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Lawmakers Should Focus on Adult Students, Says Report With State-by-State Data

Washington — Colleges and universities are increasingly looking for ways to lure adult students to their campuses, believing that the education of older students may well hold the ticket to bolstering local and regional economies.

But lawmakers who set state and federal higher-education policies are still largely focused on the traditional educational path of 16-to-24-year-old students from high school to a college degree, according to a new report.

The report, “Adult Learning in Focus,” has compiled, for the first time, a wealth of national and state-by-state data about how states serve their adult learners. Produced by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, the report draws on data from various sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the GED Testing Service. It also provides state-by-state profiles of how adult learners fare in individual states.

“We felt it was time to actually gather some real data on how states are doing,” said Pamela Tate, the council’s president and chief executive, in announcing the release of the report today at the National Conference of State Legislatures’ spring meeting here.

For example, many states, Ms. Tate said, do not track how many of their GED recipients go on to postsecondary education. “How do you implement policy change if you don’t have any data to base it on?” she said.

The full report, as well as the state-by-state profiles and other related materials, will be available online in coming weeks at <http://www.cael.org/adultlearninginfocus.htm>. —Libby Sander

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— SUE Apr 25, 06:23 AM #

I am very happy that this report was created. As an adult educator, I feel it is a timely study that will support the need to serve the adult learner better in institutions of higher education. Adult learners have a great deal to offer “traditional” students and faculty in classrooms and on campuses. We must engage and support them more intentionally.

— Dr. Cynthia Sims Apr 25, 10:45 AM #

It is about time that society as a whole sees the trends both in increased age of the population due to low birth rates, and the fact that modern employment trends require that one change jobs two or three times in their adult life. These facts contribute to the increase in non-traditional age learners coming to the university. Their inclusion in the conversation on how to improve education will only make the development, acquisition and distribution of knowledge that much richer and beneficial to all of society.

— Marie Nubia-Feliciano, M.S. Apr 28, 12:28 PM #