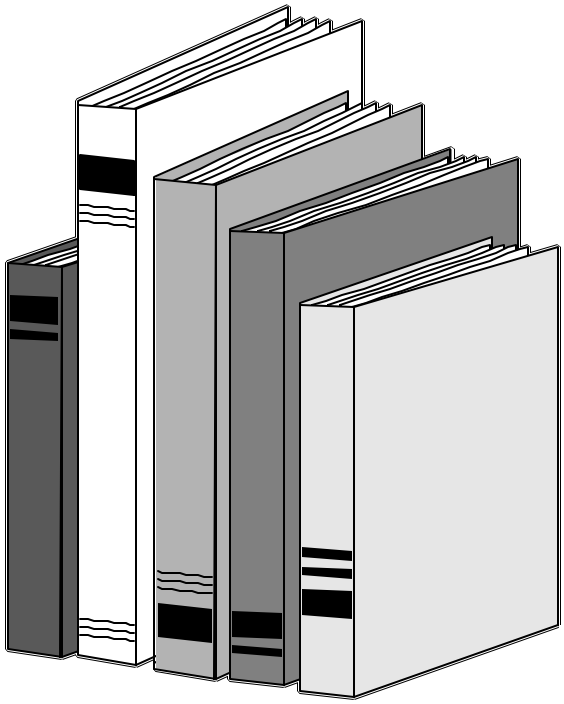
Adult Education And Literacy In Kentucky



Research Report No. 296

LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH COMMISSION
Frankfort, Kentucky
August 2000

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY IN KENTUCKY

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August 2000

Paid for from state funds.

FOREWORD

Over the past decade, Kentucky has taken bold steps to improve its total system of public education with the passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act in 1990 and the Postsecondary Education Act in 1997. However, much remains to be done to educate adults who missed the opportunities now provided young students. Adult illiteracy is a fundamental barrier to every major challenge facing Kentucky, including early childhood education, education reform, economic development, and improving the health and well-being of Kentucky's families and communities. Approximately one million Kentucky adults, many of whom are in the workforce, lack the basic skills necessary to function more effectively in their jobs or as members of their communities.

In response to the need to improve educational opportunities for adults, the 1998 General Assembly adopted SCR 126 (Appendix A) to establish the Task Force on Adult Education and charged it to develop recommendations and an implementation plan for raising the literacy level and educational attainment of Kentucky's adults who have not graduated from high school or who have poor literacy skills. The task force was chaired by Governor Paul E. Patton and included six senators, six representatives, and five members appointed by the Governor.

The task force completed its work in August 1999 by accepting this report that was drafted by the consultant to the task force, Dr. Aims McGuinness, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. The 2000 General Assembly unanimously adopted Senate Bill 1 in response to the recommendations and appropriated new funds. A summary of SB 1 is included in Appendix B.

Staff support to the task force was provided by Sandra Deaton, Charles Bush, Ethel Alston, Audrey Carr, Jonathan Lowe, and Lora Hawkins. The manuscript was edited by Charles Bush and Tom Lewis.

Staff members of the Department for Adult Education and Literacy were most helpful in providing information and assistance in the course of this study.

Robert Sherman
Director

The Capitol
Frankfort, Kentucky
June 2000

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SUMMARY

The Task Force on Adult Education met ten times to address the directive of Senate Concurrent Resolution 126 (1998) to develop recommendations and an implementation plan for raising the literacy level and educational attainment of Kentucky's adults who have not graduated from high school or who have poor literacy skills. The work began with a full-day meeting of the task force and over 250 representatives of education, business, students, and community leaders from across the state who participated in small group discussions relating to national trends; educational, social, economic, and cultural issues and needs in Kentucky; types of clients and needs; barriers to program participation; and recommendations.

A consultant to the committee highlighted Kentucky's demographic characteristics and Kentucky's economic and educational achievements compared to those of other southern states as reported in the "State of the South: 1998," published by MDC, Inc., Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He particularly emphasized the impact of increased numbers of single-parent families, decreasing educational participation by males, high dropout rates, low numbers of bachelor's degrees, the aging population in Kentucky (fewer younger workers), and the changing workplace needs. While Kentucky has made progress in the elementary and secondary area, in postsecondary education, and in adult education, the state still lags behind with too many undereducated adults.

The consultant said that the South needs to organize to meet the needs of the undereducated adults, stating that nothing should be more central to the mission of education than responding to the needs of those who need it the most to function in the economy and who need it to make the economy function. He said they might be a high school graduate who cannot write English, an aging worker who is rusty in skills or who never had skills, or the welfare mother who cannot negotiate in the economy. He emphasized that without education a person has no influence in society and no assets to sell in the labor market, but that educated people refuse to be poor.

The former Commissioner for the Department for Adult Education and Literacy gave an overview of adult education in Kentucky. According to her, 22% of all Americans perform at the very lowest literacy levels (which would be about a fifth grade reading skill level) as compared to about 14% of Kentuckians. She said that the bad news is that those 14% of Kentuckians functioning at the lowest level of literacy represent 340,000 people in our state who have minimal skills needed to compete in the workplace, as well as to function in the home and in their communities. She added that another 650,000 adults in Kentucky function at the next lowest level of literacy. This may mean that they can read and write at minimal levels, but they have difficulty in applying what they read and write to other situations; thus 44% of Kentuckians struggle with minimal literacy skills, and 37% of the Kentuckians age 25 and older do not have a high school diploma.

Kentucky receives both federal and state funds for adult education and literacy. While total funds are at an all time high of $21 million annually, this funding is serving about 40,000 Kentuckians per year, or only about 5% of the target population. Nationally, programs are serving about 9% of the people who need those services.

The task force heard from various presenters and stakeholders and visited programs across the state to learn more about adult education. The task force divided into two teams and visited local adult education programs, observing programs located in Rockcastle, Whitley, Laurel, Bell, Hardin, Ohio, Daviess, and Hancock counties. The combined task force also visited the adult education program at the Kentucky Correctional Institution for Women at Pewee Valley and various programs in Jefferson County.

The task force contracted with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems for consulting services. The consultant provided a draft report and recommendations, which he presented to the task force for their review. They spent several meetings reviewing and amending the report and adopted it on August 18, 1999. The major findings and recommendations are as follows:

Findings

- 40% of Kentucky's working age population (1 million) is at the two lowest literacy levels I and II – not being able to read at all or at very limited to moderate levels.

- Two-thirds of Kentucky's counties have 40% or more of their working age population at levels I and II literacy; in 10 counties 50% or more of the working age population is at levels I and II literacy.

- Continued high dropout rates from secondary school continue to feed the problem.

- Low literacy levels of parents relate directly to the education of children and youth. Children of parents with low literacy levels are five times more likely to drop out of school.

- Illiteracy is a pervasive condition affecting every dimension of Kentucky life.

Principles

- Recognize that adult literacy is not an isolated problem but a fundamental barrier to every major challenge facing Kentucky.
- Create a 20-year strategy to raise the educational level of the Commonwealth's population; shift from implementing a state or federal law to leading a statewide strategy.
- Narrow the disparities among counties.
- Improve adult literacy of *all* Kentucky.
- Shift the emphasis from providers to the needs of clients; and from programs and pilots to systemic impact on adult literacy in all counties.
- Recognize multiple dimensions of the issue and the need for multiple but coordinated strategies to meet the needs of different target populations.
- Emphasize continuity and development of basic capacity of providers; require performance and accountability in serving clients.
- Recognize the different roles and strengths of players (e.g., public schools, postsecondary institutions, employers); avoid assigning roles that are inconsistent with strengths and traditions.
- Emphasize coordination among entities with differentiated roles.
- Focus on the county as the unit for improvement and change; use regional and statewide frameworks to support county-level change.
- Build on existing structures and statutory frameworks as much as possible; avoid creating new bureaucratic structure whenever possible.
- Use incentives rather than mandates to change the behavior of individuals, governments, institutions, and employers.
- Avoid "One-Size-Fits-All" strategies; recognize diversity among Kentucky's counties in needs, providers, and in "what works."

Recommendations

- Assign responsibility for statewide policy leadership for lifelong learning and adult education to the Council on Postsecondary Education to create and oversee:
  - a statewide 20-year strategy;
  - public advocacy;
  - coordination at the local, regional, and state levels;
  - a county-by-county network for coordinated service delivery to adults;
  - new policies on professional preparation, development, and certification of adult educators;
  - new financing alternatives; and
  - new approaches to assessment and accountability.

- Retain the Department for Adult Education and Literacy in the Cabinet for Workforce Development to:
  - implement federal and state policy as defined in current statute;
  - serve as the designated state agency for Title II of the Workforce Investment Act;
  - enter into five year agreements with the comprehensive coordinating entities;
  - increases the emphasis on performance; phases in over four years; and
  - provide technical assistance to the comprehensive coordinating entity to develop family literacy services.

- Expand the adult education and literacy initiative fund to support county and regional strategies for lifelong learning and adult education to provide a system of statewide initiatives for excellence, and to provide research and development funds.

- Include funding components to provide:
  - county and regional strategies focused on a comprehensive coordinated approach;
  - statewide initiatives that stimulate the development of models that may be replicated elsewhere in the state; and
  - research and demonstration that result in the development of:
    - > standards for the professional preparation of adult educators;
    - > a statewide competency-based certification for transferable skills in the workplace;
    - > incentives for adults, employers, and providers to establish and accomplish learning contracts;
    - > and other initiatives as determined by the council.

- Provide employer and workplace incentives to include:
- performance-based incentives for adult learners in the workplace; and
- tax credit and other incentives for private sector employers.

- Mandate that public employers require employees to have a high school diploma or GED or to obtain a GED, and that employers provide access to adult education for employees.

- Provide incentives for secondary school completion by providing:
  - improved programs for at-risk youth within secondary education;
  - incentives for out-of-school youth to obtain a GED or alternative secondary school certificate, linked to the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship program; and
  - a statewide requirement to be enrolled in school or a GED program to obtain a driver's license.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Adult illiteracy is like a disease that infects virtually every dimension of Kentucky life. Adult illiteracy saps the energy and capability of Kentucky's people and its economy. Adult illiteracy feeds the state's unemployment, its welfare rolls, and the correctional institutions. Adult illiteracy severely hinders the life chances of young children, undermines school reform, and limits the opportunities for postsecondary education.

Despite landmark reforms in public schools, too many Kentuckians continue to drop out of school, thereby perpetuating the chronic problem of adult illiteracy. Too many young Kentucky parents are unable to read and lack the basic literacy necessary to provide the necessary stimulating, supportive family environments for young children. It is known that children's literacy levels are strongly linked to the educational level of their parents and that children of parents who are unemployed and have not completed high school are five times more likely to drop out.

Kentucky's capacity to raise the state's per capita income, improve the quality of life of its population, and develop a competitive economy, depends fundamentally on the state's ability to increase the population's educational level. Progress is needed across all of Kentucky, not just some of Kentucky. The social, economic, and political costs of growing disparities between the haves and have-nots are unacceptable. To maintain its current standing relative to competitor states, Kentucky must make progress. Extraordinary progress will be necessary for Kentucky to improve its competitive position relative to neighboring states and the most progressive states in the nation.

To be successful, the Commonwealth's strategies must energize and gain the commitment of all the state's political, education, business, and civic leaders. No strategy will succeed unless it engages leaders in each community and county to identify needs and develop programs and services appropriate to the community's unique circumstances. The most serious challenge will be to motivate low-skilled, under-educated adults within the working age population to seek further education. Simply expanding the number of providers and programs will not necessarily increase demand from the populations and communities where the needs are greatest. Deep-seated social, economic and cultural barriers—many dating back generations—lead people to undervalue education. In addition, in many counties it is difficult for people to see a direct relationship between better education and better-paying jobs. Either there are no jobs available or many existing employers do little to emphasize the connection between better education and the possibilities for getting a job, keeping a job, or earning a higher wage. For many, getting more education and earning a high school diploma or a college degree has little positive meaning. Only the negative consequences are obvious: getting more education often means leaving one's family and community for jobs and opportunities for advancement somewhere else.

The future of Kentucky depends on uplifting the quality of life and economy of all of Kentucky. The social and economic costs of neglect of large parts of the state will drag down the rest of the state and seriously hinder its capacity to compete in the global economy.

Much like strategies to curb epidemic, strategies to reduce illiteracy and raise the educational attainment of Kentucky's population must include both short-term efforts to face the immediate crises as well as long-term strategies to get at the underlying causes. Short-term crises include the imperative to keep helping welfare clients make the transition from welfare to work within the constraints of federal and state mandates and the need to train workers for immediate employer demands. Long-term prevention must address the underlying, persistent problems of the state's economic structure as well as the low awareness--if not appreciation--among segments of the population of the vital connection among education, employment, and improved standards of living.

Definitions

The field of adult education and literacy is plagued by confusion about definitions. Over the years definitions have evolved from provisions in federal law and initiatives of groups advocating particular methodologies or the needs of specific adult populations. The result is that definitions tend to merge statements about the goals to be achieved (e.g., improving the literacy of a particular population) with a particular means (e.g., adult basic education) to achieve the goal.

Therefore, it is helpful to distinguish between at least these dimensions of the issue:

1. "Literacy" refers to the knowledge, skills, and competencies of individuals. The federal Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Title II of the Workforce Investment Act)[1] defines literacy as "an individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems, at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society." Literacy is often defined in terms of specific domains such as "basic academic skills," "workplace skills," "life skills," "parenting skills," or skills necessary to exercise one's rights and responsibilities for citizenship. Different dimensions of literacy are often categorized by terms that cluster several dimensions of literacy important for different clients. Examples include workplace literacy (combining both basic academic skills and workplace skills), and family literacy (combining basic academic skills and other skills essential for successful parenting).

2. "Education attainment" usually refers to the numbers of years of schooling completed or the level of credential (e.g., high school diploma or associate degree) an individual has obtained. Despite concerns about the meaning of credentials, there is a strong correlation between educational attainment and literacy.

3. "Literacy initiatives" often are defined in terms of the needs of a particular target group. These may be parents of young children, youth who have dropped out of high school without earning a high school diploma, welfare recipients, persons with limited English-speaking ability, incarcerated adults, or adults in the workforce.

4. Other literacy initiatives are defined in terms of a particular educational service, strategy, or means to address a target population's literacy problems. "Adult basic education" and "family literacy" are examples. These initiatives are often defined in terms of a particular

configuration of services for the target population (e.g., assessment and information and counseling services).

5. The term "lifelong learning" is often associated with "literacy." Lifelong learning is a means to the goal of maintaining necessary levels of literacy throughout one's lifetime. The goal of lifelong learning has implications for both individual adult's learning behavior as well as education policy and the design of the education system.

