's career center, while learners also receive basic skills instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics through an online academic skills lab. Basic skills and occupational training partners do not share a classroom, but they provide coordinated instruction through monthly meetings and a curriculum they develop on the basis of a shared set of academic standards.*[2] *The instruction also includes workplace preparation activities such as externships with local employers and career advising.*[3]

[1] Information extracted from I-BEST description in Gardiner, K., & Juras, R. (2019). *Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) cross-program implementation and impact study findings* (OPRE Report #2019-32). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/pathways-advancing-careers-and-education-pace-cross-program-implementation-and-impact

[2] The shared standards are the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education. For more information on these standards, see https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CCRStandardsAdultEd.pdf

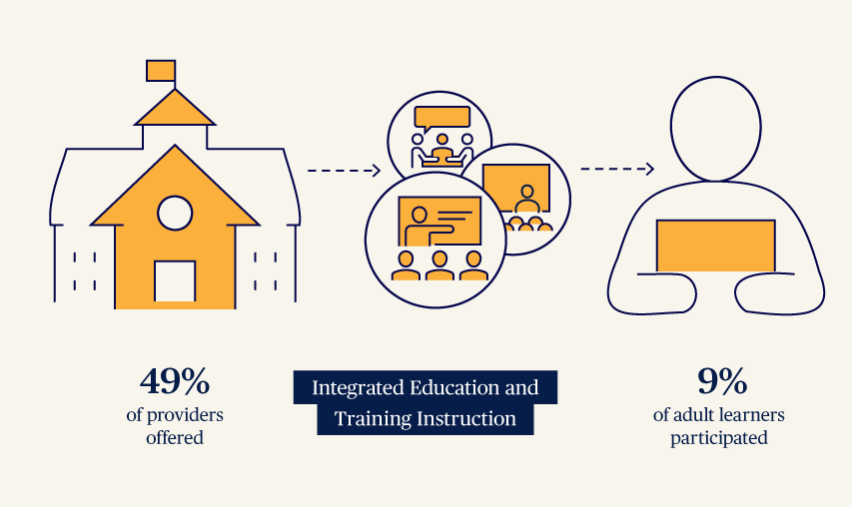
[3] Information extracted from Career Training at Wayne Township Adult Education description in Alamprese, J. A., & Cheng, I-F. (2021, August). *Compendium of innovative practices: Holistic approach to adult education services*. Manhattan Strategy Group and Abt Associates. https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/holistic-approach-adult-education-services.pdf

- ***Approximately half of providers reported offering IET instruction.*** In 2018-19, 49 percent of providers reported offering IET within at least some of their ABE, ASE, and ESL programs (exhibit 8 and appendix table B.7). As was the case with linked instruction more generally, CBOs were the least likely provider type to report offering linked instruction in the form of IET (appendix table B.11).
- ***However, very few learners appear to have participated in IET instruction in 2018-19, based on study calculations.*** Only about one in five providers (21 percent) indicated offering IET in all their programs (appendix table B.7). Providers reported offering IET just as often in ABE, ASE, and ESL programs, as intended under WIOA. However, when providers did report offering IET, it was typically in less than half of their courses in those programs (appendix table B.8). Combined with information on enrollment in each

provider's programs, this suggests that an estimated 111,000 learners participated in IET, or just under 10 percent of adult learners enrolled (exhibit 8 and appendix table B.9).

- ***Over a third of providers found it challenging to develop and implement IET early in WIOA implementation, which is one hypothesis for its more limited availability and estimated participation.***[12] Among the WIOA reforms asked about during the study, developing or implementing IET was one of the two reforms providers identified most often as "very challenging" (39 percent, as shown in exhibit 9 and appendix table B.10; the same share reported having instructional staff who have the time or expertise to implement changes in the law as being "very challenging"). Findings from a recent study of IET implementation in several colleges echo these reports. For many occupational instructors, the courses were their first experience teaching basic skills learners, whereas basic skills instructors needed to learn occupational content quickly.[13,14]

Exhibit 8. Integrated Education and Training instruction: Availability and participation, 2018-19

