

Celebrating

50

Years
of Advancing
Adult Learners
and Workers



“Our adult learner reach is nearly
1.25 million and growing.”

–Earl Buford, President, CAEL

Rashaan Green, the 2018 winner of CAEL’s Adult Learner of the Year Award, hasn’t rested on his laurels since claiming that distinction. If anything, his growing list of accomplishments has only strengthened the never-give-up spirit that garnered him the award in the first place. To understand why, it’s important to know that Green views every advance in his own education and career pathway as a trailblazing opportunity for inspiring others. His story is one of personal persistence and a resolve to pay it forward. It makes for an apt illustration of the continuum of individual, partner, and systemic outcomes. As CAEL caps its 50th anniversary year, it also makes a fitting highlight within our special edition impact report.

[Watch his story on YouTube](#)



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A Vital Mission for the Next 50 Years

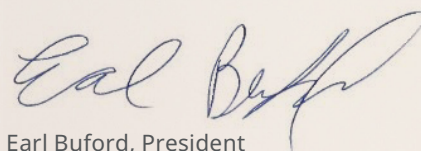
Every year, CAEL works to increase access to rewarding education-employment pathways. In that sense, new beginnings are an annual hallmark of our work, something witnessed in the most profound sense when adult learners and workers successfully navigate those pathways to career success. It's essential to consider our impact within the context of those individual journeys while also remembering they are the foundation of our collective achievements. In 2023, with the publication of our Theory of Change and our first annual impact report, we committed to a renewed intentionality around the end results made possible by new beginnings, accounting for our impact at the individual, partner, and system levels.



When it comes to compelling symbols of CAEL's comprehensive impact, one new beginning of the past year stands above the rest. 2024 marked the start of CAEL's 50th year. It was March of 1974 when CAEL, then known as the Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning, held its first meeting. Totalling 10 members and 16 months of funding, it was located at Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey. Now, as we look toward the completion of our 50th year, our adult learner reach is nearly 1.25 million and growing. Today, the CAEL community, which included over 5,300 members in 2023 and is steadily increasing, spans all 50 states plus Puerto Rico, Canada, Jamaica, Singapore, and Ireland.

We are grateful to our community of practice for helping CAEL deliver sustainable growth in our capacity for collaboration over the past year. From local and regional programs to national initiatives, we continued to leverage the power of partnerships to scale impact. In Delaware, we were honored to work with the Department of Education on the release of a state CPL policy framework, and we look forward to doing this work in other states. On a broader level, we announced the Where It Starts: Build Better Careers Initiative. Funded through a \$15.7 million Truist Foundation investment, Build Better Careers will encompass five regions, where we anticipate connecting thousands of adult learners to rewarding education-employment pathways in finance, insurance, and adjacent industries. On a national level, our 2023 work included the continuation of the Adult Learner Centered & Equity Framework for Community Colleges in a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)* Network (ALCEF), made possible by a \$1.4 million U.S. Department of Agriculture SNAP Employment and Training National Partnership Grant. To date, we have engaged with close to 100 community colleges through this project.

You'll find many more highlights from 2023 within this report, along with spotlights and reflections from our [50-year experience](#). None would have been possible without the support of the CAEL community, especially our members, and the perspective it brings from every niche of the education-employment ecosystem. That ecosystem is evolving in ways that would have been hard to imagine when CAEL was founded. But as we embark on our next 50 years, it is clear that this uncertainty only makes our mission more vital than ever. Thank you for being a part of it.

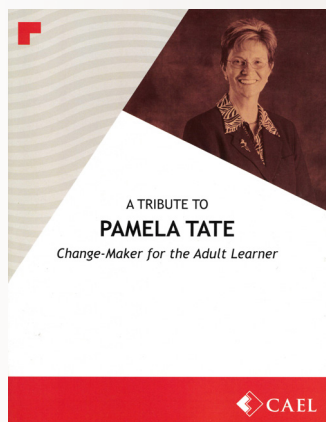
A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Earl Buford".

Earl Buford, President

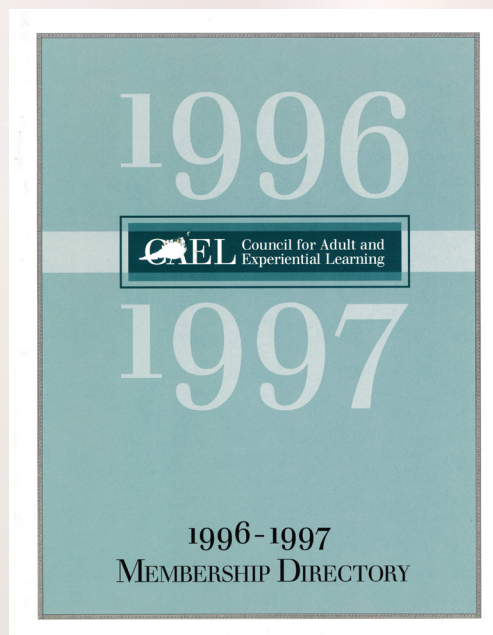
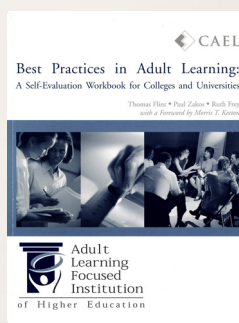
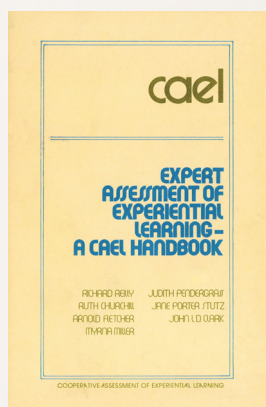
**Note: This project has been funded at least in part with federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.*

Reflections From Leaders and Partners in the Adult Learning Movement

CAEL's founder,
Morris T. Keeton,
pictured left in the '70s
(in photo at right)



The Ford Foundation funds CAEL to develop, in partnership with the Joint Education Trust (JET), a pilot workforce development project in South Africa.



"We often lose awareness of the isolation of the dozen or so institutions that came together to become CAEL. Fifty years ago, the adult education world was truly on the periphery, and the assessment of experiential learning was barely taken seriously at all. How incredible it is that, right now, thousands of institutions/organizations across the world have embraced the heart of what Morris Keeton and colleagues envisioned: a deeper understanding of what "learning" really means, and the opportunities for those who have been bypassed by conventional institutions to be recognized for what they know. What a triumph, with so much more to be done."

– Alan Mandell, SUNY Distinguished Service Professor, Empire State College, and 2023 Morris T. Keeton Award Winner

"The worlds of learning and work are facing unprecedented -- and largely unpredictable -- disruptions from the climate emergency, technology, artificial intelligence, immigration, shifts in global production, political polarization and threats to academic freedom. Through five decades now, CAEL has been a voice for adult learners navigating our evolving and volatile world, and I'm glad to know that it is thriving and laser-focused on preparing adult learners for today's new realities. I'm so proud of this organization and all it continues to do to bring learning within reach of all. Congratulations to CAEL and its staff and members on this important anniversary celebration -- you are doing work that is so important to our collective futures!"

– Pamela Tate, former CAEL President and CEO, 1990-2018

"CAEL is often and accurately described as a movement ... The experiential learning movement by necessity became the adult learning movement, and CAEL became sort of the crucible for the whole movement. And it attracted institutions that were interested in adults, it attracted scholars that were interested, it attracted practitioners that were interested."

– Dr. George Pruitt, former Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at CAEL and President Emeritus, Thomas Edison State University

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"Hats off to CAEL!
Your 50 years of contributions to adult learning, recognition of prior learning, and workforce development have been stellar: high-quality research, networking, professional development conferences, and ability to read the tea leaves

to provide needed resources that students, institutions, states, and employers have used to improve our learn-and-work ecosystem."

– Holly Zanville, Research Professor,
George Washington University;
Founder/Co-Lead,
Learn & Work Ecosystem Library;
Co-Lead, Credential As You Go

"The CAEL community offers opportunities to network with postsecondary institutions, employers, community action agencies, and businesses across the nation that can enhance our organization through shared resources, inspiration, and policy awareness that can benefit the IECC communities.

– Angel Maguire, Adult Education Director
of Instructional Services for Illinois
Eastern Community Colleges

"The beauty of CAEL is that we get immersed in another dialect of workforce development - another perspective of the work we do, an opportunity to learn, see the intersections, commonalities, and the differences - it helps us improve EPG's operations and comprehensiveness."

