

SREB

Investing Wisely in Adult Learning is Key to State Prosperity

2005

Southern
Regional
Education
Board

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CHALLENGE TO LEAD SERIES

This report was prepared by a team of staff members from SREB's Adult Learning Campaign, including James Mingle, special consultant; Bruce Chaloux, director, Adult Learning; and Angela Birkes, associate director, Adult Learning.

It is part of the *Challenge to Lead* education goals series, directed by Joan Lord, director of educational policies. It is also part of SREB's Adult Learning Campaign, supported by Lumina Foundation for Education. For more information, e-mail Joan Lord at joan.lord@sreb.org or Bruce Chaloux at bruce.chaloux@sreb.org. A full listing of goals, with the indicators for the goal on adult learning, is printed on the inside back cover.

A Message from the President of SREB

The record of SREB states on adult learning is dismal.

The high percentage of young adults who did not complete high school — 17 percent in SREB states — coupled with the low rate — under 1 percent — of these adults who earn the GED credential in any year is a huge problem for these adults and for your state.

But didn't we already give these adults their chance?

Young adults without high school diplomas are starting families and careers with their hands tied. Without at least a high school education, they face a lifetime struggle of low pay, reduced opportunity and poor health. But it is difficult for them to find the time and motivation to return to school. Your state can take the lead in convincing them to get the education that they need and can support them in their efforts. As shown in this report, doing so measurably benefits both them and your state.

Skeptics may want to argue that education dollars and energy are best spent on children. After all, these adults already missed their best opportunity. But demographers remind us that the number of undereducated young adults in SREB states is too large and fast-growing. The cost of their underachievement, both economic and personal, far outweighs the cost of giving them a second chance. **No state can afford to write off its undereducated young adults.**

SREB is here to help your state in this important work.

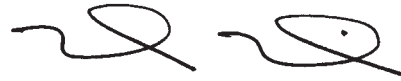
SREB has long provided leadership in services to adult learners through its *Electronic Campus*. With support from Lumina Foundation for Education, SREB also has established a regional Adult Learning Campaign to help your state try new ways to reach more adults. With only one in 100 dropouts going on to earn a GED credential yearly in SREB states, every state needs to reach more of these adults. This report provides information on how to do this.

Some SREB states have already taken up the adult learning challenge and can serve as a model for others. Kentucky has won national recognition for its efforts. It set specific enrollment targets for its adult education programs and provided funding based on the results. Enrollment doubled. Kentucky's success shows that facing the challenge, being creative and committing resources can work.

Increasing the commitment to adult education can create new momentum for state economies and new opportunities for our high school dropouts. Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco said of Louisiana's Adult Learning Task Force, **"If we are going to move our families out of poverty and into good-paying jobs, then education is the key to open the doors."** Cheryl King, Kentucky's adult education leader, describes adult education as building a **"sense of achievement and hope for the future"** for young working adults. Their words capture the importance of this work for us all.

Your work force of tomorrow is essentially your work force of today. If your state actively helps these young adults achieve higher educational credentials, they will have more economic opportunity and achieve greater success. Equally important, their children will be less likely to drop out of high school.

You can create new opportunity through fresh programs and services for these young adults. The ripple effect of this effort may continue for years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' followed by a cursive 'Musick'.

Mark Musick
President

Investing Wisely in Adult Learning is Key to State Prosperity

Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.

SREB *Challenge to Lead* Goal

Is your state making progress toward this vital goal?

Most of us realize that increasing the education of adults who did not complete high school is good. Fewer of us realize just how good. This report on one of SREB's *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education focuses on the considerable impact of closing the education gap for these adults in SREB states. The latest research shows that helping working-age adults complete high school equivalency programs and enroll in postsecondary programs has tremendous benefits for both the individual and society.

Yet if your state is like almost every other state, many of your policies either ignore this enormous pool of potential high school completers and college graduates — *your adult learners* — or actually discourage them from pursuing further education.

Many policy-makers advocate reforming education “from the bottom up,” starting with the youngest children. But — even as critical to our future as K-12 education is — overlooking the education of working-age adults undermines the economic prosperity of our states *now*. As one state demographer concluded, “If you want to know what our work force will look like in 10 years, just look around and imagine everyone 10 years older!”

Your state will continue to compromise its economic growth unless it takes steps now to help these residents. Taking action also may help break the cycle of illiteracy that ultimately affects your state's children.