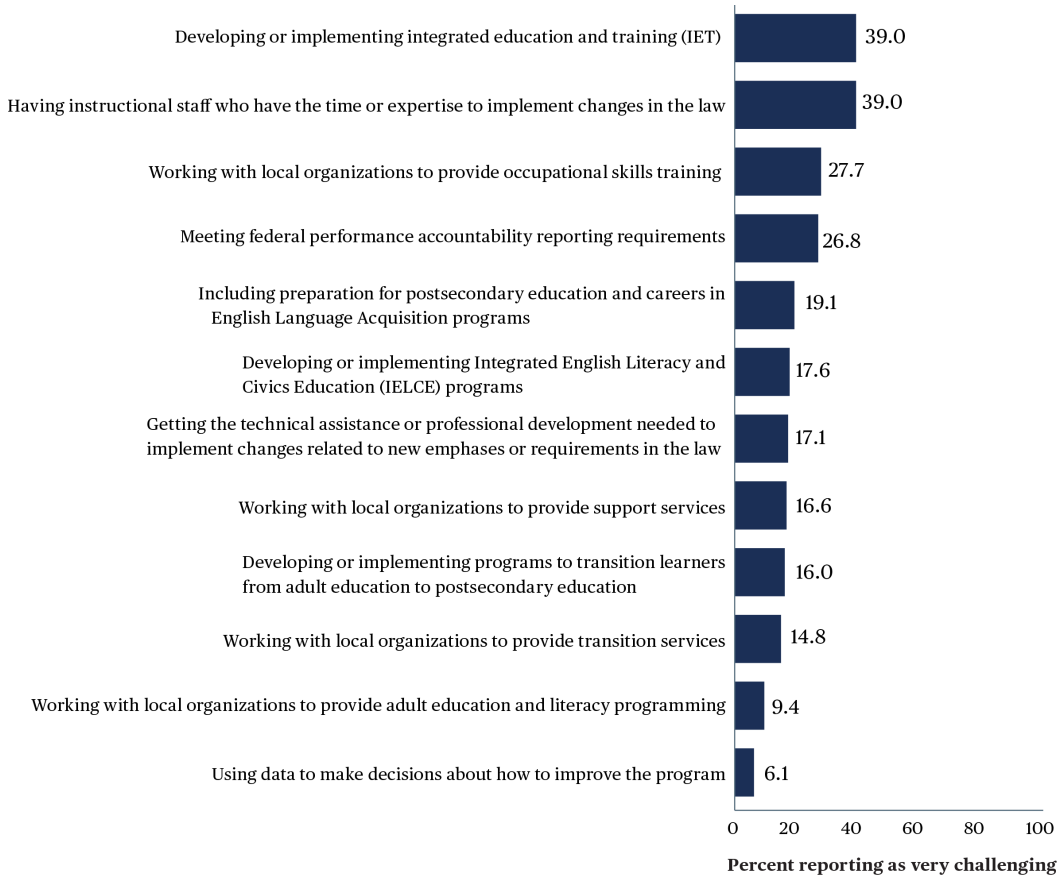


NOTE: Estimates are based on providers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Study of the Implementation of Adult Education, 2019-20.

INSTRUCTION DESIGNED TO "BRIDGE" LEARNERS TO OTHER SKILL-BUILDING PROGRAMS IS MORE COMMON

In addition to linked instruction, many adult education providers implement another approach—typically referred to as *bridge instruction*—that is consistent with WIOA's priority for linking adult education to workforce development. Bridge instruction is designed to encourage learners into and along a career pathway by intentionally helping them transition from adult education to occupational skills training, postsecondary education, or both (exhibit 10). For instance, bridge instruction specifically designed to improve learners' preparation for credit-bearing college courses can include instruction in writing and mathematics; preparation for taking secondary credential exams and/or college placement exams; or the skills and logistical knowledge needed in a college setting, such as study skills and accessing advising and financial aid.[15] Bridge instruction designed to prepare learners to move directly into occupational training can include, for example, the use of occupational content and materials in adult basic skills instruction or occupational training boot camps. It can even include "pre-IET" activities, such as IET preparation courses designed to help learners transition to IET programs. Because bridge instruction focuses on helping learners make a specific type of transition, it tends to be short term.[16]

Exhibit 9. Reforms described by providers as very challenging under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 2018–19



NOTE: Estimates are based on providers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Study of the Implementation of Adult Education, 2019–20.

Although bridge instruction is not new, it takes on added significance under WIOA. The stated purpose of adult education now explicitly includes assisting learners in transitioning to postsecondary education and training, including through career pathways. This priority is further underscored by the reshaping of allowable ESL programming to include a focus on transitions. As described in the next section, WIOA also brought changes to the Title II performance measures to include the attainment of a postsecondary credential.[17] Bridge instruction therefore aligns with this new reporting requirement and represents another instructional approach that providers can use to link adult education and workforce development. How widely adult education providers use bridge instruction to facilitate learners' transition to further education or training could be an indication of how well adult education is moving toward achieving WIOA's priority.