– Walter Simmons, President and CEO,
Employ Prince George; CAEL Member

"CAEL's focus on adult learners in the last 50 years has many stories like NACTEL. The ability to reach adult learners where they are has been key to success. These adult learners don't start at the same place, or even have a shared ending. This focus on adult learners' partnerships is what makes CAEL's charter so special."

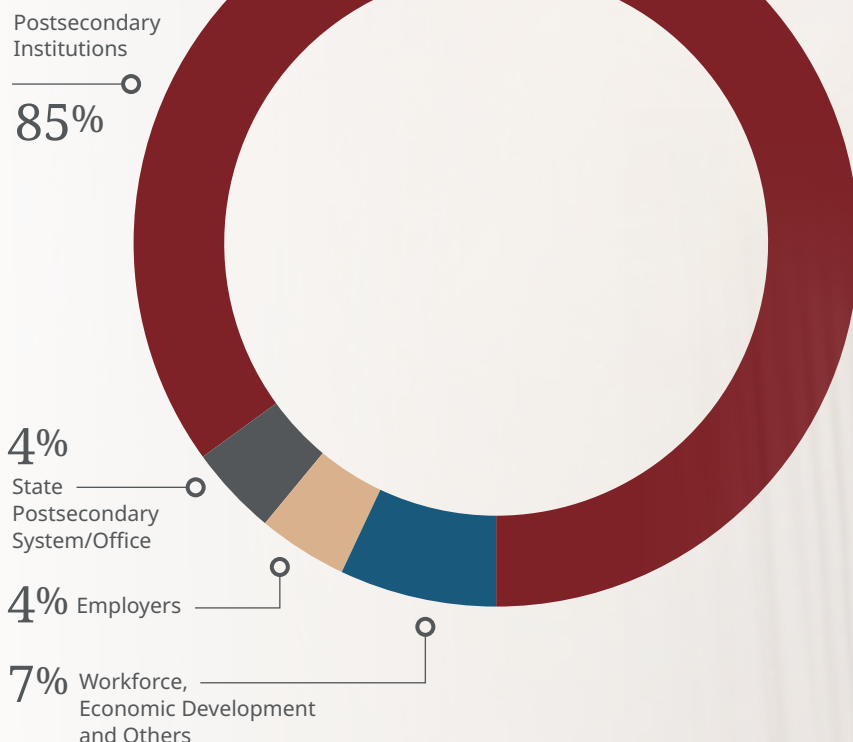
– Jeff Batiste, Senior Director,
Learning & Development, Verizon



Expanding Our Members, Expanding Our Impact

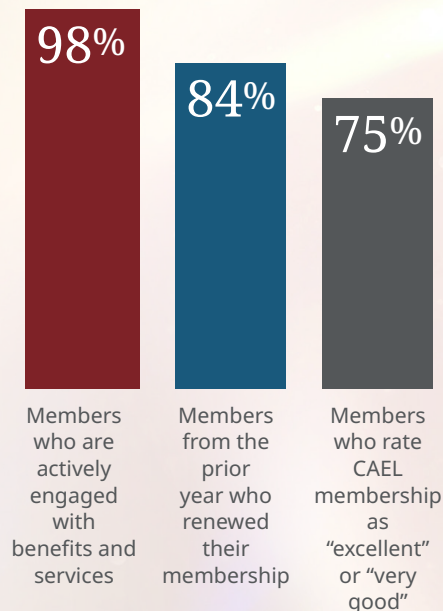
CAEL's national [membership](#) forms a powerful community of practice to help advance our vision that every adult can navigate lifelong learning and career pathways that fuel economic mobility and community prosperity. From the 10 founding higher education members in 1974, CAEL grew nearly 20-fold by the end of that year. Today, CAEL's membership encompasses more than 5,000 individuals representing postsecondary education institutions and other education providers, state higher education systems, employers, workforce development boards, training organizations, economic development organizations, and nonprofits. In 2020, CAEL introduced the role of a member ambassador to our membership, providing an opportunity for our most engaged members to lend their voices and expertise, and to contribute input and insights on current issues as leaders in the member community. Together, our members help CAEL to extend and deepen its impact on adult learners within and across their organizations.

CAEL MEMBERS BY TYPE, 2023



Source: 2023 Member Survey

OUR 2023 MEMBERS INDICATE THE VALUE OF CAEL



CAEL MEMBERSHIP BY THE NUMBERS, 2023

5,340 Individual Members
615 Member Organizations
18 Ambassadors

Access CAEL's [membership brochure](#).

EXAMPLES OF HOW OUR MEMBERS ARE ADVANCING ADULT LEARNER SUCCESS:

- EPCE member **Duke Energy's** Duke Energy Foundation is investing \$350,000 to help 11 community colleges, including active CAEL member **Forsyth Tech Community College**, bolster their lineworker training resources. (Duke Energy)
- **Pima Community College** celebrated the conclusion of its 10-month Southern Arizona Workforce Leadership Academy. Twenty workforce development leaders representing multiple organizations collaborated in the Academy on solutions to support Arizona's workforce ecosystem. (Pima Community College)
- **Employ Prince George's** has opened the first-ever affiliated American Job Center within a building trades union. The Building Trades Career Center will house apprenticeships and other training programs along with career coaching resources. (The Daily Record)
- **North Carolina Central University** is leading a coalition comprised of HBCUs and North Carolina's sole historically American Indian University, the **University of North Carolina at Pembroke**, that is making free training in life sciences manufacturing available to college students and the general public. The coalition includes three other CAEL members: **Elizabeth City State University**, **Fayetteville State University**, and **Saint Augustine's University**. (WFAE)



“Adults, like never before, are coming back to college seeking workplace skills and credentials to fuel their economic mobility and transform the communities where they live and work. CAEL is the catalyst; they engage education, workforce development, and employers who can transform traditional structures to meet the needs of adult learners.”

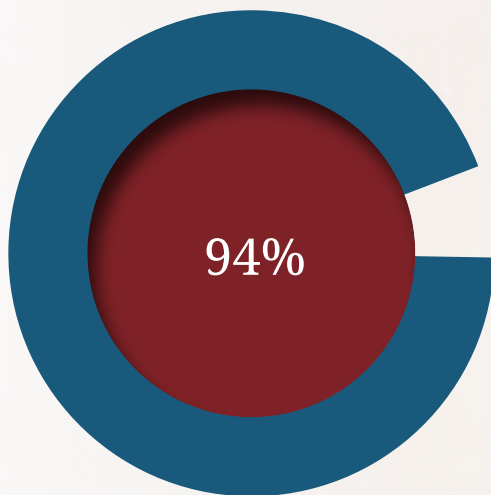
– Elizabeth Cole, Director,
Outreach & Partnerships
Community Development,
Rio Salado College,
Maricopa Community Colleges;
CAEL Ambassador and Member

“I have access to fantastic resources and a network of peers who are working on similar issues. The research and tools made available alone are worth the cost of membership.”

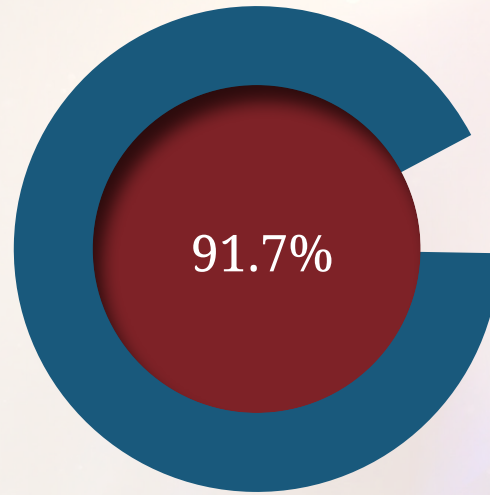
– Member Comment,
2023 Member Survey

Collaborating to Achieve Our Ultimate Goal

CAEL's ultimate goal is to help all adult learners have an equitable opportunity for, and success in, obtaining credentials and skills that lead to well-paying, good quality jobs, increased earnings and economic mobility, and improved quality of life. We engage with members, clients, and other stakeholders – who often work collectively in national or regional ecosystems – in pursuit of this goal. Whether the focus is on education and skills development, inclusive employment opportunities, supportive services, research, or advocacy, our partners address the range of individual, organizational, and systemic outcomes needed to advance adult learners to career success.



