

JFF Announces Accelerating Opportunity Initiative – A Funding Collaboration to Provide Adults with Needed Credentials

The U.S. continues to face a growing skills gap, with many adults lacking the training and education they need to attain and succeed in family-sustaining jobs. Helping these adults compete for and succeed in middle-income jobs earn the credentials and training they need is crucial to increasing employment and strengthening the nation's economy.

To help meet the need, [Jobs for the Future \(JFF\)](#) recently [announced](#) the five states that will each receive a \$1.6 million grant to assist more workers to earn the credentials needed for competitive jobs, through innovative adult education programs. These grants to Illinois, Kansas, [Kentucky](#), [Louisiana](#), and [North Carolina](#) are part of [Accelerating Opportunity: A Breaking Through Initiative](#), an \$18.5 million strategic collaboration of philanthropies, including the Bill & Melinda Gates, Joyce, W.K. Kellogg, Kresge, Open Society, and University of Phoenix foundations.

The initiative is designed to help underprepared workers in today's job market. Some 26 million adults in the U.S. lack a high school diploma. Over 2.5 million of them are enrolled in adult basic education (ABE) programs, but many of them withdraw after only one or two semesters without having earned any postsecondary credential. Accelerating Opportunity seeks to create effective pathways for many more adults through fundamental change in the structure and delivery of ABE at state and institutional levels thereby increasing the number of individuals who complete credentials of value in the labor market and enter the workplace with competitive skills.

Each of the five states has a leadership team that represents a collaboration of higher education agencies, the governor's office, state workforce development agencies, state data agencies, leading community colleges, and employers or employer associations in industry sectors with strong labor demand and career advancement potential. The hope is that this multistate, four-year initiative will address policy-based, systemic and programmatic barriers to student success, enabling many more adults to succeed in their pursuit of postsecondary credentials.

In this effort, Accelerating Opportunity will use evidence-based instructional and organizational models, such as Washington state's experience implementing and scaling up its [Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training \(I-BEST\)](#) program. Another component of Accelerating Opportunity is the independent evaluation program designed to ensure that the initiative is able to document best practices, and encourage growth through the addition of other state community college systems.

The Alliance for Excellent Education Releases New Report on Helping English Language Learners Meet Common Core Standards

The [Alliance for Excellent Education](#) recently released a new brief, [The Role of Language and Literacy in College- and Career-Ready Standards: Rethinking Policy and Practice in Support of English Language Learners](#). It states that by 2020, more than half of all public school students will likely have a non-English-speaking background. Nevertheless, in all college- and career-ready standards, including the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), English is embedded throughout. Thus, in order to meet these standards, the growing proportion of students who are English language learners (ELLs) must possess and be able to demonstrate an understanding of not only the subject matter being considered but also of the English language. This could be a daunting task for many.

As stated in the brief, "In the emerging workplace, students must be able to engage with complex texts, communicate effectively, think critically, and apply what they learn to novel settings." To that end, the new college- and career-ready standards offer promise. This brief describes the implementation of the new standards, with a focus on the implications for ELLs. It discusses the challenges of language acquisition, the importance to learners of connecting language proficiency to rigorous content standards, highlights of several initiatives currently under way to examine the language demands embedded in the new standards, and changes needed at the secondary school level as well as recommendations for state and local policymakers.

The brief notes that emerging technologies should enable teachers to extend instructional time for ELLs. Digital tools "can increase access to content anywhere and anytime, provide approaches to learning vocabulary and

content, support language acquisition, expand practice opportunities, and deliver timely feedback." The brief further notes that states bear the "primary responsibility" for ensuring that teachers and school leaders can provide ELLs with effective language and content-area learning, and it offers recommendations that are focused at the state level in the following four areas. First, in regard to states ensuring "robust implementation of college- and career-ready standards through close alignment, assessments, and professional development with these standards;" second, in the area of strengthening teacher preparation; third, in regard to improving the use of data by states, districts, and schools; and last, in the creation of support systems targeted to meet the needs of students who are ELLs.

The SAT Report on College and Career Readiness: 2012

Among the high school graduating class of 2012, 43 percent of all SAT takers met the "SAT Benchmark," according to [The SAT Report on College & Career Readiness: 2012](#). That report also shows that the percentage meeting the benchmark is unchanged from that of SAT takers in the class of 2011. The SAT Benchmark score of 1550 out of a possible 2400 "indicates a 65 percent probability of achieving a B- average or higher during the first year of college, which research suggests is indicative of a high likelihood of college success and completion."

The 2012 report cautions that the benchmark score is designed to assess groups of students, not individual students. The College Board, publisher of the report, recognizes a college readiness continuum made up of a variety of factors and dependent on both academic and non-academic qualities. "Many factors contribute to college readiness. A student is considered college ready when he or she has the knowledge, skills and behaviors to successfully complete a college course of study." The report notes that the benchmark is not a perfect predictor in that students scoring above 1550 can still fail college, while some scoring below it can do well. As a consequence, the College Board recommends that admissions decisions be made based on grades, recommendations and other considerations, as well as SAT results. Many four-year colleges and universities in the United States use SAT scores as a part of their admissions process because the test is a "reliable measure of college readiness as well as a fair and valid indicator of likely college success for students from all backgrounds."

The SAT College and Career Readiness Benchmark, is not the only tool provided by the College Board to measure students' college readiness. Readiness indicators are also derived from the three sections of the SAT—critical reading, mathematics, and writing. For SAT takers of the class of 2012, 49 percent achieved the readiness indicator in critical reading, 55 percent in mathematics, and 45 percent in writing.

Since 2008, SAT participation has increased six percentage points, up to 1.66 million in the class of 2012. Also since 2008, critical reading scores have declined by four points, writing scores have declined by five points, and mathematics scores have remained stable.

Attesting to the importance of a rigorous high school curriculum, the report shows that the SAT performance of students in the class of 2012 "continues to reinforce the value of a rigorous high school education. Data confirm that students who complete a core curriculum and enroll in honors and/or of Advanced Placement courses perform better on the SAT." The report also provides additional details on academic achievement and the characteristics of students, including demographic and other non-academic information.

Advancing CTE in State and Local Career Pathway Systems

OVAE invites you to apply to participate in Advancing Career and Technical Education (CTE) in State and Local Career Pathways Systems to assist your state in building its capacity to integrate CTE Programs of Study (POS) into its broader career pathways system development efforts. Five states will be selected through a competitive application process to participate in this two-year project, which is managed by Jobs for the Future through a contract with OVAE. For the application overview, materials, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), go to http://cte.ed.gov/nationalinitiatives/advancing_cte.cfm. The deadline for submission of state applications is 5:00 PM EST, Dec. 10, 2012. Please address questions to Mary Clagett, director for workforce policy, Jobs for the Future, mclagett@jff.org.