- ***The vast majority of providers reported offering bridge instruction in at least some of their courses and programs, most frequently as a ramp to postsecondary education.*** Most providers (85 percent; exhibit 11) reported offering instruction designed to transition learners to occupational skills training or postsecondary education in 2018–19, with bridge to postsecondary instruction being the most common type offered (82 percent; appendix table B.12). The high level of reporting for bridge instruction may reflect the many forms it can take, or the perception by providers that much of their programming is directed toward a next step in training or jobs.

Exhibit 10. Examples of bridge programs

BRIDGE TO IET: *A basic skills instructor for a local school district teaches reading and writing in a short-term boot camp using materials intended to prepare learners for the district's healthcare IET programs. In addition to basic skills instruction, the program offers workforce preparation activities that include a career exploration and planning project.*[1]

BRIDGE TO POSTSECONDARY OR WORKFORCE: *A basic skills instructor teaches a state college's developmental writing, developmental mathematics, and computer applications curricula in combination with learning strategies and career exploration. Later in the program, a state labor agency staff member provides a training on writing a resume and cover letter, and the basics of customer service. Learners can also take introductory college courses taught by the state college's faculty or participate in work-based learning in healthcare, business, or trades.*[2]

[1] Information extracted from a description of PIVA Boot Camp in Alamprese, J. A., & Cheng, I-F. (2021, February). *Compendium of innovative practices: Adult education bridge programs and Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs*. Manhattan Strategy Group and Abt Associates. https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/compendium-of-innovative-practices-ae-bridge-iet-programs.pdf

[2] Information extracted from a description of Connections 101 in Alamprese, J. A., & Cheng, I-F. (2021, February). *Compendium of innovative practices: Adult education bridge programs and Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs*. Manhattan Strategy Group and Abt Associates. https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/compendium-of-innovative-practices-ae-bridge-iet-programs.pdf

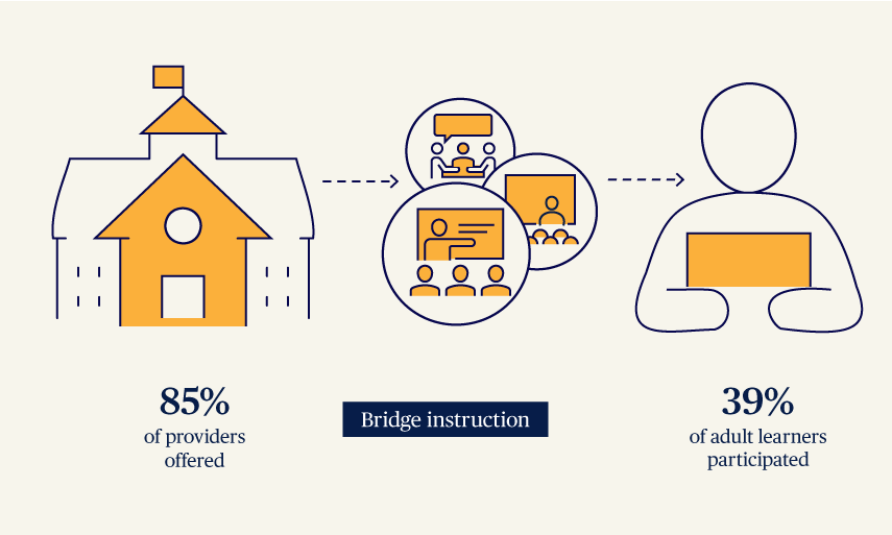
- ***More learners are estimated to have participated in bridge instruction than instruction that simultaneously links basic skills and occupational training, although bridge instruction is still being offered to a minority of learners.*** More than half (61 percent) of providers reported offering bridge instruction in all their programs (ABE, ASE, and/or ESL) in 2018-19 (appendix table B.12). This instruction typically was offered within less than half of their courses in those programs but seems to have reached an estimated 470,000 learners—nearly 40 percent of those enrolled in Title II-funded adult education (exhibit 11; appendix tables B.13 and B.14).

PROVIDERS REPORTED COLLABORATING WITH WORKFORCE PARTNERS IN MOST WAYS WIOA ENVISIONED, BUT KEY NEW REQUIREMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES ARE CHALLENGING FOR SOME

WIOA also seeks to strengthen the connection between adult education and workforce development through requirements for workforce development partners to work together in planning and providing services. Collaboration is intended to streamline and coordinate services so that partners operate efficiently and key stakeholders—including program participants and employers—can access services more easily. Workforce development partners generally include employment, vocational rehabilitation, and adult education and postsecondary education agencies or service providers, and they may include other types of organizations that provide support services to their program participants.