Clients who agree
that CAEL supports their organization's
short- and long-term goals.



Quality Index (out of 100)
How our clients rate the quality of our products,
services, and the customer service relationship
along with how we meet business needs while
being easy and enjoyable to work with.

Source: 2023 CAEL Voice of the Partner Survey



FIVE DECADES OF PARTNERSHIPS

Over the last 50 years, CAEL has engaged in a wide range of partnerships to advance adult learners. Read on to learn more about some of these innovative collaboratives across the spectrum of our education-to-employment work.

- Engaged with **state and local workforce leaders** in Massachusetts, Chicago, IL, and Colorado to **design one-stop career centers**.
- Worked with the **Pew Charitable Trust, the U.S. Department of Education, and the MacArthur Foundation** to initiate CAEL's **public policy work**.
- Partnered with the **W.K. Kellogg Foundation** to create a **Commission for a Nation of Lifelong Learners**.
- Joined with the **National Center for Higher Education Management Systems** to release: **Adult Learning in Focus: National and State-by-State data**.
- Collaborated with employer leaders from diverse industries to develop **Business Champions for Adult Degree Completion**.
- Partnered with the **Toledo Regional Chamber** on a **comprehensive talent alignment strategy**.
- Joined with the **Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education** to host virtual **Regional Workforce Assemblies**.
- Engaged with **Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership**, an economic development initiative, on **broadening internships**.
- Partnered with **SEMI Foundation** to support talent development for the semiconductor and global electronics manufacturing industry.
- Collaborated with **SCPA Works** (South-Central Workforce Development Board) to support the **NextGen Information Technology Industry Partnership (TechConnect)**.

OUR 2023 PARTNERS INDICATE THE VALUE OF CAEL

“Powerful insights, superior customer service, and industry-leading products and support!”

“Access to data, new partnerships, exposure to new markets and collaboration.”

“Met with us to determine how they can engage our community and co-created strategies to meet those engagement needs.”

“Always have resources and research for the topics and trends that I am searching for in my work; staff is always responsive and resourceful in connecting me to others doing work in the same space as my institution.”

Source: 2023 Voice of the Partner Survey

Recognizing All Learning



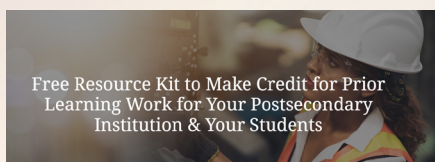
With an origin story steeped in advancing equity for adult learners, CAEL's founding also launched an innovative idea: that experience gained by adult learners could be assessed and recognized for college-level learning leading to college credit or advanced placement. Since then, CAEL has remained the premier leader around credit for prior learning (CPL) and has, over the years, developed a comprehensive suite of tools, resources, and services to support expansion of CPL in the field.



Assessing Learning Standards. CAEL's history with CPL reflects a strong focus on ensuring academic quality in assessment and the awarding of credit. The heart of this work is found in CAEL's Ten Standards for Assessing Learning, described in *Assessing Learning, Third Edition (2017)*



Member Resources. To help members be more effective and impactful in their CPL implementation efforts, CAEL offers a Quick Start Kit. This toolkit includes sample policies and process maps, talking points to help make the CPL case at your institution, marketing materials, microcourses and on-demand webinars, discounted professional development opportunities, key research and articles, and other resources. As importantly, CAEL members *are* resources who share their CPL approaches, innovations, and evidence of effective practice with the larger CAEL community through CAEL's



newsletter, webinars, and conference sessions. One example is [this effort](#) led by CAEL members to address CPL transfer credit issues.



Technical Assistance. CAEL has created both customized technical assistance and professional development offerings to support credit for prior learning institutional policy development and implementation. Our [From the Ground Up: Building the Foundations of a CPL Program](#) workshop supports the creation of an action plan for executing a CPL program on your campus. The [Assessing Prior Learning](#) workshop provides an overview of all forms of institutional-based prior learning assessment and discusses approaches to awarding college credit for learning that occurs from previous life/work experiences. In 2022, CAEL also developed a [publicly available toolkit](#) designed to help institutional CPL champions move their CPL programs forward. In 2023, taking a statewide approach to capacity-building in Oregon, CAEL offered more than 40 workshops to college administrators, faculty, and staff around CPL, including credit crosswalking sessions and Credit Predictor Pro implementations.



Technology Platforms. For decades, colleges and universities used a combination of spreadsheets and emails to track the progress and success of their CPL programs, with varied success. In 2022, CAEL launched the **Credit Predictor Pro**, an online platform that makes the CPL process more efficient. The Credit Predictor Pro platform guides students through the process of documenting their work and learning experiences prior to -- or in between -- their college years. Once students have completed their PLA/CPL profile, the Credit Predictor Pro automatically recommends appropriate PLA/CPL options based on the institution's PLA/CPL policies and offerings. Advisors review student profiles and recommend CPL matches. The tool enables lead advisors and system administrators to see PLA/CPL data from across the entire institution via dashboard reports, thereby increasing streamlined access to CPL options for learners. CAEL has also created a simplified but customized version of this tool, [Credit Predictor Standard](#), which is available free of charge to institutional members.

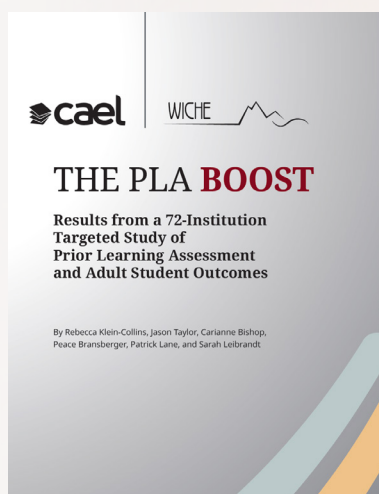
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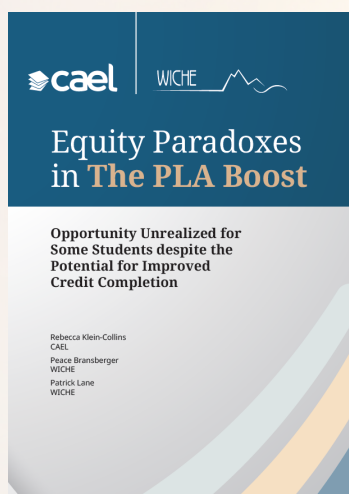


Research. Throughout our history, CAEL has led the field in examining CPL impact, practice, policy, and equity. Key recent research reports, in partnership with WICHE, include:

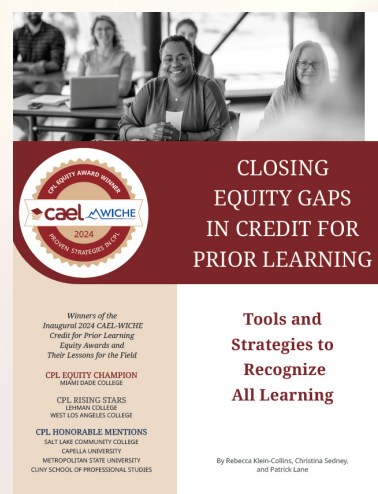
Adult student outcomes and CPL



CPL and Equity Considerations



CPL and Equity Strategies



Policy. CAEL's policy and advocacy work supports the expansion of CPL. For example, in [Delaware](#) and [Indiana](#), CAEL has contributed to statewide guidance around expanding credit for prior learning. CAEL's policy leadership has also sparked an emphasis on CPL in federal policy (e.g., U.S. Department of Labor TEGL33-11, June 8, 2012, and incorporation of CPL into U.S. Department of Labor TAACCCT grants, 2011-2018) and efforts by state legislatures or higher education systems to develop comprehensive CPL policies, approaches and guidance (e.g., Ohio Department of Higher Education's PLA with a Purpose; Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission's Credit for Prior Learning Standards, Tennessee Higher Education Commission's Timewise TN, and Colorado's statewide CPL policy).



CPL Provider Network. Planned in 2023 and launched during our 50th year anniversary celebration, the [CPL Provider Network](#) allows adult learners to efficiently navigate postsecondary institutions that offer credit for prior learning. Given CPL's proven ability to advance student and institutional success, the CPL Provider Network is an invaluable resource, creating a free, one-stop connection to postsecondary institutions where the prior learning experiences of adult learners can be recognized. Future enhancements also are planned.