Population changes make the effort especially critical. We all know that the population profile of nearly every SREB state is changing, but you may not know that the age distribution in your state may be shifting. From 1992 to 2002, SREB states had an *increase* of 2 percent in the proportion of older residents ages 25 to 64. At the same time, SREB states experienced a *decline* of 0.5 percent in the proportion of residents ages 18 to 24. The growing number of maturing workers will increase for some years to come as the baby boomers and their children continue to age.

Demographers tell us with certainty that as the population gets older, **if just the same proportion of students completes high school as today, the percentage of working-age adults with a high school education will actually decline by four percentage points by 2020.**

Just how big is the problem? When the literacy skills of adults in the United States were measured against those of 19 other industrialized nations in both 1994 and 1998, the Educational Testing Service called the performance of U.S. citizens “mediocre” — a stinging label for our nation. American adults scored no better than 12th on three of four key scales of the International Literacy Survey, which measures skills important to the workplace.

As detailed in a special section on the benefits of adult education on pages 4 to 6, America's poor

literacy skills correlate directly with greater unemployment, poverty and health problems. For SREB states, the implications are clear: *We cannot lead the nation in educational achievement without significant gains in adult literacy, job skills, postsecondary technical education and college participation.*

How many people in SREB states do not have a high school diploma or the equivalent? Nearly 20 percent of all adults.

- **More than 5 million adults** — 17 percent — ages 25 to 44 in SREB states do not have a high school diploma or equivalent credential. (See Table 1.) These adults have long working lives ahead of them — lives that can be more productive with additional education.
- **More than 1.4 million people** — nearly 27 percent of these adults — did not complete ninth grade. (See Figure 1.)

These state-level statistics mask an even more alarming problem. A detailed analysis shows that in 36 percent of the total counties in SREB states, more than one in four students did not complete

high school. In some areas, more than half of students dropped out. (See Figure 2.) These levels underscore the statewide *and* localized challenge to increase adult education in SREB states.

How will you know if your state is making progress with your adult learners? SREB’s *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education identify three important indicators for you as state policy-makers and education leaders to watch as you develop policies and programs for adults. If your state can answer “yes” to these questions, then you are moving in the right direction.

- Do more working-age adults without the basic reading, writing and mathematics skills to begin a high school diploma program enroll each year in Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language classes?
- Do larger percentages of working-age adults without high school diplomas pass GED tests?
- Do larger numbers of working-age adults who pass GED tests pursue postsecondary studies within two years?

Table 1

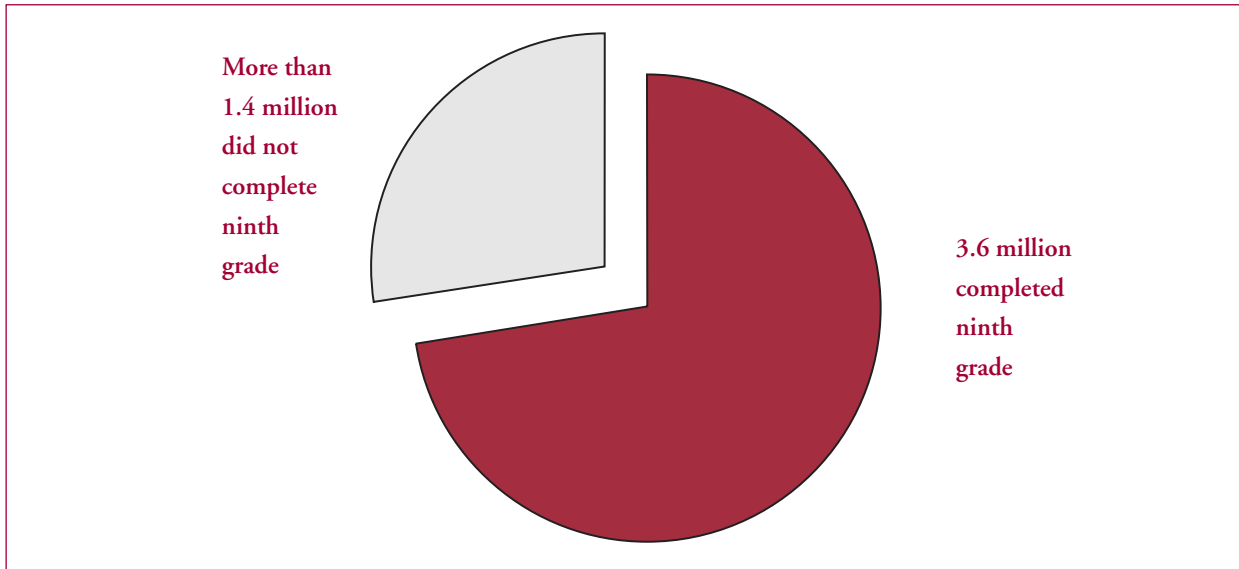
Percent of Adults Ages 25 to 44 Who Did Not Graduate From High School, 2000
17 Percent of Young Adults in SREB States Have No High School Diploma