Previous legislation also prioritized collaboration among workforce development partners, principally by means of a requirement that they coordinate services through local American Job Centers, often referred to as "one-stops." These one-stops were created as part of a coordinated system overseen by the U.S. Department of Labor that provides—under one roof—training referrals, career counseling, job listings, and other employment-related services to job seekers.

Exhibit 11. Instruction meant to bridge to occupational skills training, postsecondary education, or both: Availability and participation, 2018–19



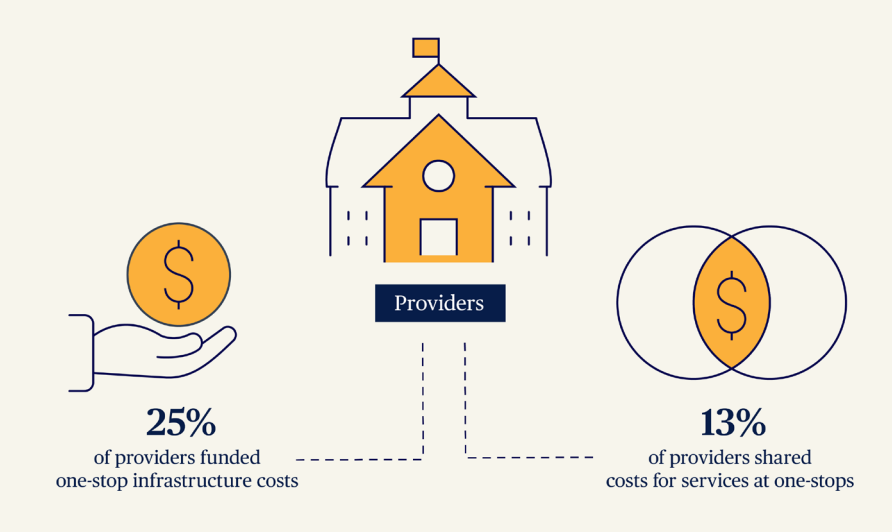
NOTE: Estimates are based on providers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Study of the Implementation of Adult Education, 2019–20.

However, ensuring collaboration among workforce development partners is required in several additional ways under WIOA at the federal, state, and local levels. For example, WIOA requires that state agencies awarding grants to adult education providers consider in these decisions whether the providers will coordinate with other education, training, and social service resources in the local community. Local providers are required to coordinate curricula and planned services with their local workforce development boards, in an effort to improve the responsiveness of their services to the needs of local employers. Local workforce development boards must review adult education providers' applications for Title II grants before they are submitted, to ensure this coordination takes place. Joint funding is another method of collaboration emphasized in WIOA that is intended to streamline and increase access to employment-related services across workforce development partners. For instance, the legislation now requires that adult education providers contribute funds to support their local one-stops. The nature of collaboration in 2018–19, particularly the types of coordination that the new law introduced, may provide some signal of how WIOA implementation is progressing.

- ***The vast majority of providers were already collaborating with workforce partners early in WIOA implementation, mostly to coordinate basic skills instruction across programs and provide transition supports.*** Perhaps building on efforts undertaken under prior laws, most providers (84 percent) reported collaborating with workforce development partners in 2018–19 to offer basic skills instruction, occupational skills training within their programs, or transition services such as college and career advising (appendix table B.16). Coordinating basic skills instruction was the most often reported area of collaboration (78 percent reporting), for example by adult education providers offering English language instruction to a local employment agency's job-training participants. Nearly the same share of providers reported collaborating to provide transition services to adult learners (72 percent) or to provide occupational skills training to adult education learners (62 percent). The latter may align with efforts to link basic and occupational skills, as described earlier in this report, and also providers' new ability under WIOA to pay for occupational skills–training costs using their own Title II funds, as long as the occupational skills training is part of an IET program.[18]