“With so many “offices of one” in the PLA/CPL world, I rely on CAEL to provide regular trainings, share information, and foster networking opportunities so I can stay laser focused on serving local students while CAEL monitors and shares innovation in the field.”

– Melissa DeBlois, Director of Prior Learning Assessment for the Vermont State Colleges System, a program administered by the Community College of Vermont

CAEL continues to build on its legacy of recognizing all college-level learning, regardless of where or how it is acquired. Our ongoing innovations in this area ensure that CAEL is widely recognized as an authoritative voice on CPL policies and practices that lead to adult learner and institutional success.

BY EXPANDING CPL WITHIN OUR PARTNER INSTITUTIONS, CAEL ENHANCES AFFORDABILITY AND, ULTIMATELY, COMPLETION FOR ADULT LEARNERS.

113

Postsecondary Institutions Engaged With CAEL's CPL Custom Tools and Assistance in 2023

3,848

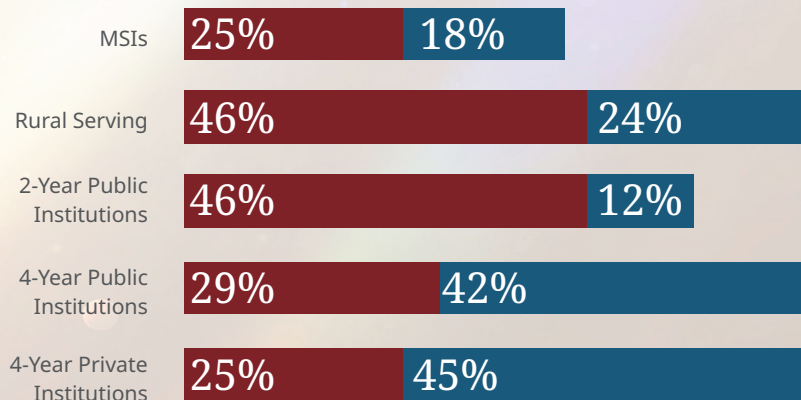
CPL Credits Earned Through CAEL Solutions and Initiatives in 2023

\$1,406,121

Estimated Total Student Tuition Savings as a Result of CPL Credits Earned in 2023*

USE OF CAEL CPL TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS BY INSTITUTIONAL TYPE, 2023

■ Credit Predictor Pro
■ Credit Predictor Standard



*Conservative estimates based on average tuition costs identified by Education Data Initiative (<https://educationdata.org/cost-of-a-college-class-or-credit-hour>)

Linking Learning and Work

Recognizing the vital role that employers play in helping adult learners access economic opportunity and advance in their careers, CAEL has worked to strengthen the engagement of these partners – directly and through industry associations – in talent pipelines for new jobseekers and incumbent workers. From CAEL’s leadership of the “Partnership for a Smarter Workforce” in 1995, in collaboration with the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and others, CAEL’s strategies to link learning and work include managing tuition assistance programs for companies such as BetzDearborn, Inc, Chase Manhattan Bank, Media One Group, and Blue Cross Blue Shield; developing transition programs for displaced workers from Levi Strauss and Company; creating educator-employer competency frameworks through the Wellspring project in collaboration with IMS Global Learning Consortium and Education Design Lab; and working with the McDonald’s Corporation to provide career development opportunities for employees in local franchises seeking the next step in their careers. Today, CAEL continues to work directly with employers and industry partnerships to support and advance adult learners.



19,000+

Working Adult Learners Upskilled or Credentialed through 22 Years of EPCE Energy Industry Partnership

- **EPCE - Energy Providers Coalition for Education**

The Energy Providers Coalition for Education (EPCE), formed in 2000, represents energy employers across the country working together to create, sponsor, and offer industry-reviewed education and training pathways for the energy workforce. Administered by CAEL, EPCE offers timely and relevant online energy education options – including courses, certificates, and degree programs built by industry experts -- to address the critical employment needs of the evolving utility industry. CAEL and the EPCE employers collaborate with organizations and educational partners to offer the support needed to better prepare individuals for the future of the energy sector. [Read more](#) about this unique partnership.



8,000+

Working Adult Learners Upskilled or Credentialed through 19 years of NACTEL Telecommunications Industry Partnership

- **NACTEL - National Alliance for Communications Technology Education and Learning**

The National Alliance for Communications Technology and Learning (NACTEL) has been educating and training the communications workforce for more than 25 years. Administered by CAEL, NACTEL is a unique partnership – overseen by an industry-formed advisory council -- of employers and unions working to create and sponsor online education programs that meet the needs of current and future telecommunications professionals. Offerings through Pace University include courses, badges, certificates, and degrees developed by industry experts and educators. [Read more](#) about the benefits of NACTEL.



1500

Working Adult Learners Upskilled through two years of Fortune 10 IT Supply Chain Partnership

- **Information Technology Supply Chain Partnership**

CAEL entered year two of its partnership with a Fortune 10 company to reskill and upskill adult workers in their U.S. supply chain. In collaboration with third-party education providers, learning and development opportunities have been provided to over 1,500 workers in an effort to retain talent and create upward mobility. Areas of focus include professional skill development such as leadership, customer service, digital literacy, project management and supervision, Lean Six Sigma certification, and English language learning and proficiency.

BRIDGING THE TALENT GAP: A TALENT DEVELOPMENT TOOL FOR EMPLOYERS

Bridging The Talent Gap (BTTG) is a nationally proven tool that engages employers in a regional survey campaign to support the growth of a skilled and educated workforce. Survey results help employers, employees, education providers, and community stakeholders identify interest in education and training, gaps in employee knowledge of existing training programs, and opportunities for regional partnership. Designed especially to support entry-level employees, the tool supports equitable talent development and retention initiatives, whether at the regional or employer level, creates a baseline for participating employers, and tracks progress toward upskilling goal attainment. Participating communities and employers find that the survey and subsequent activities boost employee engagement in education and training programs, as well as help build regional employer-educator partnerships.

To date, BTTG has engaged more than 3,800 employers and more than 5,700 employees. The survey results indicate that there is significant, untapped demand from employers to partner with education providers, but they find these partnerships difficult to develop. In fact, only 13% of surveyed employers currently partner with an education provider, but 86% desire such partnerships. The survey results also identified a significant disconnect in employees' understanding of education benefits programs as well as significant interest in participating in these employer sponsored programs. BTTG is an important strategy to identify and convert employee interest in education and upskilling into program enrollment and completion to help employers develop internal talent and reduce turnover. Learn more [here](#).



Increasing Access and Success for Adult Learners

CAEL is committed to innovating and implementing strategies that improve postsecondary and career success for adult learners. In addition to addressing the needs of adult learners as a group, over the years CAEL's programs, products, and services have responded to barriers faced by these learners because of race, ethnic, or gender bias or due to socioeconomic status. Here are a few examples of our work in 2023.



THE GRADUATE! NETWORK JOINS CAEL

In fall 2023, CAEL announced a new strategic operating partnership with The Graduate! Network, a national nonprofit organization focused on expanding educational equity by engaging adults who are historically underrepresented in college and reengaging the more than 45 million individuals with some college but no degree (aka “Comebackers”). The Graduate! Network’s portfolio of products and services are now being implemented through CAEL. Collectively, these member organizations have impacted more than 30,000 adults.

The heart of the Comebacker strategy is sustained, high-quality contact (HQC) with Comebackers by Navigators, outside advisors who provide institution-agnostic guidance to Comebackers, helping them review transcripts, identify the right field of study and school, complete applications, and manage past debt. Our research shows increased enrollment and graduation rates to be positively correlated with the number of high-quality interactions a Comebacker had with

their navigator. The model is helping Comebackers get back on track: those who engage with Network-affiliated programs reenroll at a rate almost four times that of the national Comebacker population (50 percent versus 13 percent). And they graduate at a higher rate as well (30 percent versus 25 percent). Even more striking, Comebackers who engage with us and then go on to graduate are largely Black, Latina, and multi-racial/ multi-ethnic (76 percent), the reverse picture of what is happening at the national level (where 74 percent of graduates are White).

A signature service resulting from this partnership is Data That Move Us, which represents the discoveries and learnings from aggregated data that are captured and updated across program partners annually. CAEL looks forward to analyzing and disseminating findings from this data to share best practices and implications for policy at a broader level.