Goal six of the National Education Goals illustrates a broadly stated goal that incorporates expectations about both adult literacy and the kinds of policies and services that should be in place to improve literacy. Goal six, "Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning," states that, "By the year 2000, every adult will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship." The objectives related to this goal touch on several of the common elements of definitions listed above, for example:

- Different dimensions of literacy (e.g., academic and workplace skills),
- The level of education attainment (e.g., increasing the number of persons who complete postsecondary degrees),
- The needs of target groups (e.g., parents, minorities, or part-time learners),
- The need to increase the availability of particular educational services, strategies or means (e.g., accessibility of libraries to part-time learners or opportunities for parental involvement), and
- The importance of lifelong learning, both in the learning behavior of individuals and in the educational system's responsiveness to the needs of adult learners.[2]

National Adult Literacy Survey

The National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS)[3], carried out by the Educational Testing Service, was initiated in 1988 and was last conducted in 1992. NALS is the widely accepted measure of literacy in the nation's adult population. The Kentucky Adult Literacy Survey conducted in 1997 used the same definition of literacy as the national survey. Both surveys define literacy as "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential." The surveys capture three dimensions of literacy: prose, document, and quantitative. Prose literacy is the knowledge and skill to understand and use information that contains prose format, such as news stories, reports, books, and poems. Document literacy is the knowledge and skill to find and use information in documents like job applications, maps, schedules, and payroll forms. Quantitative literacy is the knowledge and skill to locate numbers contained in printed material and apply arithmetic operations, either alone or sequentially, to do things like balance a check book, complete an order form, figure the interest from a loan application, or similar activities.

Because individuals' levels of literacy vary among domains and change over time, the literacy surveys recognize five general levels of literacy proficiency along each of the

dimensions: prose, document, and quantitative. Individuals at Level 1, considered "highly deficient to very limited," have no or minimal literacy skills. The simplest prose literacy tasks at Level 1 involve reading a relatively short text to locate a single item of information identical to or synonymous with the information given in the question or directive. Individuals at Level 2 of prose literacy, considered "very limited to moderate," may be required to match a single piece of information in the text while ignoring distracters or plausible, but incorrect information. Alternatively, the reader might be required to integrate two pieces of information or compare and contrast easily identifiable information. As the complexity of tasks that the individual can complete increases, so does the level of literacy. At Level 5, the highest level of literacy proficiency, individuals are able to extract and use complex information for various purposes.[4]

Federal Law

The federal Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, now Title II of the Workforce Investment Act, replaces the Adult Education Act as amended by the National Literacy Act of 1991. The Act makes a clear distinction between the definitions of "literacy" and "adult education." "Literacy," as cited above, is defined in terms of the ability of individuals to accomplish certain functions or tasks. "Adult education," in contrast, is defined in terms of services.

The term "adult education" means services or instruction below the postsecondary level for individuals:

- Who have attained 16 years of age;
- Who are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under state law and;
- Who (1) lack sufficient mastery of basic educational skills to enable the individuals to function effectively in society; (2) do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and have not achieved an equivalent level of education; or (3) are unable to speak, read, or write the English language.[5]

The federal law defines other aspects of the services for different target populations, including English literacy programs, family literacy services, and workplace literacy services.

Kentucky Statutes

The statute authorizing the Department for Adult Education and Literacy (KRS 151B.410) does not include an explicit definition of "adult education and literacy" except in terms of services that are to be included in an "adult education learning system." In practice, as the designated state agency for the federal Adult Education and Literacy Act, the Department's focus is on teaching "basic skills" to the adult learner (16 and older) regardless of beginning level. Each level is related to grade levels at the elementary or secondary levels:

Level I	0 to 5.9 grade level
Level II	6 to 8.9 grade level
Level III	9.0 to 11.9 grade level

Because of the close association of the term "adult education" with federal law, the role of the Department of Adult Education and Literacy has been construed narrowly. Perhaps, therefore, the Department has not been seen as the accountability point in state government for statewide leadership on the broader challenge of all dimensions of adult literacy in Kentucky.

The definitions in federal law are intended to focus and narrow the specific target populations and services that are eligible for federal funding. While these limitations are important for federal purposes, it is important for Kentucky to define its goals in broader terms in relationship to the Commonwealth's unique needs and circumstances. These goals should set forth expectations regarding the literacy of the population—the knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for full participation in society—for family literacy, for employment and economic self-sufficiency, for citizenship, and for continuing/lifelong learning. The means—e.g., the specific configuration of services—should then be able to take a wide range of forms, subject to accountability for performance. State policies should establish the framework within which a wide range of services can be developed to meet highest priority needs. While some of these services may meet the federal definitions, others may go beyond the federal law in efforts to serve Kentucky's adult population.

Evidence on Adult Literacy in Kentucky

Most Serious Problem: 40% of the working age population at Levels 1 and 2

Forty percent of Kentucky's working age population ages 16 to 64 functions at the two lowest levels of literacy—not being able to read at all or having very limited to moderate reading ability. Statewide averages mask the reality that large numbers of Kentucky counties have levels of literacy comparable only to those of developing nations—not other states.

The Martin School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Kentucky conducted a 1995 survey of adults between the ages of 16 and 65 to determine the literacy levels in the state. The Kentucky Adult Literacy Survey (KALS) was based on the same instruments that were used to measure literacy across the US in the National Adult Literacy Survey. The data were prepared by the Educational Testing Service and analyzed by the Martin School. The Kentucky survey found that an estimated 14% of Kentucky adults, or 346,000, are at Level 1 in prose proficiency, and another 26%, or 631,000, are at Level 2 of proficiency. The numbers are roughly comparable for document and quantitative literacy proficiency. These data indicate that 14% of Kentucky's adults on average have no or virtually no literacy skills. Another 26% have low levels of skills that are likely to impede their personal advancement and, collectively, the development of the state's economy. In other words, approximately 1 million of Kentucky's 2.4 million working age population function at Levels 1 and 2.[6]

Comparison with the US and the Southeast

Despite the alarming size of Kentucky's workforce at the two lowest literacy levels, the KALS found that on average the Kentucky population's literacy levels are competitive with literacy levels of all Americans and the residents of the Southeast.

- The average prose, document, and quantitative literacy proficiency of Kentucky adults is higher than the national and regional averages. The average prose proficiency of

Kentucky adults is 286, compared to 267 for the Southeast and 272 for the nation. The average document proficiency in Kentucky is 284, compared to 262 in the Southeast and 267 in the nation. The average quantitative literacy is 280 in Kentucky, 265 in the Southeast, and 271 for the country as a whole.

- Fewer Kentucky adults perform at the lowest levels of literacy. For prose literacy, 14% of Kentucky adults are at Level 1, compared to 23% for the Southeast and 21% nationally. For document literacy, 13% of Kentucky adults are at Level 1, compared to 26% in the Southeast and 23% nationally. For quantitative literacy, 16% of Kentucky adults are at Level 1, compared to 25% in the Southeast and 22% nationally.

- More Kentucky adults perform at the highest proficiency levels (Levels 4 and 5) than adults in either the Southeast or the nation.

- When the national data are adjusted to be comparable to the Kentucky data for working age adults (ages 16 to 64), Kentucky adults continue to outperform other adults, although the differences are not as great.

The report on the KALS survey points out that these positive results for Kentucky are somewhat surprising in light of Kentucky's low rankings for educational attainment in the 1990 US Census. In 1990, Kentucky ranked first in the nation in the proportion of the population that had less than a 9th grade education, 19%, compared to 10.4% nationally. Among neighboring states, only Tennessee (16%) and West Virginia (16.8%) approached this low level of educational attainment. In 1990, 35.4% of Kentucky's population age 25 and older had less than a high school education, compared to 24.8% for the US. Among neighboring states, only Tennessee (32.9%) and West Virginia (34%) approached this level of low educational attainment. Kentucky ranked 49th out of 50 in the proportion of the adult population with a high school diploma or higher.

Some of the difference—but certainly not all—between the results for Kentucky and those for the nation and the Southeast can be explained by the differences in the population surveyed as well as in the racial and ethnic composition of the respective populations.[7]

Comparison with Competitor States

A more important question for Kentucky, however, is how its levels of literacy compare with those of its competitor states—many of which are not in the Southeast. Figure 1 shows estimates of literacy in Kentucky and 14 other states. These states include those in the Southeast as well as Kentucky's neighboring states and one or two states considered as Kentucky's principal economic competitors. These data are estimates based on statistical analysis combining the NALS data and 1990 US Census data. The mean proficiency levels combine levels for prose, document, and quantitative literacy. Even allowing for variations at the 95% confidence level, Kentucky's mean proficiency level is significantly below those for Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Ohio, and Virginia. The percentage of the population at Level I (total population, not just working age population) is comparable to those of these five competitor states, while the proportion of Kentucky's population at Levels I and II is significantly higher than those in all of these states. In other words, these literacy data are good news when Kentucky is compared with

states in the Deep South, but not such good news when compared with states in the Midwest that are major competitors for economic development.

Figure 1

Synthetic Estimates of Literacy - Kentucky and Competitor States

State	Mean Proficiency Level	Percent Level I	Percent Levels I & II	Percent Less Than 9th Grade	Percent 9th Grade but Less Than 12th	Percent Less Than H.S. Diploma
Kentucky	262	19	54	17	17	34
Alabama	258	25	57	12	20	32
Florida	265	25	51	9	17	26
Georgia	263	23	54	11	18	29
Illinois	275	20	44	9	14	23
Indiana	277	16	43	8	16	24
Louisiana	254	28	61	13	18	31
Mississippi	249	30	64	14	21	35
Missouri	274	17	46	10	15	25
N. Carolina	265	22	52	11	18	29
Ohio	275	18	45	7	17	24
S. Carolina	259	25	56	12	19	31
Tennessee	264	21	53	14	18	32
Virginia	272	19	47	10	14	24
W. Virginia	261	20	56	15	18	33

SOURCE: Stephen Reder, Portland State University, 1996. Available on the Worldwide Web through the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System, CASAS.org. Prepared under contract with the U.S. Department of Education. Synthetic estimates are prepared to statistical techniques using the 1962 data from NALS and the 1990 U.S. Census. The proficiency levels are the average of prose, document, and quantitative literacy for the state. Estimates are at a 95% confidence level. This means that the true proficiency levels and the estimated percentages at Levels I and II could be several points above or below the levels in this table. Therefore, small differences are not statistically significant.

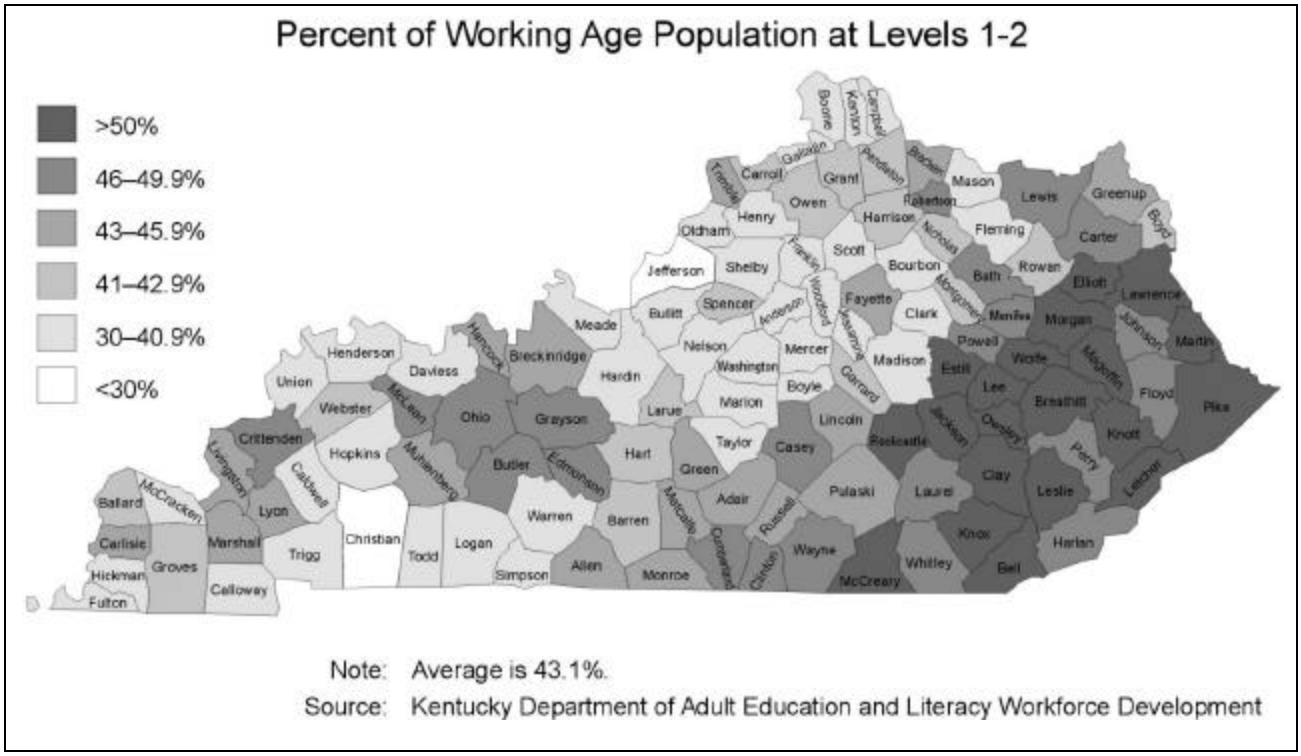
Major Issue: Variations Within Kentucky

Average figures for Kentucky mask some of the most seriously bw levels of literacy and education attainment of any state in the nation. The differences within Kentucky are more severe than any differences between Kentucky and other states. Large portions of the state have literacy levels that could only compare with those of developing nations.[8]

The 1995 KALS sample size permitted analysis of the results by five Kentucky regions: Northern Kentucky, the Lexington metropolitan area, the Louisville metropolitan area, Eastern Kentucky, and Western Kentucky. These results revealed approximately 30 point differences between the proficiency levels for the highest scoring region, the Lexington metropolitan area, and the lowest scoring region, Eastern Kentucky, and almost 20 point differences between the Lexington area and Western Kentucky. In 1998, the University of Kentucky's Martin School prepared "synthetic" estimates of literacy for as many of the Kentucky counties as possible, using a methodology similar to that used for the comparison of Kentucky with competitor states. In contrast to inter-state comparisons, however, the UK estimates for Kentucky counties were for the state's working age population, ages 16 to 64. (Figure 2.) These new estimates found that in

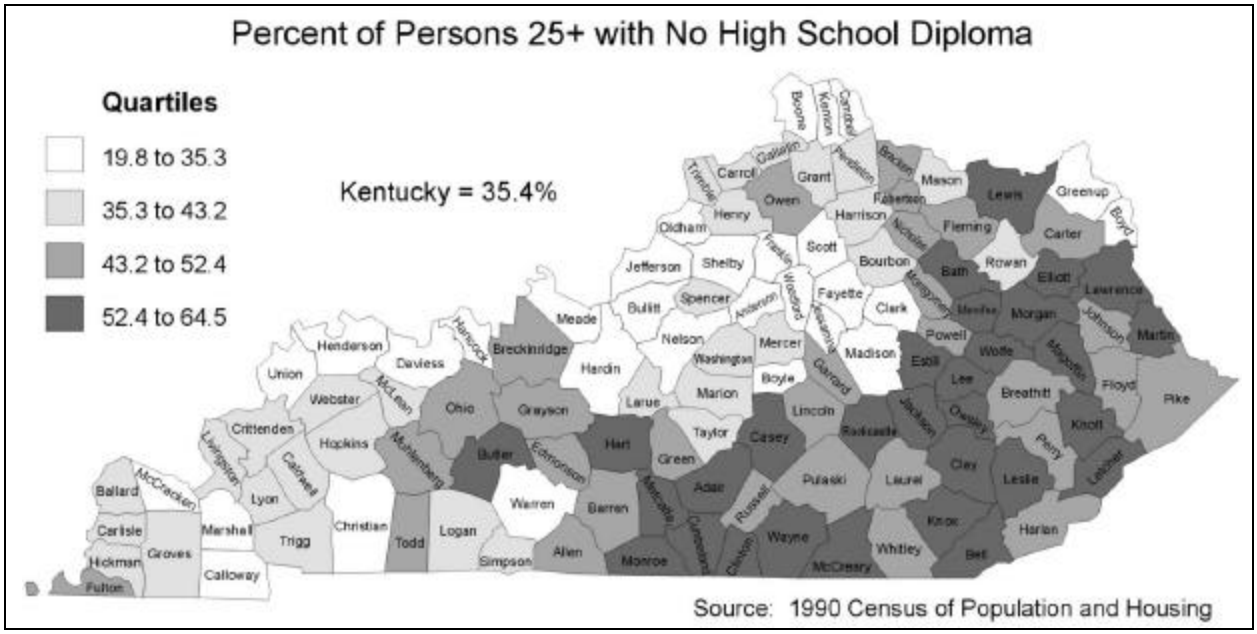
two-thirds of the counties, the percentage of the working age population at Levels I and II exceeds 40%, and in 20 counties it is more than 50%.