- ***Partnering to provide occupational skills training appears challenging for some.*** Although 62 percent of providers reported collaborating with other agencies or groups on occupational skills training, providers overall were more likely to rate doing so as "very challenging" (28 percent) compared with collaborating on basic skills instruction or transition services (9 percent and 15 percent, respectively; exhibit 9 and appendix table B.10). This finding echoes the share of providers reporting challenges in designing and implementing IET, a type of program in which providers often work with partners to provide the occupational skills-training component.
- ***Provider funding of one-stop partners is not prevalent so far.*** Although required under WIOA, only a quarter of providers reported paying funds to support one-stops (referred to in WIOA as "infrastructure funding"), and even fewer reported spending on shared services at one-stops (exhibit 12 and appendix table B.17). It is possible that state adult education agencies are negotiating with partners and paying the infrastructure costs on behalf of their providers, but more information is needed to fully understand whether WIOA's joint funding provisions are being implemented as expected.[19]

Exhibit 12. Provider-reported funding to support infrastructure and shared services through one-stop centers, 2018–19



NOTE: Estimates are based on providers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Study of the Implementation of Adult Education, 2019-20.

EXPANDED PERFORMANCE REPORTING DESIGNED TO MAKE ADULT EDUCATION ACCOUNTABLE FOR LEARNERS' WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES IS COMPLICATED BY DATA CHALLENGES

WIOA's performance reporting holds adult education responsible for helping learners not only to improve their basic skills but also to progress along a career pathway and succeed in the labor market. For example, WIOA introduced the possibility of reduced federal funding for states not meeting their performance goals in these areas.[20] WIOA also added a requirement for states to consider providers' past performance on learner outcomes such as obtaining credentials in making decisions about future funding.[21] To allow stakeholders in the federal workforce development system—including Congress—to assess whether adult education is delivering these outcomes for its learners, WIOA requires performance reporting at the federal, state, and local levels on a set of

workforce-related outcomes. For adult education, local providers report to the state agency that administers their WIOA Title II grants, which then combines the data to provide state-level information to the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). OCTAE then reports state- and national-level information to the public and to Congress.

While performance reporting is not new under WIOA, the law substantially changed and expanded the outcomes that adult education must submit (exhibit 13).[22] For instance, WIOA now requires adult education to collect data and report on the same set of outcome measures that all other core workforce development partners use each program year, and to report on most of these outcomes for every learner.[23] These common outcomes are intended to reinforce the purpose of the workforce development system, which is to improve adults' employment and economic prospects. WIOA's predecessor already required providers to include measures of learners' skill gains while in the adult education program, secondary credentials obtained, and employment status after learners leave the program. However, under WIOA, providers must also collect information on wages and attainment of postprogram postsecondary credentials. Importantly, WIOA also requires that both the number of learners served and their outcomes be reported separately for learners who face potential barriers to employment—such as single parents, ex-offenders, and those experiencing homelessness—and by race, ethnicity, sex, and age. Whether these new performance-reporting policies shift adult education implementation or outcomes in the desired ways will likely depend on data quality and use.

Exhibit 13. Scope of performance outcomes reported under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act versus the Workforce Investment Act

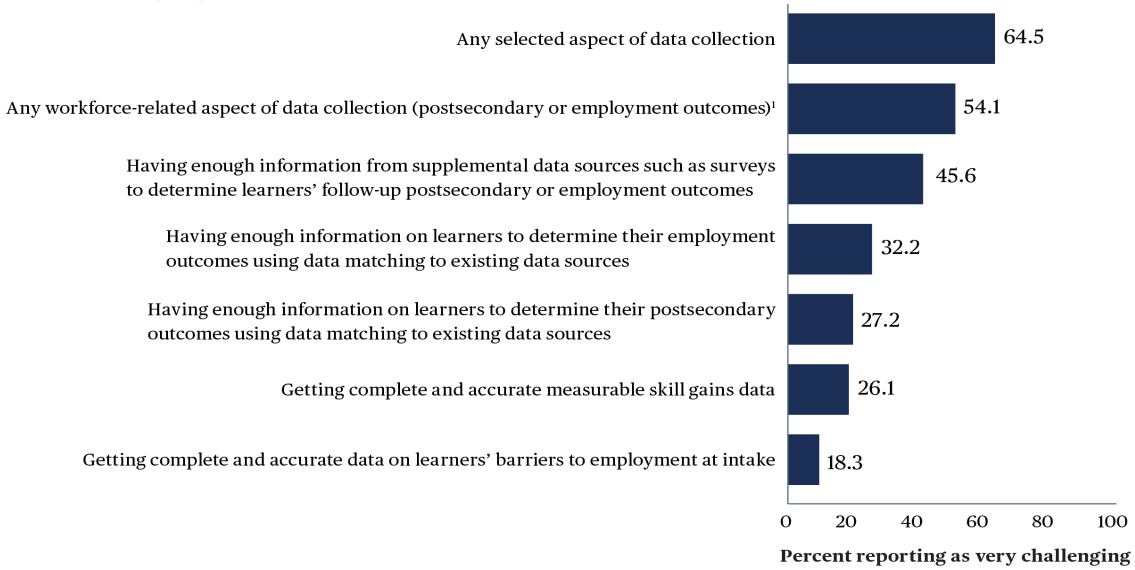
Outcome	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2014)	Workforce Investment Act (1998)
Measurable skill gain	Reported for all learners. Includes: • Basic skills gains • Entry into postsecondary education • Attainment of a high school equivalency (HSE) credential	Not reported. However: • Basic skills gains reported for all learners • Entry into postsecondary education reported for a subset of learners • Attainment of HSE credential reported for a subset of learners
Credential attainment (secondary or postsecondary)	Reported for a subset of learners	Not reported, although attainment of HSE credential was reported for a subset of learners
Employment	Reported for all learners at their 2nd and 4th quarters after program exit	Reported for a subset of learners at their 1st and 3rd quarters after program exit
Median earnings	Reported for all learners who are employed in the 2nd quarter after exit	Not reported