ADVANCING EQUITY: EMPOWERING WORKFORCE BOARDS TO EXPAND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Recognizing that economic competitiveness and community prosperity are tied to engaging all residents in economic opportunity, CAEL joined forces with the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) to launch the Advancing Equity initiative. Through this partnership, a sustained capacity-building resource was developed – [The Advancing Equity Leadership Academy](#) – to inform data-supported, equity-focused program development and policy change in the public workforce development field. Co-designed with a “Master Class” of workforce board leaders, the Advancing Equity Leadership Academy addresses equity topics related to expanding access to public workforce system services, elevating and activating participant voice, funding and performance benchmarking, and purposeful data

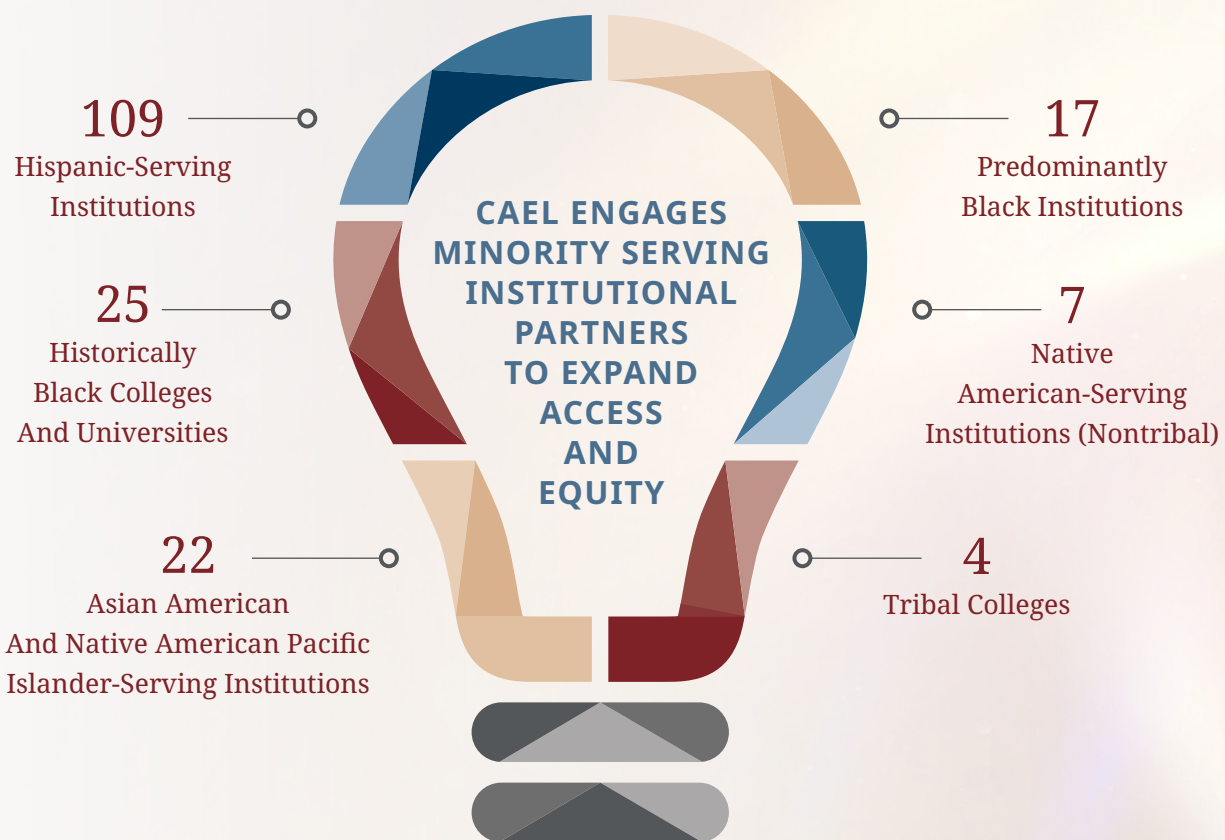
disaggregation to analyze outcomes. Senior leaders from the following workforce boards were selected to participate in this initial cohort: Alaska Workforce Investment Board, Career Source Broward, Crater Regional Workforce Development Board, Gulf Coast Workforce Board, Newark Workforce Development Board, Ohio Means Jobs Defiance and Paulding Counties, Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association, Piedmont Triad Regional Workforce Development Board, Philadelphia Works, and the Workforce Alliance. Participants engaged in collective learning experiences to help transform their organizations, used tools and resources to guide change, and created equity-focused initiatives for their local communities. Stay tuned for information about the launch of our next cohort.

ADVANCING DELTA TALENT

Rural communities in the Mississippi Delta region face multiple barriers to economic success. That’s why CAEL teamed up with two of our community college members – Arkansas State University Mid-South, a predominantly Black institution in West Memphis, Arkansas, and Coahoma Community College, a Historically Black Community College in Clarksdale, Mississippi – to expand opportunities for residents in this region through the [Advancing Delta Talent](#) initiative. CAEL is working with both colleges to build institutional capacity and practice around effectively serving adult learners. With funding from the Delta Regional Authority and the U.S. Department of Labor, and in collaboration with employers, the Workforce Development Board of Eastern Arkansas and the Delta Workforce

Development Area Board, and other community partners, more than 250 residents have already enrolled in high-demand occupational programs in health care, manufacturing, and transportation since training began in fall 2023.

This project was funded by a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)’s Employment and Training Administration (ETA). It was created by CAEL (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) and does not necessarily reflect the official position of DOL/ETA. DOL/ETA makes no guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, expressed or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites and including, but not limited to, accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability, or ownership. CAEL received a U.S. DOL grant of \$1,394,534 to implement this project (100% of total budget).



ADULT LEARNER 360® GETS AN UPGRADE

Representing an evolution of our original Ten Principles for Effectively Serving Adult Learners, CAEL recently developed and released our new [Adult Learner Leaders for Institutional Effectiveness \(ALLIES\) framework](#), which now guides our work with postsecondary institutions. This evolution has also resulted in updates to [CAEL's Adult Learner 360 \(AL360\) assessment tool](#). Gathering information from adults, faculty, and staff, AL 360 helps institutions assess how well they are attracting and supporting adult learners and focus on future improvement. The survey tool can help institutions close the gap between what adult students need and what the institution delivers.

Through the enhanced AL 360, institutions are scored based on survey feedback in the following ALLIES Framework areas:

- **Level 1: Data-Driven Planning.** Does your institution engage in a set of activities that establishes the first part of the foundation: making data-driven decisions that ensure equity and success?
- **Level 2: Organizational Capacity and Policy.** Does your institution focus on expanding and improving internal capacity to meet adult learner needs?
- **Level 3: Student Experience.** Does your institution focus on designing, developing, and improving the program- and service-design components that the adult learner sees and experiences?

LATINO AND ADULT STUDENT SUCCESS ACADEMY BUILDS CAPACITY TO SUPPORT ADULT LEARNERS

The Latino and Adult Student Success Academy, or LASS, was born from a shared commitment to increasing the number of students who complete a certificate, associate degree, or baccalaureate degree leading to a living wage job, particularly for students of color, adult learners and low-income individuals. In 2022, CAEL launched the second round of the Latino and Adult Student Success Academy (LASS 2.0), with four Texas-based institutions continuing their implementation of targeted strategies to support adult learners in their regions. CAEL's work throughout the last two years, made possible by grants from Greater Texas Foundation and Strada Education Foundation, has focused on helping Austin Community College, South Texas College, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley invest more deeply in adult learner support strategies such as coaching, credit for prior learning, and strategic outreach and recruitment. The work undertaken has fostered promising innovations poised to persist through continued collaboration after the conclusion of this initiative. Read the recent evaluation report [here](#).

Adult Learners
Engaged Through
LASS 2.0 Student
Support Strategies

11,405
Strategic Outreach
and Recruitment

2,617
Student
Advising/Coaching

291
Credit for Prior Learning

HELPING ADULT LEARNERS NAVIGATE CAREER AND EDUCATION OPTIONS

For many employer groups and regional workforce initiatives in search of a robust talent pipeline, CAEL recognizes that a public-facing platform is an essential part of a regional or industry talent initiative. A well-designed platform with customized content highlighting specific in-demand jobs can help people navigate training options and earn higher wages. They are often paired with marketing and outreach activities that target populations most in need of better career opportunities and wage growth. As technology products advance, technology solutions can also help collect outcome data revealing interest in industries and occupations, and are even moving toward providing a holistic picture of the effectiveness of talent development initiatives.