Figure 2



Because the KALS estimates are based in part on census data, it is not surprising that the estimates mirror the 1990 findings of striking disparities among Kentucky counties in educational attainment. (Figure 3.) In 1990, in 31 counties more than 52% of the adult population age 25 and older lacked a high school education. In 25% of the counties, the proportion of the adult population with eight years of education or less exceeded 35%.[9] (U.S. Census, 1990; KY Data Center)

Figure 3



Overcoming the Legacy of the Past

One of the most persistent barriers to both youth and adults pursuing further education is a perception that further education does not lead to higher paying jobs or that higher paying jobs are not necessarily related to further education. Striking evidence of this problem can be found in research on the effects of the coal boom of the 1970s on high school dropouts in Pike County. The boommay have had an unanticipated outcome, creating high-wage, relatively low-skill jobs in the local economy that effectively rewarded dropping out of high school. The analysis strongly suggests more and more students were not completing high school during the coal boom, but were dropping out to take jobs in the coal and other industries that were expanding at the time. The data suggest that the coal boom may have increased the earnings of high school dropouts relative to high school graduates, which caused a decline in high school enrollments. One would have expected the coal bust in the 1980s to increase the incentive to finish high school. Instead, the difference in earnings between those who dropped out of high school and those who completed high school increased only slightly during the 1980s, while the most significant change was between those who completed only high school and those who completed some postsecondary education.[10]

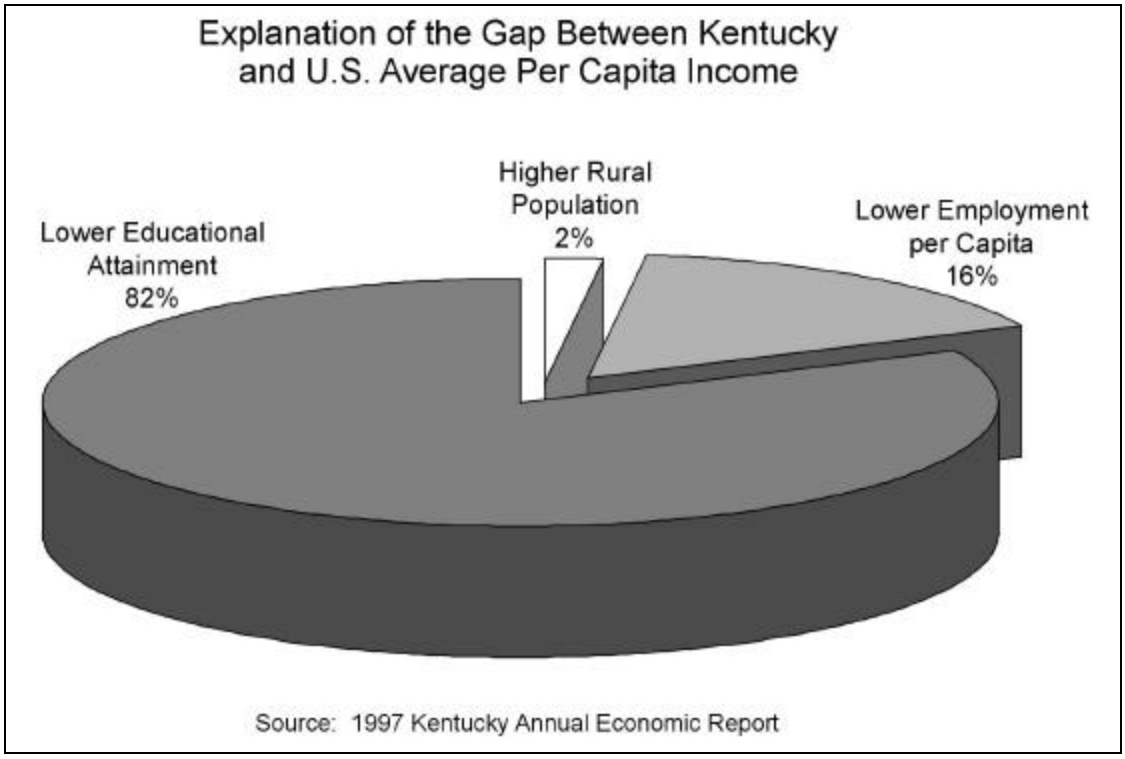
Why is Adult Literacy Important?

There is a strong relationship between the Kentucky population's comparatively low educational attainment and the Commonwealth's comparatively low per capita income.

In a paper published in the 1997 Kentucky Annual Economic Report, Mark Berger used an econometric model to explain why Kentucky's per capita income level is below that of the average across all states. As shown in Figure 4, Berger was able to explain that 82 percent of the

difference between Kentucky's predicted per capita incomes and the predicted average of the states' per capita incomes is attributable to education differences.[11]

Figure 4



The Task Force heard testimony from the commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Community Development on the direct relationship between the educational attainment levels in Kentucky's counties and these counties' ability to compete with counties in other states. Using an econometric model similar to that used by Berger, the Department of Community Development found a correlation between the per capita income and education attainment in 1,384 counties, including 120 Kentucky counties and 1,264 "competitor" counties. The commissioner also underscored the strong relationship between the percentage of each Kentucky county's population with a high school education and above and the county's per capita income and its attractiveness to employers paying above the national average.

As shown in Figure 5, the percent of the county population 25 years and older with 12 or more years of education displays a statewide picture that is the inverse of the concentrations of low levels of adult literacy summarized in Figure 3. Comparing this map with Figure 6, it can be seen that per capita personal income in 1996 by county is highly correlated with educational attainment. The commissioner stressed the reality that prospective employers carefully analyze the education of the workforce before deciding to relocate. It should not be surprising, therefore, that most of the projects undertaken through Kentucky economic development initiatives (KREDA, KJDA, KIDA) in the period from 1989 to 1998 have occurred in counties with higher levels of educational attainment of the adult population. The projects creating jobs that pay

above the national average are even more highly concentrated in counties with the highest levels of educational attainment.

Figure 5

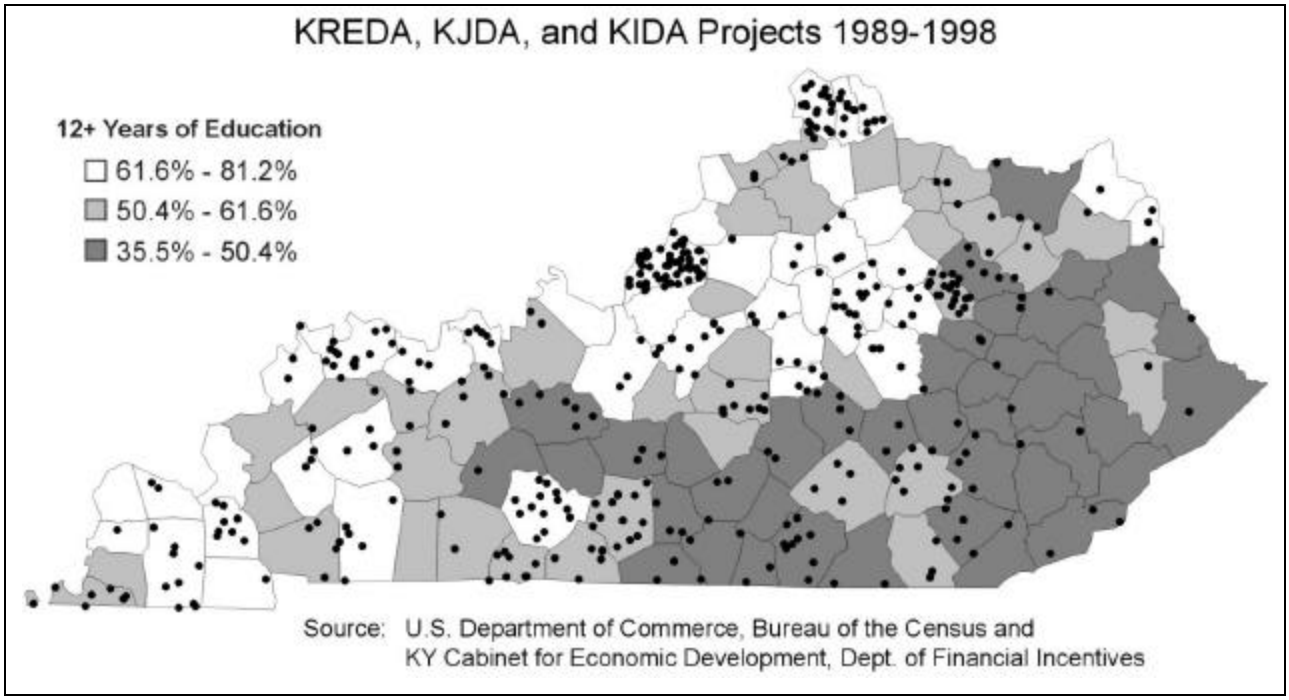
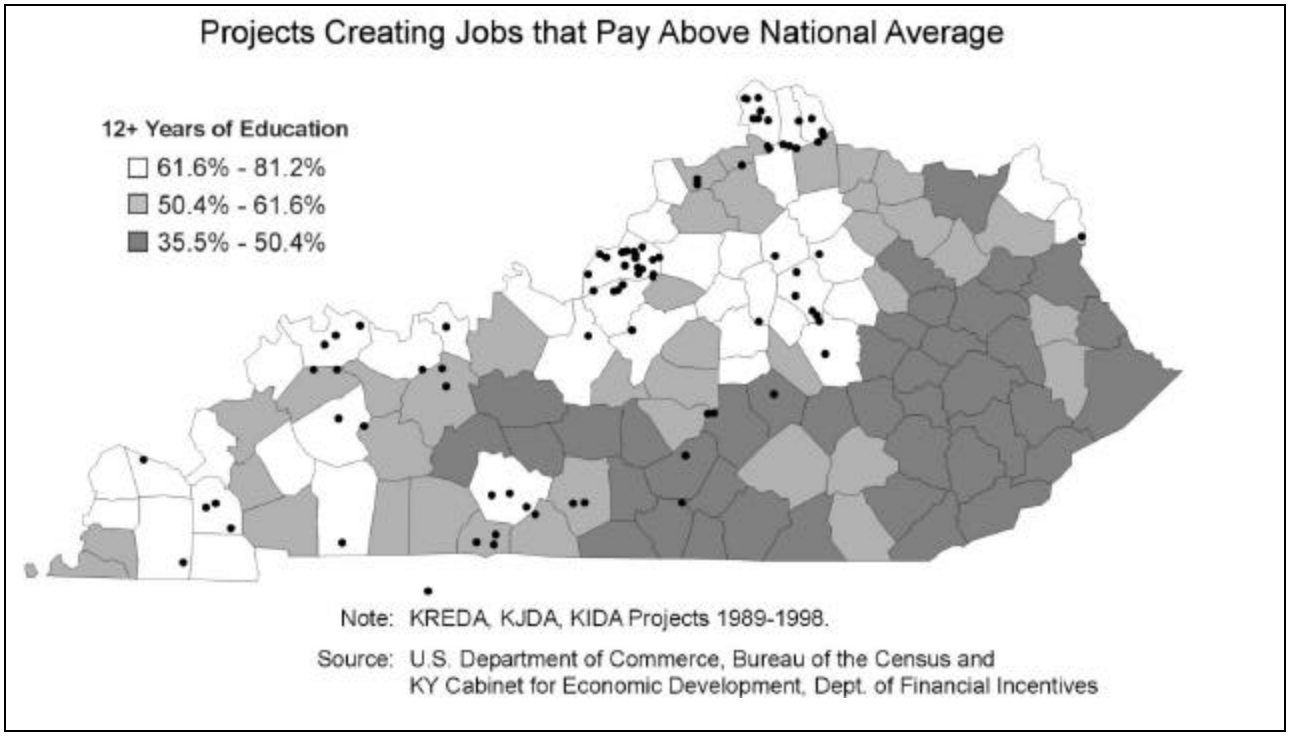


Figure 6

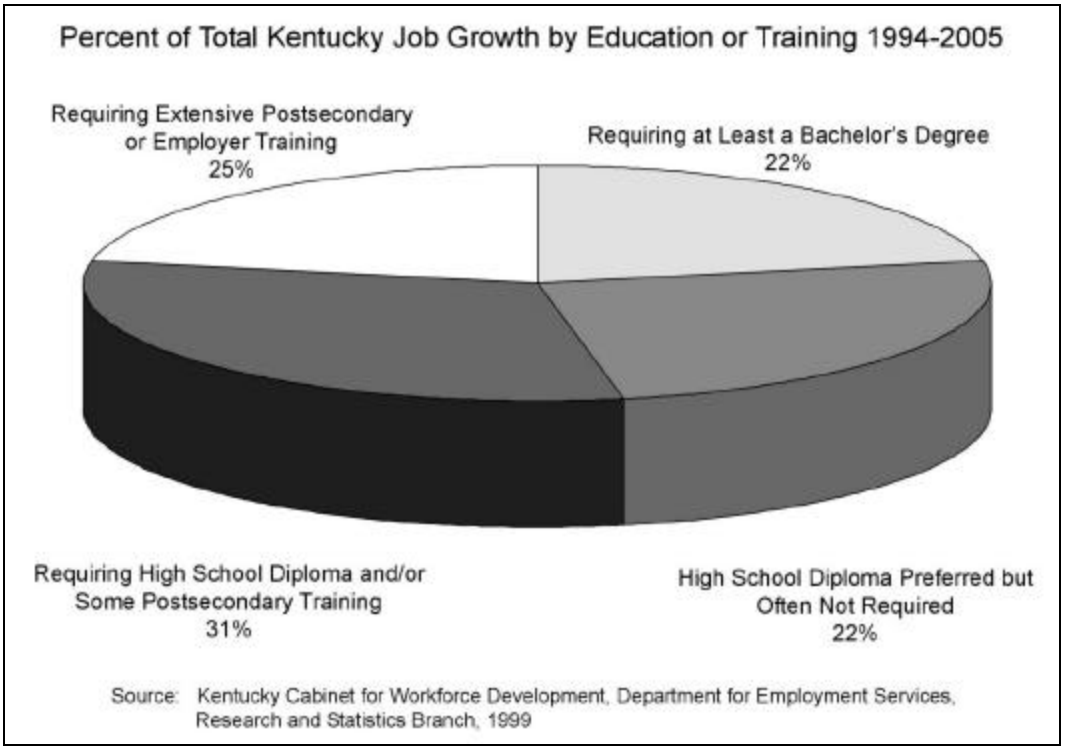


Kentucky's economy is increasingly demanding a high school diploma and more.