- ***Some providers reported challenges with performance reporting, particularly with getting data on learners' workforce development outcomes after leaving the program.*** Under WIOA's expanded reporting requirements, more than one-quarter of providers (27 percent) said that meeting federal performance accountability reporting requirements, in general, was very challenging (exhibit 9 and appendix table B.10). This may be due in part to difficulties with gathering the information needed to fulfill those requirements. Although most providers (64 percent) found at least one aspect of collecting the data needed for performance reporting to be very challenging, collecting workforce-related data appeared particularly problematic. Just over half of providers (54 percent) indicated that aspects of collecting data on workforce-related outcomes, such as having enough information to match learner data with administrative records that included information on postsecondary and employment outcomes, was very challenging (exhibits 14 and appendix tables B.18).

A U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) study provides additional context for understanding the potential challenges in collecting outcomes data under WIOA. In the 2016 study conducted in three states, GAO found that missing identifying information—such as missing Social Security numbers—was a frequent problem for collecting data on learner outcomes for performance reporting.[24] For employment outcomes, federal guidance requires that state quarterly employment records be used if available, and other sources can be used if they are not.[25] The absence of Social Security numbers can make it difficult to reliably match learners to employment records in state databases. In these cases, and in states where privacy laws prevent the collection of learner Social Security numbers, providers must collect the outcomes data themselves.[26] The use of surveys, a common alternative to using Social Security numbers for data matching, comes with its own challenges. Surveying requires providers to track down learners at multiple time points after they exit the program and can therefore yield low response rates.[27]

- ***Still, most providers reported using performance data frequently for performance improvement purposes.*** Reflecting the intent of WIOA, most providers reported using performance data often to assess their programs; roughly 75 percent indicated using data at least monthly (appendix table B.19). This suggests that providers are using data for more than just annual accountability performance reporting. In fact, providers reported that performance information was "very important" for a variety of program improvement purposes, such as determining what changes were needed to curricula or assessing staff needs for technical assistance or professional development (65 percent and 55 percent of providers, respectively; appendix table B.20). Although many providers found some aspects of collecting these data challenging, few providers found it challenging to use them in practice. Fewer than 10 percent of providers reported that using data for program improvement was "very challenging" (appendix table B.10).

Exhibit 14. Aspects of data collection for performance reporting described by providers as very challenging, 2018–19



[1] Includes having enough information on learners to determine their postsecondary outcomes using data matching to existing data sources; having enough information on learners to determine their employment outcomes using data matching to existing data sources; and having enough information from supplemental data sources such as surveys to determine learners' follow-up postsecondary or employment outcomes.

NOTE: Estimates are based on providers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Study of the Implementation of Adult Education, 2019-20.