For more than 25 years, CAEL has helped industry groups, employers, regional workforce organizations, and education/training providers navigate technology platforms, create customized content with employer-validated occupations and pathways, and measure the effectiveness of outreach campaigns. This history and experience are now underpinning CAEL's work as we support our partners to implement learning and employment records (LERs), explore advanced data collection technologies, and explore the potential of AI. Examples of our work in this area include:

- [SEMI Career Exploration Platform](#)
- [FIPSE XP Connected Pathways](#)
- [Build Better Careers Financial Services Exploration Platform](#)
- [Banking on My Career](#)
- [Petrochem Works](#)

Recent LASS Academy Attendees



Advancing Adult Learners

Whether learning, working, or both, the success of adult learners across the country is the fuel that drives CAEL's impact. We are inspired by the accomplishments of these learners and their ongoing journeys of success. Since our first Learner of the Year award in 1998, CAEL has been devoted to sharing their commitment and resolve with the field. Read on for a sampling from our award winners and other adult learner success stories.

Adult Learner Entrepreneur Champions Career Pathway Navigation

[Terry Bazemore Jr.](#), COO of Ey3 Technologies, a systems engineering and cybersecurity company based in Prince George's County, Maryland, brought twin perspectives to CAEL's career pathway navigation work (Exponential Pathways/XP) in 2023. As a business owner in the tech space, he is keenly aware of the ethical and economic imperatives of a diverse and thriving talent pipeline. And from his own experience navigating education and employment pathways, he knows just how arduous the career-exploration journey can be, especially for underrepresented workers.

International Adult Learner Overcomes Monumental Challenges

Like so many adult learners, CAEL 2023 Learner of the Year [Don Khan Huai](#) was confronted with a gauntlet of challenges in pursuit of her educational and professional goals. She moved from Myanmar to the U.S. in 2013. Her initial learning experiences were largely focused on developing an understanding of a new language and culture. In 2018, Don enrolled in high school equivalency classes at Rio Salado College's Adult Education program. By early 2020, she had joined the college's Adults Achieving a College Education scholarship program, or Adult ACE. Amid the disruption of the pandemic, Don not only persisted in her own college education but actively supported her daughter's advancement in a specialized education program, an experience that aroused a professional calling in Don. She decided to focus her studies on a degree in early childhood education with an emphasis on special education. Despite

her many other commitments and health challenges, in 2022, Don completed Adult ACE. She followed that by earning her foundation of early childhood education certificate, her child development associate credential, and her high school equivalency diploma.

First-Generation Immigrant Students Chart Course to Credential Attainment

Coming to the U.S. to pursue college and career goals, siblings [Cassandra Munoz](#) and [Gael Munoz](#) gained valuable assistance through the adult education program at Rio Salado College. Not only did they receive help in obtaining their GED, but they gained access to CAEL's Exponential Pathway (XP) career exploration program. Using this resource, the siblings confirmed plans to earn an associate degree and transfer to Arizona State University. They gained valuable insight into their current skills and competencies and how they aligned with their proposed career choices, an affirmation of their future career path.

Working Adult Learner Advances in Career After Beginning Education Program

[Leigh Mason](#) found her "perfect for me" job in the nuclear power industry. Working as a plant operator for 20 years at Constellation energy, her hard work and dedication paid off. She was promoted to supervisor for a crew of 8-10 in the plant's instrument and controls department shortly after she began an M.B.A. program at Excelsior University. Leigh credits her employer-sponsored education benefits and her company's partnership with Energy Providers Coalition for Education (EPCE) as being instrumental to her career growth. Noting that the skills she gained in her education program were immediately useful in her new manager role, Leigh also believes her M.B.A. has prepared her for the next steps she plans to take into senior management positions.

2019 award winner [Caprice Morales](#) faced challenges that included domestic abuse, addiction, and incarceration. She would go on to become an advocate for women who were victims of abuse during their incarceration, a writer for *Dwight's Newspaper*, and a member of the honor society Alpha Beta Sigma.

CAEL's 2020 Adult Learner of the Year, [Alphur "Slim" Willock](#), earned a master's degree – while continuing to raise six kids as a widower – and appearing on The Oprah Winfrey Show! His award was in recognition of his family, career, and educational success, which was supported by NACTEL education benefits.



Photo courtesy of
Union University.



2021 award winner [Javier Garcia](#) left his home country to pursue a new life in the United States. Arriving there in 2000, he spoke little English. He would go on to become a police officer and graduate summa cum laude while working full time. A father of two, Garcia received an academic medal of excellence from Union University.

2022 Adult Learners of the Year [Loyce Shelley](#) and [Joyce Brandon](#) (pictured here with Kate Smith, Ed.D., president of Rio Salado College) volunteered to set aside their small business and educational pursuits to serve during CAEL's 50th Anniversary conference in New Orleans this year.

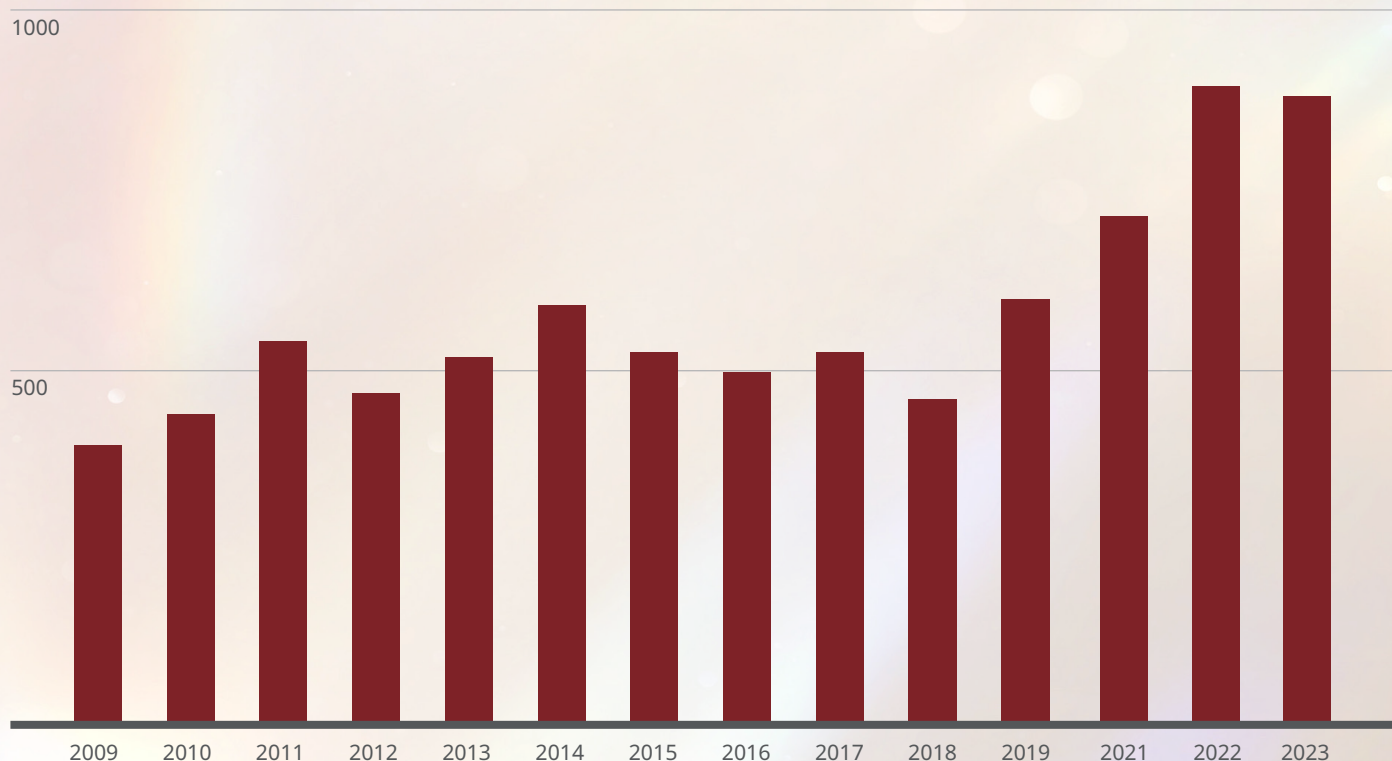
Convening Adult Learner Champions

The CAEL conference has been a cornerstone event in the field of adult education and learning for several decades. It began in the early 1970s as a small gathering of educators and practitioners passionate about the unique needs and challenges faced by adult learners. Over time, it evolved into a prestigious annual conference attracting leaders from postsecondary education, workforce development, and employers from across the nation.