As the president of MDC, Inc., emphasized in his testimony to the Task Force, "a high school diploma is only economically relevant as a ticket to more education."[12] Without a high school diploma, however, the chances of an adult's obtaining employment in Kentucky are steadily decreasing. Even more alarming is the Department of Adult Education and Literacy's estimate that more than 90% of the target population—adults at the two lowest levels of literacy—are in the workforce. This means that they are unable—or only minimally able—to participate in employer-based training and upgrading to maintain or improve their skills. Their chances for advancing beyond minimum wage jobs are slight.

Nearly 50% of the new jobs created in Kentucky through 2005 will be in two major occupational divisions: professional/technical and services. Employment in professional/technical occupations will produce the most new jobs of all sectors, followed by new service jobs. Within these two major sectors, health care and computer-related occupations will grow very rapidly through 2005. New jobs in personal service and protective service occupations will also increase at a very fast pace. Employment will grow in occupations requiring all levels of education and training. Kentucky's job growth will range from 22% to 31% through 2005, when allocated among the four education levels as illustrated in Figure 7. Employment in occupations requiring education and training beyond high school will increase in the share of total employment by 2005.

Figure 7

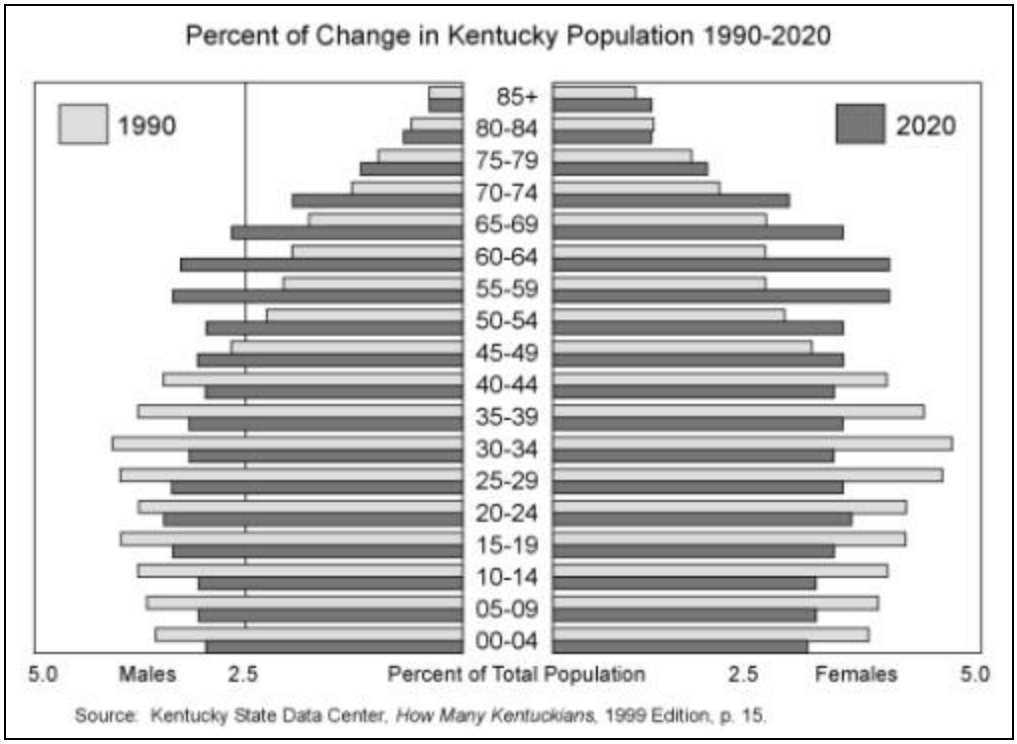


Most of the state's workforce well into the next century will be drawn from adults already in Kentucky's working age population.

As important as reform of elementary and secondary education is to the future of Kentucky, the foregoing forecast of new jobs, the Commonwealth's economy and quality of life for the next twenty years will depend heavily on those who have already completed secondary education. More than half of those who will make up Kentucky's workforce in the year 2020 are now in Kentucky's working age population and are beyond secondary school. The current cohort ages 20 through 40 is estimated to be slightly larger than the cohort ages 0 to 19. In fact, population forecasts indicate that Kentucky will continue to experience a decline in the population in the younger age cohorts, a shrinking of the population in the most productive years of the 30s and 40s, and a significant proportion of the population in the older age groups.[13]

Adult literacy is especially critical for the Kentucky counties with the most serious literacy problems. It is these counties where the proportion of the population in the older age cohorts is increasing while the younger age cohorts are declining. (Figure 8.) In other words, uplifting the quality of life and economies of these areas must depend on improvements in adult literacy, because there will not be enough young people graduating from secondary education to replace the current workforce. In addition the education of young children depends strongly on the education of their parents.

Figure 8



Adult literacy is critical to virtually every issue facing Kentucky.

Early childhood education. Children's literacy levels are strongly linked to the educational level of their parents, especially their mothers. Parental income and marital status are both important predictors of success in school, but neither is as significant as having a mother (or primary caregiver) who completed high school. Children of parents who are unemployed and have not completed high school are five times more likely to drop out of school than children of employed parents.[14]

Crime prevention. According to national data, prisoners generally have significantly lower literacy skills than the general population. Those who improve their skills return to prison less often. Only 51% of prisoners have completed high school or its equivalent, compared with 76% of the general population. Seventy percent of prisoners scored in the two lowest literacy levels of the National Adult Literacy Survey. Eleven percent of prisoners self-report having learning disabilities, compared with three percent of the general population.[15] In Kentucky, 40% to 45% of the population of the state's correctional institutions have less than a high school education.

Health. Adult literacy is directly related to health. Low educational attainment and higher rates of morbidity (serious health problems) and mortality are strongly correlated with adult literacy. The fundamental problem is that adults with low levels of literacy simply cannot read and understand much of the public information available for prevention and treatment. Therefore, improving public health and prevention is inextricably linked to improving adult literacy. Individuals with low income and limited education are at a higher risk for both cancer incidence and mortality.[16]

Breaking the cycle of dependency on public assistance. Improving basic literacy and education skills can be the key to long-term self-sufficiency for welfare recipients. National data show that welfare recipients ages 17-21 read, on average, at the sixth grade level. When teens drop out of school, they are likely to drop into the welfare system. Almost 50% of adults on welfare do not have a high school diploma or GED. Welfare recipients with low education skills stay on welfare the longest; those with stronger education skills become self-sufficient more quickly. Over 60% of those who spend more than five years on welfare enter AFDC with less than a high school education. Over 65% of people on welfare who have a high school diploma or GED leave welfare and become self-sufficient within two years. The education level of welfare recipients is closely linked to their income level. Adults with low literacy skills earn the least. As literacy skills improve, welfare recipients' average weekly wages increase. Workers who lack a high school diploma earn a mean monthly income of $452, compared to $1,829 for those with a bachelor's degree. Among adults with low literacy skills, 43% live in poverty and 17% receive food stamps. In contrast, among adults with strong literacy skills, less than five percent live in poverty and less than one percent receive food stamps. Welfare recipients with low literacy skills work 11 weeks per year, on average, compared to 29 weeks for those with stronger literacy skills.[17]

The data in Kentucky mirror the national data. Of the adults served by the Cabinet for Families and Children, 50% do not have a secondary credential, and 40% of that population have a learning disability that gets in the way of further education and training.[18]

Summary

The “disease” of adult illiteracy is at the base of every major challenge facing Kentucky. Adult illiteracy is not a separate problem. It cannot be isolated. It is a contributing element to all other problems.

Average figures comparing Kentucky as a whole with other states and the nation can be deceiving. The differences within Kentucky are far more severe than any inter-state comparison will reveal. No state—or nation—will be able to compete in the global economy based on the success of only part of its population. The problems of the population left behind will sap the state’s economy and undermine its capacity to compete with other states and nations.

Today, Kentucky is trying to compete in two diametrically opposite niches of the world economy. At the high end, Kentucky is competing for knowledge-intensive industries requiring the best and brightest workforce in the world. At the low end, Kentucky is competing for industries that seek “workers” who lack even basic skills and will labor in conditions that exist only in the worst low-skill, low-wage economies of the world.

What Kentucky has to offer is what it has—and this means all the strengths and weaknesses of the literacy of its adult population. Unless Kentucky makes a commitment to uplift the literacy of those who are here now, it will never be able to offer a brighter future to those who will be here in the future.

CHAPTER II

DO KENTUCKY'S CURRENT EFFORTS TO COMBAT ADULT ILLITERACY MATCH THE SEVERITY OF THE PROBLEM?

Because it infects every dimension of life in Kentucky, the problem of illiteracy/low educational attainment cannot be isolated as the problem of one sector or one agency. Yet much of the attention focuses on the Department of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL), a unit within the Cabinet for Workforce Development. This part of the report focuses first on the findings of the Task Force regarding DAEL, and then makes an overall assessment of Kentucky's efforts to address the adult literacy issue.

The Department of Adult Education and Literacy

The Department of Adult Education and Literacy was established (KRS 151B.023) in its current form by legislation enacted in 1994 (1994 Kentucky Acts, Chapter 469) and by Executive Order 98-837 further reorganizing the Cabinet for Workforce Development. The 1994 legislation divided the former Department of Adult and Technical Education into the Department of Adult Education and Literacy and the Department of Technical Education. The legislation also abolished the Governor's Commission on Literacy and established the State Advisory Council on Adult Education and Literacy.

Executive Order 98-837 changed the membership of the State Board for Adult and Technical Education and redefined its responsibilities as primarily advisory to the Secretary of the Cabinet for Workforce Development. The Executive Order abolished the State Advisory Council on Adult Education and Literacy recognizing that this entity's powers and duties could "… be exercised efficiently and responsibly by the State Board for Adult and Technical Education." (July 1, 1998).

DAEL's mission is to "enable adult Kentuckians to acquire essential skills through a learner-centered network that promotes economic stability and quality of life in the commonwealth." The department's statutory responsibility is "… for all administrative functions of the state in relationship to the management, control, and operation of programs and services in adult education and literacy." The department is the sole state agency for developing and approving state plans required for Kentucky to receive federal funds for adult education and literacy. (KRS 151B.023.)

DAEL is headed by a commissioner who is appointed by the secretary of the Cabinet for Workforce Development with the approval of the Governor. Executive Order 98-837 also clarified the duties of the Commissioner as the chief executive officer of the Department of Adult Education and Literacy.

The department consists of three divisions:

- **Management services**, including administrative services, policy and evaluation, and GED administration.

- **Program services**, including field services, professional development services, and curriculum instructional support. The field services branch currently supports six regional consultants, who provide ongoing technical assistance to local adult education programs to meet the needs of instructors and supervisors. Professional development services provides for six regional coordinators, who oversee all the development and training of adult educators in Kentucky.

- **Workforce investment**, including the SKILL (State of Kentucky Investment in Lifelong Learning) branch and the Workforce Essential Skills branch. Training and development coordinators within the SKILL branch are assigned to regions to help providers develop partnerships with business and industry, help assess the learning needs of employees within industries, and customize adult education programs offered onsite.

Services

Six major kinds of services are available through providers under contract with DAEL.

- **Adult Basic Education and Literacy Services (Beginning And Intermediate)**. DAEL contracts with local boards of education, community and technical colleges, community-based organizations, education consortia, public and private non-profit organizations, and correctional institutions to provide adult education and literacy services in all 120 counties in a variety of settings and locations.

- **General Educational Development (GED) Tests.** DAEL maintains 55 GED testing centers located throughout the Commonwealth. The entities responsible for the centers across the state include local school districts, community colleges, correctional institutions, technical schools, and colleges or universities.

- **English Literacy Services.** In 1997-98, thirty-four ESL (English as a Second Language) classes were offered statewide, which served 1,458 students. An ESL program is also maintained at the largest state correctional institution.

- **Workplace Literacy Services**. Through the Workforce Investment Division, DAEL provides leadership and support in the delivery of adult education to the workforce. The division is composed of two branches—the State of Kentucky Investment in Lifelong Learning (SKILL) branch and the Workplace Essential Skills (WES) branch. The Workforce Investment Division works directly with employers and labor to identify training needs of incumbent workers that can be met by adult education. Services include customized training and computer-based instruction. Two fully equipped mobile classrooms and labs are also used to provide workplace instruction.

- **Family Literacy Services.** In addition to the family and life skills instruction offered through regular Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs, DAEL receives state funding to provide more intensive family literacy services. The Kentucky Parent and Child Education for Family Independence Program (PACE) is designed to break the intergenerational cycle of undereducation by providing opportunities for parents and their children (aged 0-8) to learn together (KRS 158.360).

- **Initiative Fund.** To encourage improvement and stimulate reform of adult education, the Kentucky General Assembly created initiative grants totaling $2 million per year. These projects employ or research creative, replicable, and cost-effective service delivery models to discover better ways to reach adult learners who have not responded well to traditional methods of instruction (KRS 151B.142).

Total funding from all sources for the Department of Adult Education and Literacy was $19.9 million for FY 98-99. The Commonwealth of Kentucky provides approximately one half of the funding, or $10.7 million, of which $6.8 million is for basic grants. Other state funds include $2.0 million for the initiative fund (General Fund Incentive Grants) and $1.9 million for the Parent and Child Education for Family Independence Program (PACE). Federal grant awards to the department totaling $6.7 million include $4 million for basic grants. The remaining federal funds, as well as an additional $2.6 million for programs with other agencies (Welfare to Work and Jobs for Adult Graduates (JAG), are restricted for specific categorical purposes. In other words, only $10.8 million ($6.8 million from the state general fund and $4 million in federal grants) is available for the core basic adult education programs supported through the department.

Figure 9

Kentucky Department for Adult Education and Literacy
Adult Education FY 1998-99 Grant Funds

General Fund Total		**$10,673,400**
General Fund Basic Grant	$6,756,800	
General Fund Incentive Grant	$2,000,000	
PACE	$1,916,600	
Federal Grant Award		**$6,652,370**
Administration	$332,519	
Basic Grants	$4,024,040	
Corrections	$665,237	
Professional Development and Training	$665,237	
353 Research and Demonstration	$250,000	
Gateway	$50,000	
Agency Fund Total		**$2,560,000**
JAG	$400,000	
Welfare to Work	$2,160,000	
TOTAL:		**$19,885,770**

DAEL carries out these services through a number of collaborative arrangements with other state agencies. The Department of Corrections, Justice Cabinet, offers educational programs in twelve correctional facilities with an inmate population of 9,385 (not including jails and private prisons). Between 40% and 45% of the inmates have less than a high school diploma. The Department of Corrections has a Memorandum of Agreement with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) whereby staff, curriculum and program standards are offered to each correctional facility. Both academic (primarily adult basic education) and

technical programs are offered at ten of the facilities, and only academic programs at the remaining two. All correctional technical programs are postsecondary. The Council on Occupational Education accredits the Correctional Education Centers. Approximately 51% of the inmate population participate in at least one of the available educational programs. Inmates have clear incentives to participate. They receive 60 days of educational good time when they obtain a diploma and 75 cents per day while attending class. Some correctional institutions require the GED or a high school diploma for institutional jobs. That an inmate has obtained a GED or a technical diploma is an asset when he or she meets with the Parole Board. The inmate demand for educational programs exceeds the capacity to offer programs—a capacity that is limited in most instances by the lack of available space. All adult basic education programs have waiting lists at every level.