LOOKING AHEAD

This report examined the extent to which adult education practices in 2018–19 reflected WIOA's goal of strengthening the connection between adult education and the workforce development system. The report's findings provide evidence of providers' taking steps toward WIOA's vision but also point to questions about opportunities and challenges that can accelerate or hinder further progress, respectively:

- ***Are new funding and partnership provisions helping to achieve WIOA's objective to increase IET?*** IET instruction appears to be reaching a small fraction of learners, despite its encouragement through funding flexibilities and other changes in WIOA. Although nearly two-thirds of providers reported that they collaborated with partners to provide occupational skills training, this collaboration was not necessarily for the expansion of IET. Partnering with other organizations that can provide expertise or additional funding for the occupational skills–training component of IET may be one way that adult education providers could overcome challenges to developing and implementing IET and expand their capacity to offer it. For example, organizations funded under WIOA Titles I and III can provide occupational training to adult learners as a shared service with Title II-funded providers. However, findings from this study revealed that more than three-quarters of providers reported that the occupational skills-training component of their IET programs did *not* draw on WIOA Titles I and III funding in 2018–19 (appendix table B.21), indicating that providers were not capitalizing on the full array of funding opportunities provided by Congress for workforce development. Providers may need greater clarity about WIOA's funding options and/or more support for collaborating with occupational training partners to help address challenges in providing IET and to expand the number of learners who participate in this type of instruction.
- ***Can WIOA's shifts in performance-reporting requirements for adult education be a useful lever for improving workforce outcomes?*** Determining learners' postsecondary and employment outcomes after they have left an adult education program—whether through matching with administrative databases, surveys, or other means—was a challenge for many providers during the early stages of WIOA implementation. These data difficulties were neither concentrated in particular states nor limited to certain types of providers, such as local education agencies or community-based organizations. Rather, these difficulties were reported most frequently by providers that serve the largest numbers of learners (appendix table B.22). Providers reported that they rely on performance information like postsecondary and employment outcomes in their program improvement efforts. However, without accurate and complete data on these types of workforce outcomes, the value in using these data may be limited.

Additional findings from this study are available in its compendium report.[28]

ENDNOTES

[1] Literacy estimates are based on U.S. adults between ages 16 and 74. Calculated from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) in 2012, 2014, and 2017.

[2] English proficiency estimates are based on U.S. adults ages 18 and older who reported speaking English "not well" or "not at all." Calculated from ACS 5-year microdata (2014–2018).

[3] Most notably, the 1960s brought the first legislation that established the Adult Basic Education program.[3] The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964—landmark legislation intended to reduce poverty by addressing inequities in education and employment—authorized funding for instruction and other services meant to improve adult literacy, numeracy, and language proficiency. For details on the history of adult education in the United States, see: https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/Adult_Ed_History_Report.pdf.

[4] See section 2 of WIOA at https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-113publ128/pdf/PLAW-113publ128.pdf for the full statement of the law's purpose.

[5] In program year 2018-19, Congress authorized $616,955,000 for services provided under WIOA's Title II. The program year began July 1, 2018, and ended June 30, 2019.

[6] Enrollment reported for ESL includes enrollment in Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education, a program newly created under WIOA that represents about 30 percent of the overall enrollment in ESL.

[7] Although estimates were calculated for urban, rural, and suburban settings, there were no clear patterns of findings by type of setting. For this reason, findings by type of setting are not reported on in the text.

[8] Cronen, S., Diffenderffer, A., & Medway, R. (2023). *National Study of the Implementation of Adult Education: Compendium of local provider and state director survey results* (NCEE 2023-001c). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. http://ies.ed.gov/ncee

[9] Although WIOA was passed in 2014, its requirements were phased in over multiple years. Similarly, different states awarded new grants under WIOA at different times.

[10] Cronen, S., Diffenderffer, A., & Medway, R. (2023). *National Study of the Implementation of Adult Education: Compendium of local provider and state director survey results* (NCEE 2023-001c). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. http://ies.ed.gov/ncee

[11] The second program newly defined and funded under WIOA is Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education.

[12] The survey included several questions about the extent to which various aspects of providing adult education and literacy services or collecting data to meet performance reporting requirements under WIOA were challenging. Respondents were given the following instructions: "By 'challenging' we mean the complexity involved in tackling an issue, the level of effort required, or the number of obstacles you faced." The response options for these items included, "Not at all challenging," "Slightly challenging," "Moderately challenging," "Very challenging," and "Not applicable." The percentages cited are based on

the full population of providers, meaning that providers who responded "Not applicable" are included in the denominator.

[13] Glosser, A., Martinson, K., Cho, S. W., & Gardiner, K. (2018). *Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program in three colleges: Implementation and early impact report* (OPRE Report No. 2018-87). Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

[14] Another hypothesis for the limited IET offerings and participation seen at this stage is that it simply takes more time to develop, implement, and scale these programs, and then to develop effective recruitment campaigns to increase enrollment. Other hypotheses are more related to attitudes about IET. For instance, some providers may not offer IET because they serve learners who they assume will not be interested in it or because the providers themselves do not value it.

