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Shortage of Degrees in 35 States, Lack of Support for Working Adults Attending College

Report compares states on their performance in adult learning

CHICAGO - A new report compares how states perform on educating adults, and shows that significant numbers of Americans have been left behind. In 35 states, more than 60% of the adult population has not completed an associate degree or higher. Despite the fact that adults comprise a growing share of the total enrollment in postsecondary institutions, 32 states cannot catch up to the best performing countries internationally by relying solely on traditional 18-to-24-year-old-students. In terms of financial aid, the report found that 17 states do not provide any need-based aid to part time students. This disproportionately affects adults, many of whom have other responsibilities that necessitate part-time college attendance. Another 19 states devote less than 10% of need-based aid funds to part-timers.

The report, *Adult Learning in Focus: National and State-by-State Data*, recommends a new emphasis on those aged 25 or older to improve enrollment and graduation rate. It also finds that the barriers to higher education remain high for many adults. Funded by Lumina Foundation for Education, the Council for Adult & Experiential Learning (CAEL) produced the report, which along with a Web site documenting the findings, is available at www.cael.org/state_indicators.htm. CAEL has also produced individual state profiles, as well as a policy guide that states can use to improve their adult learning policies and practices.

Pamela Tate, President and CEO at CAEL explained, "Focusing only on K-12 programs and traditional-aged college students, while important, will not be sufficient in meeting the workforce needs of the 21st century. Better paying employment will require postsecondary education not only for the 32 million left out of the economy now, but even for those who already have some training, but are in a declining industry and need to return to school to prepare for a new careers. *Adult Learning in Focus* examines state efforts to educate these adults. We expect that its findings will be used in every state."

The U.S. is losing its historic world dominance with respect to higher levels of educational attainment for its citizens. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, six countries now surpass the U.S. in the proportion of 25-64-year-olds who have attained a postsecondary credential, while several others are already close to doing so. Data show that there are 45 million people in the U.S. untouched by postsecondary education and another 42 million with some college but no degree. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, for 12 of the 20 fastest growing occupations projected for 2006-2016, an associate degree or higher is the most significant level of postsecondary education or training.*

Most proposals about how to improve educational attainment concentrate on the established "pipeline" – the flow of young people through high school to graduation, into postsecondary education, toward a two-year associate or four-year baccalaureate degree. But even if students in all states graduate from high school at the rate of the best performing state, even if high school students in all states enter college at the rate of the best performing state, even if students graduate from college at the level of the best performing state, and even if educated immigrants continue to enter the U.S. at the levels of the recent past, the U.S. will likely be unable to regain its place of

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primacy with respect to postsecondary attainment by relying solely on strategies related to traditional age students.

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The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) is a national leader in the fields of adult learning and workforce development, providing colleges and universities, companies, labor organizations and state and local governments with the tools and strategies they need for creating practical, effective lifelong learning solutions. With a membership of over 600 colleges, universities, corporations, labor unions, associations, and individuals, CAEL is headquartered in Chicago and also maintains offices in Denver, Philadelphia, Norwalk, CT, and New York City. More information is available at www.cael.org.

Lumina Foundation for Education, an Indianapolis-based, private, independent foundation, strives to help people achieve their potential by expanding access and success in education beyond high school. Through research, grants for innovative programs and communication initiatives, Lumina Foundation addresses issues surrounding financial access and educational retention and degree or certificate attainment – particularly among underserved student groups, including adult learners. The Foundation bases its mission on the belief that postsecondary education remains one of the most beneficial investments that individuals can make in themselves and that society can make in its people.

* Referenced from:

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008-2009 Edition,

<http://www.bls.gov/oco/oco2003.htm>

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