Each year, the conference features a diverse range of keynote speakers, workshop presenters, and panelists representing a wide spectrum of expertise and perspectives within the fields of adult education and workforce development. The conference has a tradition of incorporating interactive elements such as roundtable discussions, networking receptions, and experiential learning activities to engage participants and foster meaningful cross-sector connections.



CAEL CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE BY YEAR



In 2014, CAEL celebrated its 40th anniversary.
In 2020, CAEL offered a free, virtual conference.

“One of the things I love about CAEL is the networking opportunities, the most exciting being the CAEL conference - having the opportunity to gather in person with colleagues in the industry is amazing.”

– Dr. Lorraine Beach, Campus President, Keiser University - Miami Campus, CAEL Ambassador and Member

“Penn State has been a longtime member, but I began participating with CAEL in 2015. I attended the conference with a colleague whose office coordinated adult learner activities and was hooked. My favorite part about being a member of CAEL is meeting and networking with other members. We all have similar goals, so it’s great to work with others and share ideas and practices.”

– Michele Rice, Director, Prior Learning Assessment, Undergraduate Education,
The Pennsylvania State University, CAEL Connector and Member

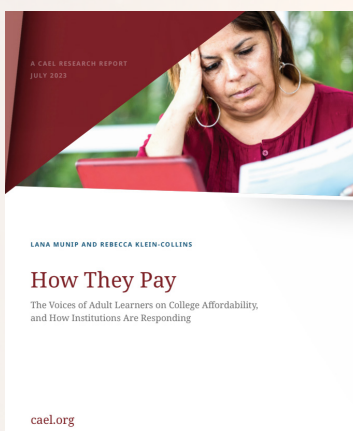
Influencing the Field Through Research, Policy, and Thought Leadership

CAEL's research and thought leadership have been instrumental in shining a spotlight on adult learners over the last 50 years — who they are, how they engage with postsecondary education and training, how institutions can recognize all of their learning, and how various organizations can better support their educational and career success. Since our initial publication on the first standards for assessing prior learning in 1989, CAEL's research agenda has ranged from benchmarking best practices for serving adult learners to models for competency-based education to innovations by workforce board leadership.

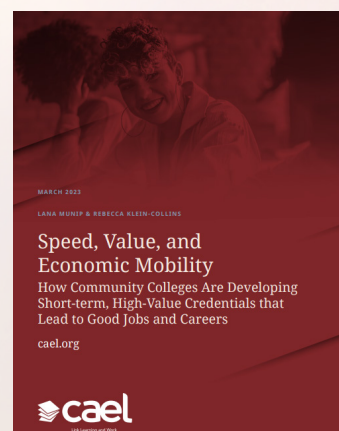
While CAEL's premier research and thought leadership on credit for prior learning over the years is covered on page 14 of this report, below are some recent highlights of CAEL's research on new ideas and approaches to engage and support adult learners.



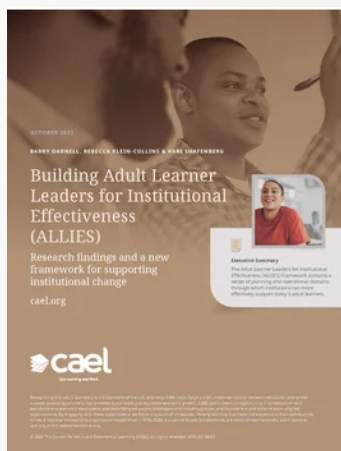
[Comprehensive Learner Records: Postsecondary Perspectives of Preparation for and Implementation of CLRs](#)



[How They Pay: The Voices of Adult Learners on College Affordability and How Institutions Are Responding](#)



[Speed, Value, and Economic Mobility: How Community Colleges Are Developing Short-term, High-Value Credentials that Lead to Good Jobs and Careers](#)



[Building Adult Learner Leaders for Institutional Effectiveness \(ALLIES\): Research Findings And A New Framework For Supporting Institutional Change](#)



[It's a little stressful when I think of it: Results Of A National Survey And Interviews With Never-Enrolled Adults On The Factors That Drive Them To Consider Postsecondary Education And The Barriers To Enrollment](#)



[Collaborating for Impact: How Workforce Boards Thrive in Unprecedented Times](#)



Empowering Adult Learners through Public Policy

Concluding work begun in 2023, CAEL debuted its latest [public policy priorities](#) in our anniversary year. Informed by a diverse set of members, the policy priorities tackle pressing challenges faced by adult learners, including student debt and workforce shortages. By focusing on accessibility, affordability, and transformative partnerships, CAEL aims to advocate for policies that empower adult learners and drive economic growth at state, local, and federal levels.

Expanding CAEL's Impact To Advance Adult Learners

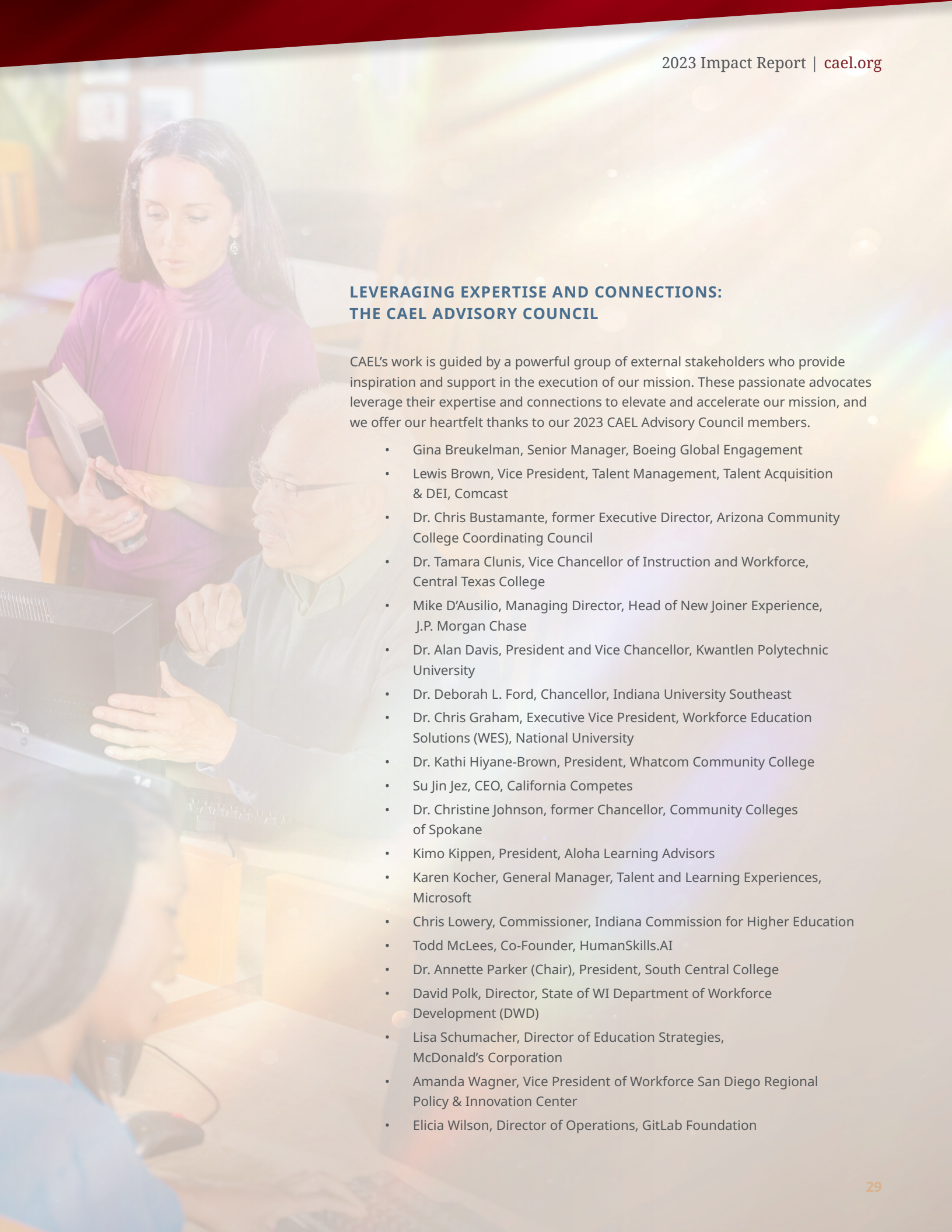
INVESTING IN CAEL'S IMPACT TO ADVANCE ADULT LEARNERS: CAEL FUNDERS

From our initial grant from the Carnegie Foundation in 1974, over the last 50 years CAEL has garnered support from a broad range of private and public funding partners who help to support and sustain our work and expand our impact. We thank our current funders for their continued partnership in advancing our mission to improve education and employment outcomes for adult learners and workers.