[15] For an in-depth description of the components of postsecondary bridge programs and common approaches to providing this type of programming, see: Rutschow, E. Z. (2019). Transitioning adult literacy students to postsecondary education. In D. Perin (Ed.), *The Wiley handbook of adult literacy* (Ch. 24, pp. 517–539). Wiley.

[16] For example, the Plugged in Virginia IET healthcare bootcamps last 8 weeks, as does the bridge instruction embedded within Central States SER's Healthcare Careers Pathway. The Plugged in Virginia IET healthcare bootcamp was described in Alamprese, J. A., & Cheng, I-F. (2021, February). *Compendium of innovative practices: Adult education bridge programs and Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs*. Manhattan Strategy Group and Abt Associates. https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/compendium-of-innovative-practices-ae-bridge-iet-programs.pdf. The Central States SER healthcare career pathway was described in the Illinois Community College Board's *Creating a Successful Bridge Program: A "How To" Guide* (2012). http://www2.iccb.org/iccb/wp-content/pdfs/shiftinggears/ICCB_2012BridgeGuide_web_REV_FEB13.pdf

[17] Note that WIOA did not define what was intended to be included as a postsecondary credential. Later joint federal guidance defined a "recognized postsecondary credential" as a credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the state involved or federal government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree. A recognized postsecondary credential is awarded in recognition of an individual's attainment of measurable technical or industry/occupational skills necessary to obtain employment or advance within an industry/occupation. These technical or industry/occupational skills generally are based on standards developed or endorsed by employers or industry associations. See https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/octae-program-memo-17-2.pdf for the full definition.

[18] In support of this point, the majority of providers (72 percent) reported using at least some Title II funds to pay for the occupational training component of their IET program in 2018-19 (table B.21).

[19] In a study of WIOA implementation in four states, findings suggest that states varied in the ways in which they supported the establishment of agreements for funding one-stops and in the extent to which WIOA partners were paying these costs as of 2017. For more information on this study, see https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/WIOA_Study_EarlyInsights_FINAL508.pdf.

[20] Under section 116(f)(1)(B) of WIOA, if a state program has a performance failure for two consecutive years—or if a state does not report on its performance—discretionary funds provided to its governor's office under section 128(a) of WIOA may be reduced by 5 percent of the maximum available amount for the next program year. Performance failures may occur if a state's performance is below the level negotiated with the federal program, after adjusting for economic and other conditions in the state that may have affected performance. The process for determining performance success or failure is detailed in Training Employment Guidance Letter No. 11-19 at http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL_11-19_acc.pdf.

[21] The requirement for states to consider providers' past performance in making funding decisions is specified in Section 231(e) of WIOA.

[22] For a summary of other aspects of accountability reporting that changed under WIOA, see https://nrsweb.org/policy-data/WIOA-Reporting-Changes.

[23] WIOA's other core programs are the Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth programs (Title I), the Wagner-Peyser Act employment service program (Title III), and the vocational rehabilitation program (Title IV). The partner agencies that oversee those programs include the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education.

[24] For findings from a U.S. Government Accountability Office report on challenges states were experiencing early under WIOA related to performance reporting, see: U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2016). *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Information on planned changes to state performance reporting and related challenges. Report to Congressional Committees* (GAO-16-287). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED572248.pdf.

[25] For more information about federal guidance on data collection for federal reporting requirements, see https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/octae-program-memo-17-6.pdf.

[26] For findings related to state privacy laws, see: U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2016). *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Information on planned changes to state performance reporting and related challenges. Report to Congressional Committees* (GAO-16-287). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED572248.pdf

[27] As of 2015-16, the most recent year for which information on state data collection methods is publicly available, a little over a third of states were using follow-up surveys or a combination of surveys and data matching for employment and other types of outcomes. For details, see figure 2 of the Title II Report to Congress at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/aefla-rtc-py2015-508-final.pdf.

[28] Cronen, S., Diffenderffer, A., & Medway, R. (2023). *National Study of the Implementation of Adult Education: Compendium of local provider and state director survey results* (NCEE 2023-001c). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. http://ies.ed.gov/ncee

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DISCLOSURE OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The research team for this evaluation included staff from the American Institutes for Research and its subcontractor, Safal Partners. None of the research team members has financial interests that could be affected by findings from this study. No members of the technical working group, which convened twice by the research team over the course of the study to provide advice and guidance, have financial interests that could be affected by findings from the evaluation.