The total budget for Department of Corrections educational programs (academic and technical) in FY 1998 was $5.8 million. Most of the funding is appropriated by the state to the Department of Corrections, including $2.1 million for academic (ABE) programs and $3.1 million for technical programs. Approximately $0.2 million comes from the federal Adult Education Act (through DAEL) for adult basic education programs, and the remaining funding comes from other federal programs.

DAEL receives federal funding for Gateway programs that provide adult basic education and life skills instruction specifically to client tenants of public housing authorities. The department also receives funds for the Jobs for Adult Graduates (JAG) program through the federal Job Training and Partnership Act (JPTA). Designed after Jobs for America's Graduates, this program targets 16- to 23-year olds who have dropped out of school. The department provides adult basic education services to welfare recipients through projects funded through the Cabinet for Families and Children. Projects deliver a combination of basic skills training, job skills training, life/family management skills training, and job placement services leading to employment and self-sufficiency.

Other projects and services supported primarily with federal adult education funds include:

- Special experimental demonstration projects involving innovative methods, systems, materials or programs that may have national significance or be of value in promoting effective programs;

- Federal workplace essential skills programs providing basic skills instruction using everyday work situations to teach basic skills, including math, quality control methods, critical thinking, and decision-making; and

- Staff development programs.

The DAEL oversees a network of providers who receive funding on a competitive basis through grants. The highly diverse set of providers, a perceived strength of the network, is as follows:

Table I

ADULT EDUCATION PROVIDERS		
Providers		**Number of Providers**
1.	Boards of education	70
2.	Regional education coops	4 cooperatives, 29 districts
3.	Community-based organizations	13
4.	Correctional institutions	12
5.	Technical colleges	3
6.	Community colleges	3
7.	Universities	3
8.	Local government	2
9.	Housing authorities	2
10.	Other state agencies	2

Program Strengths

The existing DAEL programs have a number of strengths that should be recognized in any future strategy:

- Many dedicated teachers, volunteers, providers, community organizations, and employers involved in the educational process.

- Examples of extraordinary commitment of local communities, not-for-profit organizations, churches, local schools, and volunteers. Also, a number of highly successful models, some of which are nationally recognized, for addressing the issues of adult literacy. Key characteristics of these models include:

  - Systematic approach to serving clients (e.g., providing multiple services to meet the needs of the client and his or her family, referring clients to other providers, and linking adult education with employment).

  - Leadership by one or more individuals who facilitate services of multiple providers to serve individual clients and the community.

- Partnerships with employers providing opportunities to develop work-place skills and connect further education with opportunities for employment and advancement.

- Professional personnel who have the knowledge and skills necessary to serve adult learners and clients with learning disabilities and who participate in professional development programs and networks to keep up-to-date with the latest developments in the field.

- Accessibility for clients in terms of

  > Scheduling that takes into account work, child-care and other family responsibilities

  > Locations that are geographically accessible and appropriate for adults

  > Availability of technology that is necessary for adults to access information and materials on-line, through video, or other means, and

  > Pedagogy that reflects how adults learn and the diverse needs of adults.

- Infrastructure in place for expanded services, i.e., public schools, community facilities, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), the Kentucky Educational Television (KET) programs, including the GED on TV, the Kentucky Education Technology System (KETS), and the developing Kentucky Commonwealth Virtual University (KCVU).

- Kentucky Educational Television (KET), including ties with national initiatives led by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and the National Center on Adult Literacy.

Concerns

Despite many strengths in the current DAEL-led initiatives, the task force heard of a number of problems that limit the department's capacity to serve the total target population.

A limited mandate for the DAEL

A fundamental problem is that Kentucky has focused on implementing a federal law and allocating resources for programs rather than establishing a statewide strategy to address the fundamental, far-reaching problem of adult literacy as defined above. The statutory mandate of the Department of Adult Education and Literacy is primarily the "management, control, and operation of programs and services in adult education and literacy."(KRS 151B.023.) By tradition, the department has not moved beyond the traditional, federally defined "adult education." DAEL does not have a statutory mandate to lead a statewide strategy, drawing on the resources across state government, to see that the total target adult population is served—regardless of whether these populations are being served or could be served by DAEL programs. A broader mandate would include leading efforts to ensure that adults throughout Kentucky have

access to lifelong learning for continuous upgrading of knowledge and skills, so that they may keep abreast of social and economic change and remain competitive in the workforce.

With few exceptions, DAEL's policies, regulations, and priorities are shaped by federal policy (e.g., the Adult Education Act, as amended by the National Literacy Act of 1991, and as of 1998, Title II of the Workforce Investment Act). Federal policy defines adult education, the target populations, the modes of resource allocation, and the nature of providers. While the Commonwealth of Kentucky contributes more than 50% of the funding of DAEL programs, it is federal, not state policy that guides most of these resources.

The principal exceptions to the federal emphasis of DAEL's programs are the Parent and Child Education program (PACE) (KRS 158.360), originated in Kentucky in 1986, and the Adult Education and Literacy Initiative Fund (KRS 151B.142), enacted in 1997.

Insufficient capacity to serve the target population, especially the estimated 90 percent currently in the workforce.

DAEL-funded providers currently reach approximately 5% of the target population of 1,000,000 (approximately 50,000 adults). DAEL has established the goal of reaching 20% of the target population within realistic projections of capacity over the next decade. Of particular concern is DAEL's lack of capacity to reach an estimated 90% of the target population, adults in the workforce who are at literacy Levels I and II. There is a critical need to find means to provide skills upgrades to those who are already employed (for both retention and advancement purposes). Many of these employees already have secondary school credentials, but lack basic academic and workplace skills needed to advance from a minimum wage job or to meet the needs of the changing workplace. Retention in employment is a major need. No individual in a minimum wage job will be able to be self-sufficient.

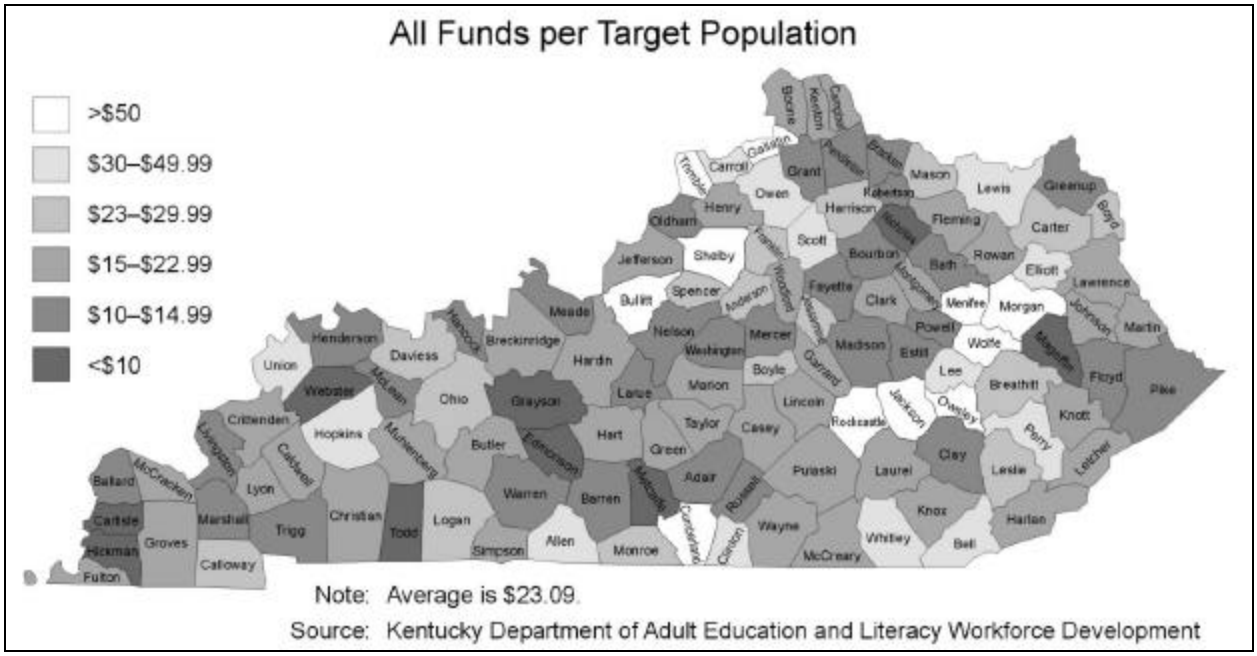
Many of the providers (e.g., public schools) and teachers have limited contact with and experience in working with adults in the workplace and with employers.

Employers need incentives to cooperate in training of their workers.

Disparities among regions and a mismatch between areas of most need and the availability and extent of services.

The DAEL employs a competitive, Request-for-Proposals (RFP) process to identify and award grants to providers. While a deliberate effort is made to ensure that basic services are provided in a manner accessible to all the target population, there remain significant disparities among counties in the basic grant and total adult education project funding per target group population. (Figure 10)

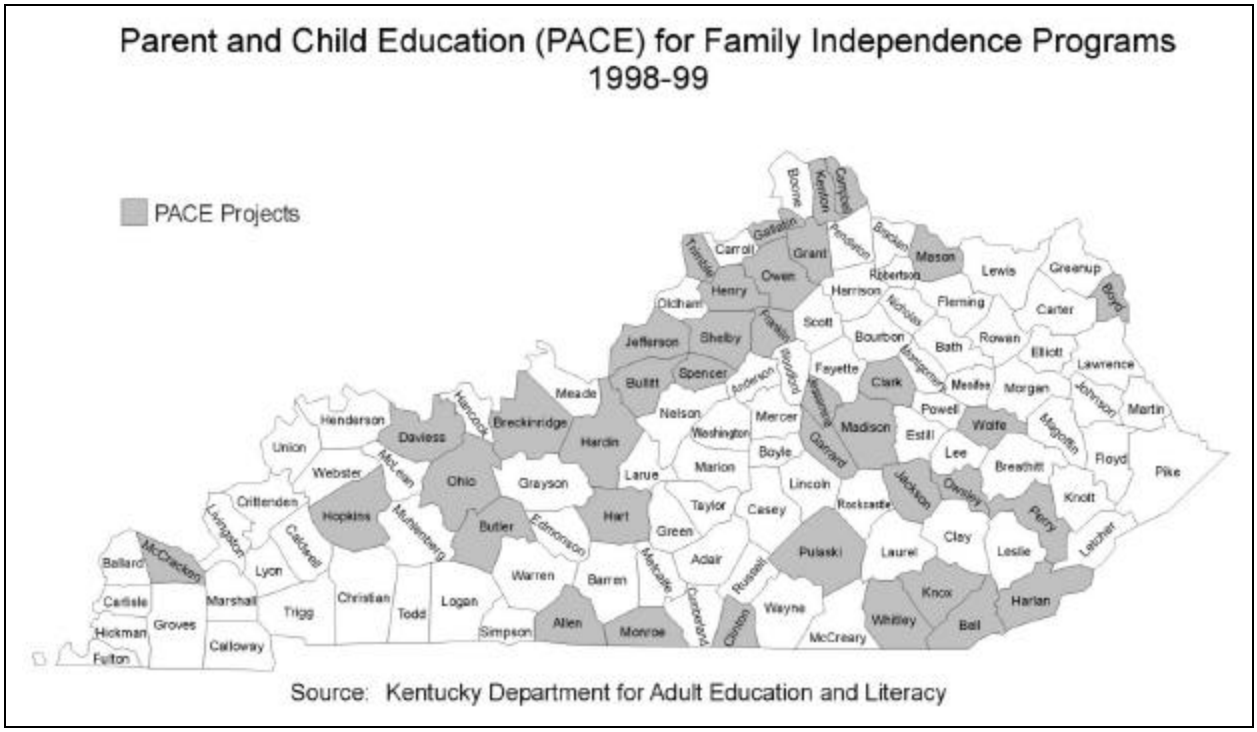
Figure 10



For example, for the two counties with the highest percentage of the working age population in the lowest two literacy levels, Owsley and Clay, Owsley received $66.84 in all funds per individual in the target population, while Clay County received only $12.29 per individual.

Such successful programs as PACE are not available in many counties, thereby limiting the capacity of DAEL to ensure a systemic impact on the needs of single heads of households with very young children (link with early childhood education/family literacy). PACE programs are currently provided in only 38 counties. (Figure 11)

Figure 11



Quality, performance and accountability of providers.

As described above, DAEL utilizes a variety of providers, although 70% are local school boards. The department, through an informal assessment of provider performance using DAEL's statewide performance goals, has found strong performing providers in all categories—from school boards to housing authorities. A lack of aggressive state oversight and performance requirements and political resistance have blocked efforts to change providers. Consequently providers have come to consider adult education funding more as an entitlement than as funding tied to the provider's accountability for serving adults.

In recent years the department has strengthened its emphasis on accountability and competition. For example, the department makes use of a list of "vital signs" to demonstrate how performance is to be measured. Unclear, however, is the extent to which these measures are actually used to evaluate providers. Policy tools as well as political support for change are needed to reinforce DAEL's efforts to weed out low-performing, inefficient providers and to ensure that all areas of the state have access to high quality comprehensive services. The configuration of providers (local school districts, postsecondary institutions, nonprofit agencies, etc.) may differ from region to region, but the quality of service should be consistent. The Kentucky Department of Adult Education and Literacy is in the process of implementing the requirements of the recently amended federal law.[19] These requirements include strengthened ones related to performance and accountability. Each state is to develop core performance indicators, as well as additional indicators relevant to the state's specific needs. Core indicators are to include:

- Demonstrated improvements in literacy skills in reading, writing and speaking the English language, numeracy, problem-solving, English language acquisition, and other literacy skills.

- Placement in, retention in, or completion of, postsecondary education, training, unsubsidized employment, or career advancement.

- Receipt of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent.

The changes in federal law in the Workforce Investment Act provide an opportunity for DAEL to review and strengthen its accountability requirements and processes.

Because local boards of education represent 70% of the providers, their performance is critical to the performance of adult education in many counties. Generalizations about the performance of local public schools are difficult, since some are among the best performers and others are not. Among the most frequent concerns expressed to the Task Force included the following:

- How can public school facilities be used more efficiency to serve adults—especially those facilities that currently sit empty in the evenings and in the summer?

- Facilities may not be appropriate for adults (e.g., classes in elementary school classrooms).

- Adults are reluctant to return to schools where their educational experiences may have been negative.

- Adult education instructors are considered "second class citizens" by some local school districts; in some districts, providers often have to beg for resources.

- Some local districts do not afford adult education programs access to technology (e.g., the Internet). It may be they have not been given the resources or direction to do so.