- Ascendium Education Group
- Charles Koch Foundation
- Delta Regional Authority and U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities (WORC) Initiative
- Greater Texas Foundation
- Hillman Family Foundation/Henry L. Hillman Foundation
- Mellon Foundation
- Robert R. McCormick Foundation
- SEMI Foundation
- Strada Education Network
- The Heinz Endowments
- The Truist Foundation
- U.S. Department of Education, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE)

“I think CAEL is a really innovative and exciting organization to be a part of – to see the intersection of workforce and education integrated and working together collaboratively to create a better experience for the participants and customers we serve makes so much sense.”

– Amanda Wagner, Vice President of Workforce,
San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center



LEVERAGING EXPERTISE AND CONNECTIONS: THE CAEL ADVISORY COUNCIL

CAEL's work is guided by a powerful group of external stakeholders who provide inspiration and support in the execution of our mission. These passionate advocates leverage their expertise and connections to elevate and accelerate our mission, and we offer our heartfelt thanks to our 2023 CAEL Advisory Council members.

- Gina Breukelman, Senior Manager, Boeing Global Engagement
- Lewis Brown, Vice President, Talent Management, Talent Acquisition & DEI, Comcast
- Dr. Chris Bustamante, former Executive Director, Arizona Community College Coordinating Council
- Dr. Tamara Clunis, Vice Chancellor of Instruction and Workforce, Central Texas College
- Mike D'Ausilio, Managing Director, Head of New Joiner Experience, J.P. Morgan Chase
- Dr. Alan Davis, President and Vice Chancellor, Kwantlen Polytechnic University
- Dr. Deborah L. Ford, Chancellor, Indiana University Southeast
- Dr. Chris Graham, Executive Vice President, Workforce Education Solutions (WES), National University
- Dr. Kathi Hiyane-Brown, President, Whatcom Community College
- Su Jin Jez, CEO, California Competes
- Dr. Christine Johnson, former Chancellor, Community Colleges of Spokane
- Kimo Kippen, President, Aloha Learning Advisors
- Karen Kocher, General Manager, Talent and Learning Experiences, Microsoft
- Chris Lowery, Commissioner, Indiana Commission for Higher Education
- Todd McLees, Co-Founder, HumanSkills.AI
- Dr. Annette Parker (Chair), President, South Central College
- David Polk, Director, State of WI Department of Workforce Development (DWD)
- Lisa Schumacher, Director of Education Strategies, McDonald's Corporation
- Amanda Wagner, Vice President of Workforce San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center
- Elicia Wilson, Director of Operations, GitLab Foundation

What's Next for CAEL?

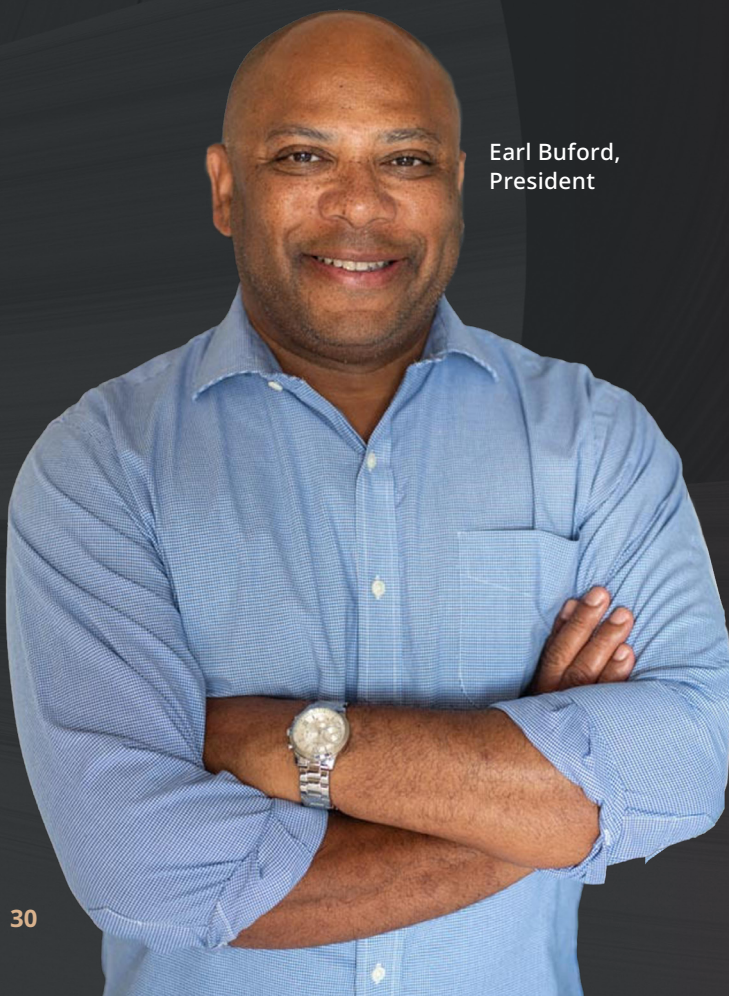
The commencement of CAEL's 50th year provided an opportune occasion to reflect on the many ways our mission has impacted adult learners and workers, and the communities who depend on them – not just in 2023 but over the past half century. At the same time, it serves as a compelling reminder of how important it will be to maintain a focused vision amid the accelerating changes that are reshaping education and employment pathways.

Scaling CAEL's impact through these changes means applying that focus at the individual, partner, and system levels. Our recently adopted theory of change aligns our work across all three spaces so reciprocal benefits arise from the outcomes we deliver for each, permeating all niches of the education-employment ecosystem.

Our theory of change is oriented around the ultimate outcome that all adult learners and workers have an equitable opportunity for and success in obtaining credentials and skills that lead to well-paying, high-quality jobs, increased earnings and economic mobility, and an improved quality of life. We designated three strategic priorities for enabling this outcome in 2024.

By expanding **credit for prior learning**, we will help strengthen career pathways and postsecondary systems. Our work on **regional upskilling and reskilling initiatives** will advance our endeavors to increase employer engagement and advancement opportunities for working learners. Finally, by **furthering industry-focused employer alignment and solutions**, we will bolster industry and employer partnerships for education and advancement, including the expansion of EPCE and NACTEL, Build Better Careers, and other industry-focused initiatives.

Each of these strategic priorities focus on organizational and programmatic development efforts and are incorporated into our overall organizational performance assessments. I look forward to including the results of these initiatives in next year's impact report. In the meantime, I am grateful for the critical support the CAEL community provides – including our team, funders, members, clients, and partners – in delivering those results. And I look forward to expanding our collaborations to extend our impact for adult learners and workers in the next half century. Join us!



Earl Buford,
President



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VISIT OUR [50TH ANNIVERSARY TIMELINE](#) TO LEARN
ABOUT CAEL'S WORK OVER THE YEARS!



cael.org

Contact us at
cael@cael.org or (312) 499-2600

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Recognizing that adult learners are the backbone of the U.S. economy, CAEL helps forge a clear, viable connection between education and career success, providing solutions that promote sustainable and equitable economic growth. CAEL opens doors to opportunity in collaboration with workforce and economic developers; postsecondary educators; employers and industry groups; and foundations and other mission-aligned organizations. By engaging with these stakeholders, we foster a culture of innovative, lifelong learning that helps individuals and their communities thrive. A national membership organization established in 1974, CAEL is a part of Strada Collaborative, a mission-driven nonprofit. Learn more at cael.org and stradacollaborative.org.