- There is concern that some local boards use state-funded adult education positions either as a way to provide supplementary income for regular teachers or other purposes unrelated to the needs of adults.

Quality, compensation, and support for teachers in adult education.

As indicated earlier, a strength of adult education in Kentucky is the dedication of the many teachers often serving under difficult conditions, without adequate support, and often with compensation and benefits less than teachers in the public schools. Testimony before the task force characterized the work of adult educators as "missionary" work. Recognizing the seriousness of the adult literacy issue in Kentucky, it should be a major concern that the Commonwealth does not have a comprehensive approach to the professional preparation, development, and support of adult educators.

The challenge for Kentucky will be to move from a system that still depends on teachers with limited training in working with adults, to one in which professional competence in working with adults is a basic requirement. Any strategy to make this transition must involve both professional development and support for the teachers now in the field as well as a new system for a new generation of adult educators.

Of the 755 full- and part-time instructional staff of providers working with DAEL, 30% do not have a baccalaureate degree.[20] Testimony before the Task Force emphasized, however, that whether an instructor has a degree is often not the best indicator of his or her skills or contributions to adult education. Thirty-three instructors have an associate degree, twelve are teaching with only a GED, and 90 are teaching with only a high school diploma. Yet the Task Force heard testimony that the instructors without degrees are often very effective in working with adult learners. In addition, a degree in elementary or secondary education is not necessarily an indication that a person has the knowledge, skills, and other attributes to be effective in working with adults. Effective programs for adults require significantly different approaches to curriculum and pedagogy than programs for students in elementary and secondary schools. Because a large percentage of the adults who seek further education are either seeking a job or are already in the workplace, adult educators must have skills and experience in working with employers and providing services at the work site, at times and places convenient to both employee and employer. Professional preparation for working with adults who have major learning or other disabilities is a particular need for adult educators.

There is clearly a need for a statewide strategy to improve the professional preparation of adult educators in Kentucky. DAEL has already been taking actions in this respect by developing the Adult Education Instructor Standards, as well as standards for workplace instructors and family literacy performance indicators. DAEL provides professional development programs for adult educators on a wide range of issues, including working with adults with learning disabilities and limited English literacy. The department is exploring the possibility of an institute to train adult administrators in such topics as performance indicators, technology, distance learning, data collection and analysis for program improvement, marketing, and other areas of leadership and administration. The department has developed a core curriculum for new adult education teachers and is exploring an adult education certificate for teachers. Despite these efforts, clearly more must be done to address the issue.

Currently 70% of the adult education providers are local boards of education. As the Commonwealth's adult education system expands and changes, one can expect a wider range of providers to enter the field—community and technical colleges, employer-based programs, community-based organizations, regional cooperatives, and programs employing technology-based distance learning, such as KET's GED on TV. Local school boards will continue to be important partners—if not providers—in the adult education and lifelong learning system. Nevertheless, it is important not to conceive a new system of professional standards, preparation, and certification of adult educators in the traditional model for public school teachers. The standards must be competency-based; that is, the emphasis should be on the capacity of persons to demonstrate that they have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to function effectively in the field. An assessment system should be developed through which individuals can demonstrate that they have the necessary competencies.

Instead of establishing a state regulatory structure for certification, Kentucky should emphasize stronger performance standards for providers and link standards for adult educators to demonstration of competence. If it is competency-based and widely accessible throughout Kentucky, a university-based system of certification could be an alternative to formal state certification. A key to promoting change will be for Kentucky to link funding and performance as a way to spur providers to employ well-qualified, effective instructional staff and methodologies. Given the wider range of providers, this kind of performance-based, market-oriented system will be the only feasible way to stimulate improvements.

A critical element of a new system will be development of a center for professional preparation and development, research, and technical assistance for adult education in Kentucky's postsecondary education system. Currently Morehead State University is authorized to grant a master's degree in adult education, but no university in Kentucky offers a comprehensive array of services for students wishing to obtain further professional education or to pursue a career in adult education. These programs or services would include, but not be limited to, endorsement, certification, and degree programs, as well as professional development and information clearinghouse services in adult education. Programs should be widely accessible throughout Kentucky through use of distance learning, the Commonwealth Virtual University, and other means so that place-bound adult educators currently in the system have opportunities to earn the necessary endorsements, certification, and, if appropriate, degrees.

Ambiguities regarding responsibilities for youth at-risk age 16-18.

One of the most serious problems that continues to plague Kentucky is a high rate of "leakage" at every step of the educational process—but especially at the secondary level. Large numbers of young people continue to drop out of high school. Kentucky is making little progress in raising high school completion rates. Unless Kentucky plugs these leaks in the system, it will not be able to address the long-term problem of adult literacy. Unless Kentucky increases the number of youth who complete high school, the Commonwealth will be unable to meet the goals of the Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997 to increase the degree-production of Kentucky's postsecondary education system. There simply will not be a sufficient number of high school graduates to enter colleges and universities to pursue degrees.

Testimony before the Task Force pointed out that students drop out of high school for multiple reasons. The problems often develop early in the educational experience. Beginning as early as kindergarten, students may have poor attendance records. Developing a student's discipline to attend school, reinforced by support from parents, can be a way to increase the chances that a student will not drop out in later years. Lack of student success, often beginning in middle school and continuing through high school, is a frequent reason why students leave school. Other reasons—often related or contributing to academic failure—include emotional insecurity, drug use, and poor family living conditions. Students also drop out to take jobs, especially when in their families and communities they see little evidence that more education is related to employment and level of pay. If a student's parents have not graduated from high school or if the parents are not involved in the student's education, the chances that the student will drop out increase significantly.

The practical problem for adult education programs throughout the Commonwealth is that youth are increasingly looking to adult education to serve as a source of "alternative secondary education." DAEL experienced a 71% increase in participation in adult education programs of clients ages 16 to 21 from 1988 to 1998. The most significant increase since 1993 has been among 17-year-olds. Adult education can enroll 16- to 18-year-olds, but these students cannot receive a GED (although they may have completed the testing requirements) until age 17 or their high school class has graduated, unless they get a hardship waiver granted by the local superintendent. The policy regarding who can take the GED is established by the American Council on Education (ACE), the national organization responsible for the test. The ACE policy is basically that a student taking the GED must be older than a state's compulsory attendance age. Therefore, the age 17 requirement in Kentucky is a function of the Commonwealth's compulsory attendance age.

The rationale for the ACE policy as well as the current Kentucky policy is that giving students access to the GED as an alternative secondary school certification would encourage students to drop out of high school. The task force heard suggestions that some school superintendents oppose giving students access to the GED as an alternative high school credential because a loss of a student would be a loss of SEEK (K-12) funding based on average daily attendance (ADA). Most of the testimony before the Task Force, however, emphasized that most school boards and superintendents are principally concerned with the broader education and social dimensions of the problem. Unfortunately, once a student drops out of high school, the chances that he or she will ever complete high school—through traditional means or a GED—decrease rapidly the longer the student is out of school. *Learnfare*, an initiative implemented in several states to create incentives for teenage members of welfare families to stay in school or return to school to complete their high school education, provides useful lessons on this subject. The aim of *Learnfare* is to improve young peoples' employability and prospects for escaping the cycle of welfare. Those lessons include:

- The shorter the time the person is out of school, the better the results. With intervention to prevent any leaving, the success rate is much better. The further they get away, the more difficult it is to get them to return to the environment and successfully complete a secondary credential.

- It takes both sanctions and rewards to get individuals to complete their high school education. Those that have both sanctions and rewards work better. *Learnfare* did an excellent job in attendance and continuation, but did not see long-term progress in actual completion.

- If students cannot be kept in school, it is important to give them alternative routes as quickly as possible. The longer the amount of time away from school, the more difficult it is to get them to complete their secondary education.

The task force heard a number of proposals aimed at both providing incentives to keep students in high school and improving the capacity of schools to serve students who are at risk of dropping out. As emphasized by the director of pupil personnel for Knox County Schools, it will require a team effort to combat the dropout problem—the school system, family, welfare, social services, juvenile court, and community. Priority should be on meeting the needs of students within the school system through alternative high schools and other programs. Elements of an

overall strategy include incentives (e.g., access to a driver's license) for students to stay in school to obtain a high school diploma or, if they are out of school, for students to complete a GED.

The underlying problems relate to the capacity of the public schools–principally middle schools and high schools–to reach and successfully engage *all students* in learning, academic progress, and achievement. Despite the best intentions of education reform, the attention of schools tends to be on the academically successful, motivated students. Meanwhile, the schools tend to give less attention to those students who are at risk of dropping out.

There are growing numbers of successful examples in Kentucky and throughout the nation of schools that have succeeded in reaching and serving a wider spectrum of students. The High Schools That Work initiative of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) is one such program. High Schools That Work is based on the belief that students following general and vocational programs of study can master complex academic and technical concepts if schools create an environment that encourages students to make the effort to succeed. Member schools implement 10 key practices for changing what is expected of students, what they are taught, and how they are taught. Key practices include:

- High expectations–setting higher expectations and getting more students to meet them.
- Vocational studies–increasing access to intellectually challenging vocational and technical studies, with a major emphasis on using high-level mathematics, science, language arts and problem-solving skills in the modern workplace and in preparation for continued learning.
- Academic studies–increasing access to academic studies that teach the essential concepts from the college preparatory curriculum by encouraging students to use academic content and skills to address real-world projects and problems.
- Program of study–having students complete a challenging program of study with an upgraded academic core and a major.
- Work-based learning–giving students and their parents the choice of a system that integrates school-based and work-based learning. The system should span high school and postsecondary studies and should be planned by educators, employers, and employees.
- Teachers working together–having an organization, structure and schedule giving academic and vocational teachers the time to plan and deliver integrated instruction aimed at teaching high-level academic and technical content.
- Students actively engaged–getting every student involved in rigorous and challenging learning.
- Guidance–involving each student and his or her parents in a guidance and advising system that ensures the completion of an accelerated program of study with an in-depth academic or vocational-technical major.

- Extra help–providing a structured system of extra help to enable students who may lack adequate preparation to complete an accelerated program of study that includes high-level academic and technical content.

- Keeping score–using student assessment and program evaluation data to improve continuously the school climate, organization, management, curricula and instruction to advance student learning and to recognize students who meet both curriculum and performance goals.

The problem is that education, cultural, and policy barriers work against implementing these reforms. At the level of the school, these reforms require exceptional leadership to overcome divisions between academic and vocational teachers and departments. In the past, students in vocational programs (primarily those from the lower two-quartiles of any high school class) took fewer and less challenging academic subjects. Now the most serious challenge facing schools is to develop programs with *far higher expectations* in core subjects such as mathematics for students in *all* programs, including those with vocational and technical components. It is programs such as these, as illustrated by the High Schools That Work initiative, that have had the best results in reaching students at risk of dropping out.

Unfortunately, state policy requirements and expectations from higher education aimed at increasing the academic rigor of secondary education can have an unintended consequence of undermining high school initiatives to reach all students. For example, requirements that high schools increase time in the high school curriculum devoted to specific academic subjects can limit the ability of high schools to develop curricula combining both academic and vocational and technical components. The key is for the state to demand high expectations for all students and to provide incentives for schools to design curricula and other strategies to increase the chances that all students *stay in school and reach these expectations*.

Kentucky currently has a number of state policies and initiatives aimed at these problems. Nevertheless, not unlike the policies to address the adult literacy problem, the policy "pieces" often contradict each other and do not add up to a comprehensive, long-term strategy.

The question remains regarding the appropriate role of adult education programs to serve at-risk youth. Lacking an alternative within the context of the secondary schools, by default students are apparently looking to adult education programs. Such *ad hoc* developments can draw resources away from the adult education program's primary mission. More important, what is needed is a comprehensive, statewide strategy to address the underlying problems. Such a strategy should clarify the roles key institutions and resources—including adult education—should play.

Limited Connections Between the Preparation for the GED and Employment.

The current DAEL delivery system is heavily weighted toward preparation for the GED of adults with inadequate links with employers and adults in the workplace. The GED is a highly credible, widely accepted, valid, and reliable award of a high-school level diploma. It is intended to validate the academic knowledge and skills required for admission to further education or employment. The results of studies in the early 1990s of the relationship between GED scores

and the performance of high school graduates led to raising the standard for passing the GED in 1997. The new standard is one that only 66% of graduating high school seniors can meet. Previously, the minimum passing standard was one that 75% of graduating seniors met. The GED has undergone several revisions over the years, in order to ensure alignment with national, state and local standards, and to maintain its value for the changing expectations of individuals, higher education institutions, and employers. GED 2000 will represent still a newer generation of the GED.[21]

There has been a long-standing debate at the national level about the emphasis of the GED on academic skills, as opposed to workplace skills. The American Council on Education, the organization responsible for the GED, intends that the GED assess a set of skills required for both the worlds of work and academia. More than 90% of those who take the test across the nation do so to gain the opportunity to further their education or attain occupational goals. The remaining 10% take the exam for personal satisfaction.

The important issue may be less the GED itself than the context within which the GED is used. The evidence from a number of studies and experiences is that students tend to complete the GED far more frequently if they are pursuing the GED in context—in conjunction with seeking or maintaining a job. A second finding is that many adults need to develop specific areas of knowledge and skill—more in the form of learning modules. While the GED may be the goal for some students, other adults need the opportunity to gain recognition, if not certification, of more "bite-sized" achievements in developing their knowledge and skills. Employers recognize and respect the GED, but they also need evidence in the form of independent certification that employees or potential employees have gained specific competencies.

The comments received by the Task Force regarding Kentucky's adult education program expressed concerns about low retention and completion rates for adults pursuing the GED. These poor results may be related to the reality that many adult education programs have limited connections with the world of work, and instructors, especially those at secondary schools, often have little experience or contact with employers.

Lessons from welfare reform underscore the critical link between employment and an adult's motivation to pursue further education. Past welfare programs funded isolated basic skills programs, but these did not work. The programs had a heavy emphasis in either skill building programs (primarily basic education) or quick employment with little, if any, education/training. In programs emphasizing basic skills, less than one-half of the students increased employment and average earnings. The majority did not obtain a GED. Most did not raise scores on tests of basic skills.

Lack of coordination in relationship to the needs of clients and employers.

Points raised in testimony before the Task Force included the following:

- Multiple initiatives and pilots that, taken together, do not add up to a comprehensive strategy.

- The need to move to comprehensive coordinating entities with the capability of providing the full range of adult education services (assessment, adult basic education, family literacy, English literacy, workplace skills, etc.).

- Significant variations among counties in the scope and quality of services, and in the coordination of those services on behalf of adults and employers.

- Danger that RFP/competitive process will lead to competition among agencies at the local level (e.g., between housing and education entities). Need to work with those best equipped to play the role rather than push agencies to play roles that are not their traditional roles.

- Recognizing the need for county-level coordination:

  - Should there be a consistent definition of which entity should assume this responsibility across all counties (e.g., the local board of education or KCTCS)?

  - Alternatively, could there be a common set of functions, services, and performance expectations for each county, but an allowance (if not encouragement) of a diversity of means to achieve county-level coordination as appropriate to the specific county's circumstances and performance?

Lack of a comprehensive financing policy that addresses issues of performance, continuity, and equity.

Points raised in testimony before the Task Force included the following:

- Lack of a funding formula that

  - Ensures equitable allocation of resources among counties in relationship to basic variables, such as the educational attainment of the adult population and economic conditions, but tied to performance.

  - Includes provisions to both ensure continuity and reward performance and accountability of providers and clients.

- State funding driven primarily by federal policy rather than state policy driven by state priorities and supplemented by federal initiatives.

- Funding policies emphasizing pilots and demonstration projects rather than sustained state and local commitment to address the needs of individual adults, communities, employers, and the state as a whole.

- Concerns about the impact of the competitive process for awarding adult education grants on program continuity and priorities.

- Questions about the competitive grant process. DAEL sees the competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process for awarding contracts as an essential strategy to improve

performance and accountability. The aim is to award 2- to 3-year contracts on a performance basis. Concerns heard during testimony before the Task Force included these:

- Should an award be based on the quality of a proposal as opposed to evidence gathered through field visits regarding the quality and capacity of the provider?

- Does the competitive process pit local agencies against each other in situations where the need is for collaboration, not competition?

- Does the grant process require too much time and does it give an advantage to those who are good at grant writing, regardless of whether they are good providers?

Issues Beyond the Department of Adult Education and Literacy

Beyond the issues relating directly to DAEL, the task force heard a number of concerns about the Commonwealth's overall approach to adult literacy.

- Lack of coherent statewide leadership and coordination among multiple complementary initiatives aimed at the same problem.

- Lack of continuity in state leadership. Cited in particular was the difficulty sustaining a high level commitment to the issue long enough to make a difference because of changes in priorities of the state's political leaders. A high level of turnover in the leadership of the Department of Adult Education and Literacy has also contributed to the instability.

- Tendency to think of adult education as a separate categorical program rather than a strategy that cuts across the mission and responsibility of multiple Commonwealth programs and initiatives (e.g., early childhood education, welfare reform, economic development, and corrections).

- Multiple uncoordinated categorical federal initiatives that tend to drive (and fragment) policy for an overall state effort that is largely funded by Kentucky.

- A tendency to commingle and confuse different functions. The most important distinction is between functions focused on the needs of clients (adult learners, employers, communities, regions, and the Commonwealth as a whole) and functions associated with the operations and performance of providers. It is important that each of these functions receive attention, yet the tendency is for one (e.g., overseeing a network of providers) to drive out attention to overall system strategy.

- Inadequate coordination of services to meet the needs of individual adults, communities, employers, and regions is hindered by:

  - Vertical financing and regulatory relationships between separate federal and state programs and local providers and administrative units. These vertical relationships can

hinder the horizontal coordination of services for individual adult learners, communities, and employers.

- Turf wars among providers, local politics, and long-standing conflicts among neighboring counties.

- Inadequate links with and leverage of other public and private initiatives and investments to reach the target population. Major sources of help include employers, postsecondary education, and workforce development.

- Lack of a state financing policy and strategy for provider performance incentives and collaboration, and tax and other employer incentives for leverage of non-state resources.

- Lack of programmatic and administrative flexibility to meet the rapidly changing needs of adult learners, employers, regional economies, and communities.

Overall Assessment of Kentucky's Adult Literacy Initiatives

Adult illiteracy is perhaps the most serious pervasive disease that threatens the Commonwealth's capacity to reach its goals for the 21st century. Yet Kentucky has no statewide strategy to combat the problem. Kentucky's highly splintered "system" of agencies, pilots, demonstration programs, initiatives, and providers does not add up to a comprehensive strategy.

Fixing the Department of Adult Education and Literacy will have only limited impact on what is a systemic problem infecting—and affecting—to some degree every community, agency, school, and employer in the Commonwealth. Clearly, as outlined in the previous section, a number of issues in the mission, structure, and financing of DAEL should be addressed. The important challenge, however, is to develop a statewide strategy that engages all the stakeholders in a 20-year public campaign to overcome a problem that has plagued Kentucky for generations.

Major Challenges

The task force identified three fundamental—and potentially inter-related—issues that the Commonwealth must address as it confronts the adult literacy problem.

How to persuade the target population that education pays.

Providing programs will do little unless the people for whom they are intended are motivated to participate. Throughout its deliberations, the task force heard comments that touched on this issue. These include:

- Persistent attitudes of dependence on welfare.

- Cultural immobility. Unwillingness to move to another community.

- Limited job prospects and sense of connection between education and getting a job.
- Differences in culture and values in urban and rural Kentucky.
- Lack of a positive high school experience for young men, so that they are reluctant to undertake additional education.
- Lack of role models; sense of hopelessness.
- Child and eldercare responsibilities limiting opportunities for further education and employment.
- Transportation barriers.

How to engage employers in the effort to upgrade the knowledge and skills not only of their current employees but also of the state's workforce as a whole.

For most adults, the most important motivation for getting more education or training is the connection with getting and keeping a job or of getting a better job. The reality is that unless Kentucky finds a way to increase dramatically the commitment of employers to join in the effort, the Commonwealth will not be able to reach many of the estimated 90% of the target population who are currently in the workforce. The problem is compounded by the reality that in many rural areas of Kentucky employers in the private sector are either extremely limited or face serious economic challenges that make their participation in upgrading the adult workforce impossible. Public employers—schools, state and county government—or health care facilities (hospitals and long-term care facilities) often are the only employers. Beyond their impact on current employees, employers play critical roles in sending signals to those who are out of the workforce that there is a connection between education, employment, and future earnings. State policies, including incentives to both employees and employers, will be essential to ensure greater employer participation.

How to narrow the disparities among Kentucky's counties in the levels of adult literacy.

When the issue is examined from a county-by-county perspective, a significant mismatch is found between the availability of services and the target population. The problem is partially one of resources. Yet an even more serious problem is the lack of local leadership and coordination of available resources—both public and private. A deliberate strategy is needed to focus state priorities on the target population at the lowest literacy levels (Levels I and II) and in the counties with largest percentages of adults at these levels. Unless Kentucky can narrow the disparities within the state, the Commonwealth will be unable to narrow the disparities in per capita income and other critical indicators between Kentucky and its competitor states.

CHAPTER III

PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Principles

The task force's policy recommendations are guided by these principles:

- Recognize that adult illiteracy is not an isolated problem but a fundamental barrier to every major challenge facing Kentucky. Without significant improvements in adult literacy the Commonwealth will be unable to make progress on issues such as early childhood education, education reform (elementary/secondary and postsecondary), economic development, and improving the health and well-being of Kentucky's families and communities.

- Shift from top-down implementation of a federal or state program to leading a statewide public campaign that depends fundamentally on a bottom-up commitment of communities, employers, and educational institutions. The campaign must engage all aspects of Kentucky life—all dimensions of state and local government, all education levels, the state's business and civic leaders, voluntary organizations, and all others whose work affects—or is affected by—the problem of adult illiteracy.

- The future of Kentucky depends on narrowing the disparities among counties by improving the adult literacy of the population in all regions of the state.

- Shift from an emphasis on providers to the needs of clients. Measure performance and progress in terms of impact on the quality of life and economic well being of:

  - Individuals

  - Communities

  - Regions

  - The Commonwealth as a whole.

- Shift from an emphasis on programs and pilots to a focus on systemic impact on adult literacy in all counties of the Commonwealth.

- Focus on all adults who are in need of significant improvement in their knowledge and skills to be full participants in Kentucky's workforce and society, to develop and maintain healthy families, and to continue their education and training as necessary throughout their lifetimes.

- Recognize multiple dimensions of the issue and, consequently, the importance and efficacy of multiple, separate but coordinated strategies aimed at the needs of different target populations, including, but not limited to:

  - Parents of young children.

  - Adults in the workforce, including those with secondary education credentials, for basic literacy and workplace skills and for retraining and upgrading of knowledge, skills, and competencies.

  - Youth from 16 to 18 who drop out of school or are not well served by traditional secondary programs.

  - Adults with significant learning disabilities that limit their ability to take advantage of further education and training.

  - Adults with limited English language literacy.

  - Incarcerated adults.

  - Adults whose access to further education is severely restricted by geography, transportation, technology, and other economic and social barriers.

  - All Kentucky adults who will need lifelong learning opportunities from basic literacy through postsecondary education to succeed in the changing society and economy.

- Emphasize both continuity and development of basic human and physical assets to provide services as well as performance in serving client, community, and Commonwealth needs and priorities.

- Recognize the current and traditional roles and strengths of public schools, postsecondary institutions, employers, and other providers; as a corollary, avoid assigning to key players responsibilities that are inconsistent with their strengths.

  - Recognize, support, and build upon the work of existing providers, if they meet performance expectations.

  - Reward those who have performed and continue to perform effectively.

- Recognize the importance of professional preparation and continuing development of adult educators, especially in working with adults with learning disabilities and adults in the workplace, including:

  - Developing a statewide strategy for professional preparation, development, and competency-based credentials for adult educators.

  - Supporting the adult educators now in the field for a transition to new expectations (e.g., accessible opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills and gain additional professional preparation).

- Preparing adult educators to serve in an expanding array of provider organizations in addition to public schools (e.g., employers, community-based organizations, or postsecondary institutions).

- Focus on the county as the unit for improvement and change.

  - Strengthen county-level commitment for effective coordination of all available resources to improve the educational attainment and economic well-being of the population.

  - Use regional and statewide frameworks to support county-level change.

- Build on existing structures and statutory frameworks as much as possible.

  - Avoid creating new bureaucratic structures whenever possible.

  - Use incentives rather than mandates to change the behavior of individuals, governments, institutions, and employers.

- Avoid one-size-fits-all strategies.

  - Recognize the diverse needs of Kentucky's counties, the configuration of providers in political relationships, and in "what works" in getting people to work together to provide services to adults.

  - Do not begin by attempting to provide a consistent, Commonwealth-wide, regional scheme or regional organizational structure.

Recommendations
Policy Leadership and Governance

Assign responsibility for statewide policy leadership on lifelong learning and adult education to the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE). Strengthen the coordination between the CPE and the Workforce Development Cabinet by broadening the representatives of the P-16 Council to include representation from the Cabinet for Workforce Development and the Department of Adult Education and Literacy. Retain the Department of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) within the Cabinet for Workforce Development.

Rationale

- Provides a means for overall leadership of the Commonwealth's 20-year strategy to raise the level of knowledge and skills of the adult population in a manner consistent with the CPE's statewide policy leadership responsibilities, as defined in the Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997.

- Places the DAEL as a "provider" network and policy implementation entity in the same relationship to the CPE as the institutional governing boards. CPE responsibilities would

be to ensure coordination of DAEL with other agencies and institutions, including KCTCS, the Department of Education, the Universities, and the other cabinets (Families and Children, Economic Development, Justice, Health, etc.) that have programs and responsibilities linked to the issue of lifelong learning and adult education. CPE would delegate to DAEL responsibility for implementing specific policies and initiatives, such as the standards and certification system for adult educators and the performance funding and research and demonstration components of the Lifelong Learning Initiative Fund.

CPE Functions

Consistent with the Council's powers and duties, as defined in the Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997, the CPE's functions would include:

- Developing a 20-year strategy as an element of the Strategic Agenda for raising the knowledge and skills of Kentucky's adult population and ensuring lifelong learning opportunities for all Kentucky adults, drawing on the resources of all cabinets, the Commonwealth's business and civic leadership, and voluntary organizations.

- Leading a statewide public information and marketing campaign, building on the "Education Pays" campaign, to dramatize the critical nature of Kentucky's adult literacy challenge and to reach adults and employers with practical information about available education and training opportunities.

- Developing county and regional strategies to increase the knowledge and skills of adults in all counties by promoting the efficient and effective coordination of all available education, training, and workforce development resources.

- Promulgating standards for adult literacy, selecting instruments for measuring attainment of such standards, and monitoring progress in achieving the state's adult literacy goals.

- Providing policy direction and establishing priorities for the Lifelong Learning Investment Fund (presented below). The fund would include components for:

  - Statewide performance rewards,

  - Research and demonstration, and

  - County and regional strategies for lifelong learning and workforce development.

Retain the Department of Adult Education and Literacy within the Cabinet for Workforce Development.

Retain and extend DAEL's current statutory authority, but link the DAEL to the overall strategy and policy coordination of the Council on Postsecondary Education.

Rationale

- Ensures continued coordination with workforce development initiatives.

- Recognizes the strengths of existing structures.
- Recognizes the distinction between the implementing responsibility of the DAEL in contrast to the overall policy leadership and coordinating responsibility of the CPE.

DAEL Functions

- Implementing a state strategy to reduce the numbers of Kentucky adults at the lowest levels of literacy. DAEL's emphasis should be on individuals, populations, and counties most in need of adult education and literacy services. These include adults at the lowest levels of literacy, including those in poverty, adults with disabilities, single parents, displaced homemakers, adults with limited English proficiency, and criminal offenders in correctional institutions. Special attention should be given to the 90% targeted population currently in the workforce, including development of basic skills, workplace skills, and other services in the workplace.
- Serving as the designated agency for the purposes of Title II of the federal Workforce Investment Act. State priorities should drive DAEL's core mission and priorities, with federal policy and funding providing critical yet supplementary support to the state priority.
- Serving as the implementing agency for state adult education and literacy policy, including ensuring that each county in Kentucky is served by a comprehensive coordinating entity operating at the highest standards of performance and efficiency and implementing the necessary professional development, financing, and accountability policies.

Comprehensive Coordinating Entities for Every County

By July 2001, move to a network of comprehensive, coordinating entities of adult education and literacy services for each county in Kentucky.

The Council on Postsecondary Education would select, with the advice of DAEL, a single comprehensive coordinating entity for every county in Kentucky. The full range of public and private non-profit entities currently serving as providers would be eligible to apply for selection (e.g., local boards of education, regional education cooperatives, community-based organizations, KCTCS, universities, and other entities).

An organization could serve as the comprehensive coordinating entity for more than one county. DAEL would be authorized to promote, if not require, multi-county organizations in order to ensure that small counties with limited resources have access to high quality comprehensive services and to keep program delivery and administrative costs at reasonable levels.

CPE, with the advice of DAEL, would enter into five-year agreements with comprehensive coordinating entities, with funding contingent upon the state's biennial and fiscal year budgetary process and provider performance. CPE, in consultation with DAEL, would retain the authority

to terminate any agreement prior to the end of the five-year period if the department should find that the organization was failing to meet performance requirements.

To be eligible to be selected as a comprehensive coordinating entity, an organization would be required to meet basic conditions defined by DAEL, including, but not limited to:

- Developing a county strategy, consistent with the CPE's Strategic Agenda, for reducing the proportion of the county's population at Literacy levels I and II and increasing the educational attainment of the county's adult population.

  - The strategy would be developed through a process engaging employers, county leaders, schools, state and local economic development initiatives, and other relevant regional and county entities.

  - A central element of the county strategy should be a public information and marketing campaign designed to reach adults, employers, public officials, and others, to increase the participation of under-educated adults in further education and training. This campaign should be coordinated with the statewide campaign led by the CPE.

  - The DAEL and CPE would jointly develop the guidelines for the county strategies.

- Providing—or ensuring access to—core adult education and literacy services to adults in the county (or counties). A comprehensive coordinating entity may provide these services directly or through a network of affiliated organizations. The single comprehensive coordinating entity, however, would be accountable for the performance of the whole network. Core services include:

  - Assessment services—GED preparation and testing, Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), ACT Work Keys, and other appropriate assessments.

  - Adult basic education/literacy.

  - Family literacy/parent and child education.

  - English literacy.

  - Workplace skills education—career education, job readiness, job placement, and services to adults currently in the workplace.

- Ensuring that certain basic capacities are in place and accessible to adult learners, employers, and other clients within the county:

  - Adult educators who meet or are in the process of gaining the essential competencies for adult educators, as defined by the DAEL.

  - Adult educators with professional competence to work with adults with learning disabilities.

  - Capacity to serve adults in the workplace.

- Services for persons sentenced under the provisions of KRS 533.200.

- Access to existing technology within the county at times convenient for adult learning (e.g., computer facilities or reception sites for KET programming in secondary schools, community colleges, technical colleges, or area technology centers).

- Ensuring that a mechanism is in place within the county (a facilitator, coordinating group, or other means) to ensure connections among organizations, one-stop centers, and other entities for serving the needs of individual adult learners, employers, and others in need of adult education and literacy services.

- Agreeing to be held accountable according to performance measures as established by DAEL. These performance measures would be used to determine a portion of the organization's funding and, ultimately, to judge whether the comprehensive coordinating entity's agreement with CPE should be renewed.

- Based on research related to welfare clients, the following changes are needed in adult education programs:

  - Adult education programs should have flexible programs with multiple options, incorporating both education/training and employment—an important connection required by welfare reform.

  - The GED alone should not be the end goal; self-sufficiency through employment is the end goal.

  - Activities that raise basic skills should be incorporated with other activities (e.g., life skills and job skills).

  - Programs must be intensive (i.e., at least 25-30 hours per week, not the 4-6 hours typical in adult education). National data indicate that intensive, integrated, blended programs have the best results.

  - Training needs to be functionally contextual.

Family literacy/parent and child education would be included within the core services to be available in every county. The PACE program funding would be integrated with the comprehensive program funding. Kentucky would commit to make available throughout the state the kinds of services now available through PACE in only 38 counties. DAEL would work with the Kentucky Department of Education and the National Center for Family Literacy to ensure that all programs meet quality standards and are designed and operated cost-effectively.

Professional Preparation, Development and Certification of Adult Educators

Develop a comprehensive approach to the professional preparation, development, and support of adult educators. Increase professional development and support for the teachers now in the field while developing a new system for a new generation of adult educators.

In the short-term, the state should increase General Fund support for DAEL to refine the Adult Education Instructor Standards and provide professional development programs for adult educators now in the field.

To address the long-term need, the Council for Postsecondary Education would design—in collaboration with DAEL—a new system of professional standards, preparation, and certification of adult educators. Drawing on Kentucky universities with recognized expertise in adult education as well as national authorities on adult education, the Council would develop the specifications for an initiative and a competitive process for selecting an entity or entities to implement the plan. Funding for this design and development would be through the Lifelong Learning Initiative Fund.

Guidelines for design of the new system include the following:

- Do not conceive a new system in the traditional model for public school teachers, but a system that:

  - Prepares, certifies, and supports adult educators to function in multiple settings (e.g., with employers, community-based organizations, distance learning networks, community and technical colleges, or public school systems).

  - Emphasizes competency-based standards and assessments.

  - Provides for an assessment and certification system through which individuals, especially place-bound adults, can demonstrate that they have the necessary competencies and obtain certification without necessarily completing a traditional academic program.

- Instead of establishing a state regulatory structure for certification, emphasize stronger performance standards for organizations and link standards for adult educators to demonstration of competence. If it is competency-based and widely accessible throughout Kentucky, a university-based system of certification could be an alternative to formal state certification.

- Promote change by linking funding and performance as a way to spur organizations to employ well-qualified, effective instructional staff and methodologies.

- Develop a university-based center for professional preparation and development, research, and technical assistance for adult education. Programs should be widely accessible throughout Kentucky through use of distance learning, the Commonwealth Virtual University, and other means so that place-bound adult educators currently in the system have opportunities to participate in the necessary programs and services, which could include:

  - Competency-based endorsement, certification, and degree programs through which learners can demonstrate by assessment that they have the required knowledge and skills instead of completing all the traditional course and credit-hour requirements.

- Professional development programs accessible to adult educators throughout Kentucky.

- An information clearinghouse on “best practices” in adult education.

Incentives for Employers and Performance-Based Incentives to Adult Learners in the Workplace

Provide a statutory mandate and General Fund support to the Council on Postsecondary Education, in collaboration with the Secretary of the Cabinet for Workforce Development, to design and pilot test an initiative to provide cash payments to adults without secondary school credentials who achieve learning objectives. For example, adults could enter into contracts specifying learning objectives (demonstrating levels of competence, completing a GED, etc.) and receive cash payments on the basis of their progress toward or accomplishment of these objectives. Funding for learning contracts would be from state and matching funds from employers and other sources. Organizations who succeed in helping these adult learners meet their objectives would receive a cash payment upon completion.

Extend the existing statutory authority of the Bluegrass State Skills Corporation for tax credits (skills training investment credit), grants-in-aid, and other mechanisms to encourage employer commitments to developing the basic, transferable knowledge and skills of their employees.

Mandate that all public employers in the Commonwealth of Kentucky require all employees to have as a minimum a high school diploma or equivalent or to be making satisfactory progress toward a GED. Require all public employers to provide opportunities (through the DAEL or other means) for employees to improve their basic knowledge and skills to earn a GED in the workplace.

Incentives for Secondary Education Completion (Dropout Prevention)

Extend the knowledge of what works from successful schools to *all* school districts, but especially those with high concentrations of dropouts. Such a state policy would:

- Require any school district with a dropout rate above a specified level to implement a comprehensive strategy based on "best practices" similar to the SREB High Schools That Work Program.

- Target additional state funding on the school districts with the most severe dropout problems, provided these districts implement an improvement plan.

- Provide state technical assistance to high-risk districts, including developing statewide networks for staff development, curriculum development, and other purposes.

- Change state policies and accountability requirements to allow for increased flexibility for school districts to design alternative secondary school programs (such as combining academic and vocational/technical components), contingent upon a district's showing

concrete results in reducing dropout rates and achieving higher academic performance for at-risk students. The Commissioner of Education would develop the implementation details.

Provide students who have dropped out of high school incentives to complete a GED or an alternative competency-based certification of their secondary-level knowledge and skills.

Students would be asked to enter into learning contracts with organizations, setting forth their commitments to certain learning outcomes. Organizations who succeed in assisting these students to achieve their contract objectives would receive the SEEK funds that would have been allocated to secondary schools if the students had remained in school. On a pilot basis, expand the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship (KEES) program to provide scholarship funding for postsecondary education for students who fulfill their contract obligations.

Extend the current state policies linking eligibility for driver's licenses to include completion of a GED.

Education and the Criminal Justice System

Incarcerated Adults

Direct the Secretary of the Justice Cabinet to explore the feasibility of expanding the incentives for inmates to pursue education and training during incarceration. These include financial incentives and the use of evidence of educational improvement during incarceration for granting additional days of educational good time and for determining eligibility for parole.

Provide increased state funding both to expand facilities and to extend the capacity of KCTCS to provide educational services. Use of the Kentucky Commonwealth Virtual University or other technology resources should be explored as a means to serve these needs. Limitations in the capacity of Corrections Education Centers—both facilities and staff—currently prevent these centers from serving more inmates.

"Sentenced to Read" Program

Charge the Department for Adult Education and Literacy to increase the awareness of the provisions of KRS 533.200, the "Sentenced to Read" program, and increase the capacity of the adult education system to serve adults sentenced under this statute. The "Sentenced to Read" statute (KRS 533.200) provides that a person convicted of a misdemeanor or violation or felony who has not received a graduate certificate from high school or has not passed the general educational development (GED) or has not obtained a high school diploma through participation in the external diploma program, may be sentenced "to attend and successfully complete a program designed to improve his learning, living and employment skills." Attendance at such a program is to be deemed a form of probation. The Department for Adult Education and Literacy administers the program.

Despite the more than 10-year existence of this program, district and circuit count judges appear to be unaware of it—or at least they tend not to use it in their sentencing.

Actions DAEL would take include:

- Launching an education awareness program, in cooperation with the Office of the Courts during the Judicial College, to ensure that district and circuit court judges are aware of KRS 533.200.

- Working with comprehensive coordinating entities of adult education and literacy services to ensure that programs are available in each county to serve persons sentenced under the provisions of KRS 533.200

- Announcing where, how, and when programs are available, and who will be responsible for supervision, monitoring attendance, and performance, to ensure effectiveness of the process.

Financing

Base and Performance Funding for Comprehensive Services

Establish a funding policy to ensure that all counties have access to core adult education and literacy services. The formula-based funding would be implemented over two biennia in a manner that would shift funding to the counties with the greatest need and increase the emphasis on performance. DAEL would be charged with responsibility for developing the specific funding policy within broad statutory guidelines. The formula would be used to generate a base for each county. This base would be for the year prior to the first fiscal year of implementation. The established base would be used to generate the actual allocations for each county based on a percentage of the actual funding available for each fiscal year. DAEL would be required to update these base allocations at least every other biennium, using updated data on the target population and other measures.

The new funding policy would have these elements:

- A funding formula would be used to generate a base allocation of grant funds to counties, based on the number of adults at Literacy Levels I and II and other indicators of need.

- The county formula allocation in any fiscal year would be available in two categories:

  - Base funding for each county to fund core services by the designated comprehensive coordinating entity for that county; and

  - Performance funding to comprehensive coordinating entities.

The following is an illustration of how these changes could be phased in over four fiscal years:

- FY 1: DAEL would complete the selection of comprehensive coordinating entities to enter into five-year agreements beginning in FY 2. All existing organizations would be informed of the new provisions. In this transition year, DAEL, in collaboration with the

CPE, would provide training for organizations and county representatives on county-level strategies and proposal development.

- FY 2: All counties would be allocated 100% of the amount of basic adult education grant funding for the previous fiscal year (the old base year) or 100% of the new formula allocation, whichever is greater. These funds would be allocated to the designated comprehensive coordinating entity for each county, to be used according to policies and performance expectations established by DAEL in the five-year agreement.

- FY 3: Comprehensive organizations would be allocated the 50% of the basic adult education grant funding for the old base year or 100% of the new formula allocation, whichever is greater, for the counties for which they were responsible.

- FY 4: Comprehensive organizations' counties would be allocated 75% of the formula allocation for their counties, and the remaining 25% of the county allocation would be placed in escrow by the Department for Adult Education and Literacy, for allocation to the organization on the basis of performance in FY 3.

  - If any organization failed to earn any portion of the full 25% in performance funding, the unused funding would be placed in escrow, to be used directly by DAEL either to provide technical assistance to improve that organization's performance or to develop alternative means to serve the county's population.

  - A failure of an organization to earn more than 75% of available performance funding for two fiscal years would result in termination of the organization's five-year agreement and would disqualify the organization from competition for the subsequent five-year agreement period.

- FY 4 and subsequent fiscal years: Comprehensive organizations would be allocated 75% of the formula allocation for each county, plus the amount of performance funding earned in the previous year for each county.

DAEL would develop the guidelines and specifications for the performance component of the funding formula. The measures would emphasize performance in terms of outcomes achieved for adult learners and measurable impact on the knowledge and skills of each county's population. Each comprehensive coordinating entity would, in a sense, "compete against itself" for the 25% of the county allocation reserved for performance. Performance targets would be both statewide and county-specific. DAEL would develop a rating scale to determine what proportion of the 25% should be allocated to any organization for performance. As indicated above, any funds not allocated to an organization would be placed in escrow, to be used directly by DAEL either to provide technical assistance to improve that organization's performance or to develop alternative means to serve the county's population.

Lifelong Learning Initiative Fund

Modify, extend and rename the current Adult Education and Literacy Initiative Fund and reassign responsibility for the Fund to the Council on Postsecondary Education. The intent of the

transfer to the CPE would be to provide a single overall fund to pursue an overall statewide strategy. Instead of having several specialized funds directed at parts of the overall problem, the new fund would have several components and would provide the flexibility to address changing priorities. The new Fund would operate within the same fiscal provisions of the existing fund (e.g., funding from both General Fund and other public and private sources, and provisions for carrying forward at the end of the fiscal year). The CPE would have authority to delegate responsibility for specific components to DAEL but would retain overall policy coordination responsibility. The modified fund would have these components:

- **Statewide performance reward component**. As determined by CPE regulations, developed in collaboration with DAEL, comprehensive coordinating entities would be eligible to receive funding in addition to the county allocation, on the condition that they perform at a level necessary to receive the 100% county allocation and meet other performance criteria established by DAEL. The statewide performance fund would be used to reward exemplary performance, encourage collaboration with other organizations, stimulate development of models that could be replicated elsewhere in Kentucky, and for other performance of regional or statewide significance.

- **Research and demonstration component**. This component would extend the purpose of the current Adult Education and Literacy Initiative Fund (KRS 151B.42) as enacted by the Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997. The purposes would be broadened to authorize funding for CPE to undertake, in collaboration with DAEL and other agencies, specific developmental initiatives designed to support systemic change, such as:

  - Developing a new preparation, professional development, and certification system for adult educators.

  - Developing a statewide competency-based certification for transferable skills, as an industry/workplace-based complement to the GED.

  - Developing, pilot testing, and implementing financing alternatives for both organizations and adult learners.

The CPE would delegate responsibility for administration of this component to DAEL.

- **County and regional strategies component**. The purpose of this component would be to provide the incentives and technical assistance at the county and regional levels for a comprehensive coordinated approach to lifelong learning and workforce development at the county and regional levels. The intent would be to complement the comprehensive coordinating entities functioning under the jurisdiction of DAEL and to support and promote connections with other entities and organizations. The idea would be to use incentives, not bureaucratic structures, to promote coordination. The component would finance incentives, technical assistance, training, and other support for leaders at the county and regional levels who can serve as the facilitators of efforts to develop connections between and among the existing highly fragmented services for adult learners. This component would have two parts:

- **County initiatives**. One dollar per adult at Levels I and II in each county would be held in escrow for support of county-level initiatives, not including personnel (salaries, wages, and benefits of full- or part-time personnel). The purpose would be to foster county-level initiatives to promote coordination and collaboration among employers, county leaders, organizations, and other stakeholders, to improve the delivery of services to adult learners. The CPE would develop the guidelines for allocation of these funds in collaboration with the Cabinet for Workforce Development. Each county would be given maximum flexibility to design initiatives that reflect unique local conditions. Funds for each county would be held in escrow to be used for the intended purposes as defined by the CPE.

- **Regional strategies**. The existing mandate to the CPE to develop regional advisory groups (KRS 164.035) would be amended as follows (language deleted is in parentheses, and new language is in boldface):

The purpose of the regional strategy funding shall be to enable the Council on Postsecondary Education (shall establish regional advisory groups and shall) **to** provide the necessary (staff**) technical assistance, training, and other** support to assist in the development of regional strategies for **lifelong learning and** workforce development that support the strategic agenda and that include a comprehensive coordinated approach to education and training services. **The CPE shall use the regional strategy funding to provide incentives for collaboration among counties in the development of initiatives for adult learners.**

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ENDNOTES

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