		United States	15%
		SREB states	17
Alabama	18	Mississippi	20
Arkansas	17	North Carolina	16
Delaware	13	Oklahoma	15
Florida	17	South Carolina	17
Georgia	16	Tennessee	17
Kentucky	17	Texas	22
Louisiana	20	Virginia	13
Maryland	11	West Virginia	16

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure 1

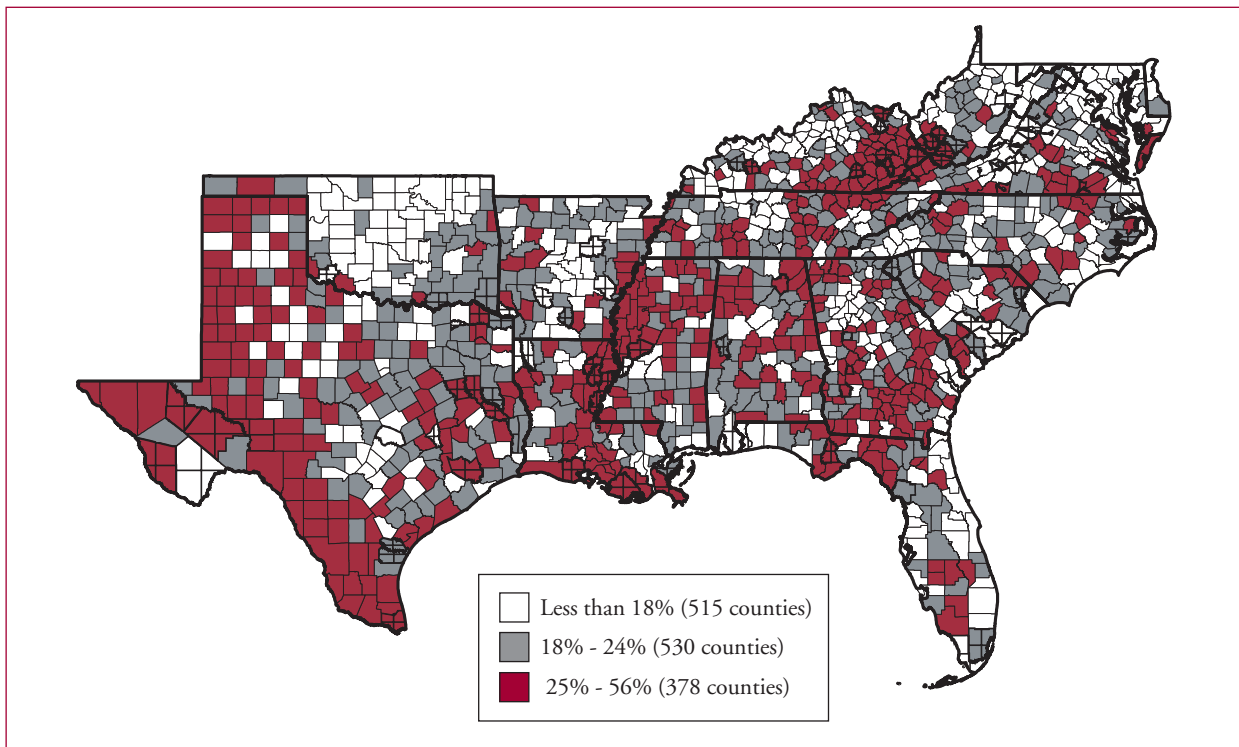
More Than 5 Million Adults Have No High School Diploma
SREB States, 2000



Source: U. S. Census Bureau.

Figure 2

Percent of Adults Ages 25 to 44 Who Did Not Complete High School, 2000



Source: U. S. Census Bureau.

The Benefits of Adult Education

The positive effects of education on the personal and economic well-being of individuals and society are well-documented. Educated adults earn more, are healthier and contribute more to society.

■ Higher income

The benefits of education to personal income and employment are steady and consistent for all workers. As one Southern governor put it forcefully, “Education pays.”

- Adults without a high school diploma earn only about half of what those with an associate’s

degree earn and 39 percent of what those with bachelor’s degrees earn. A college graduate’s average salary is more than twice that of a high school dropout, and the gap is growing.

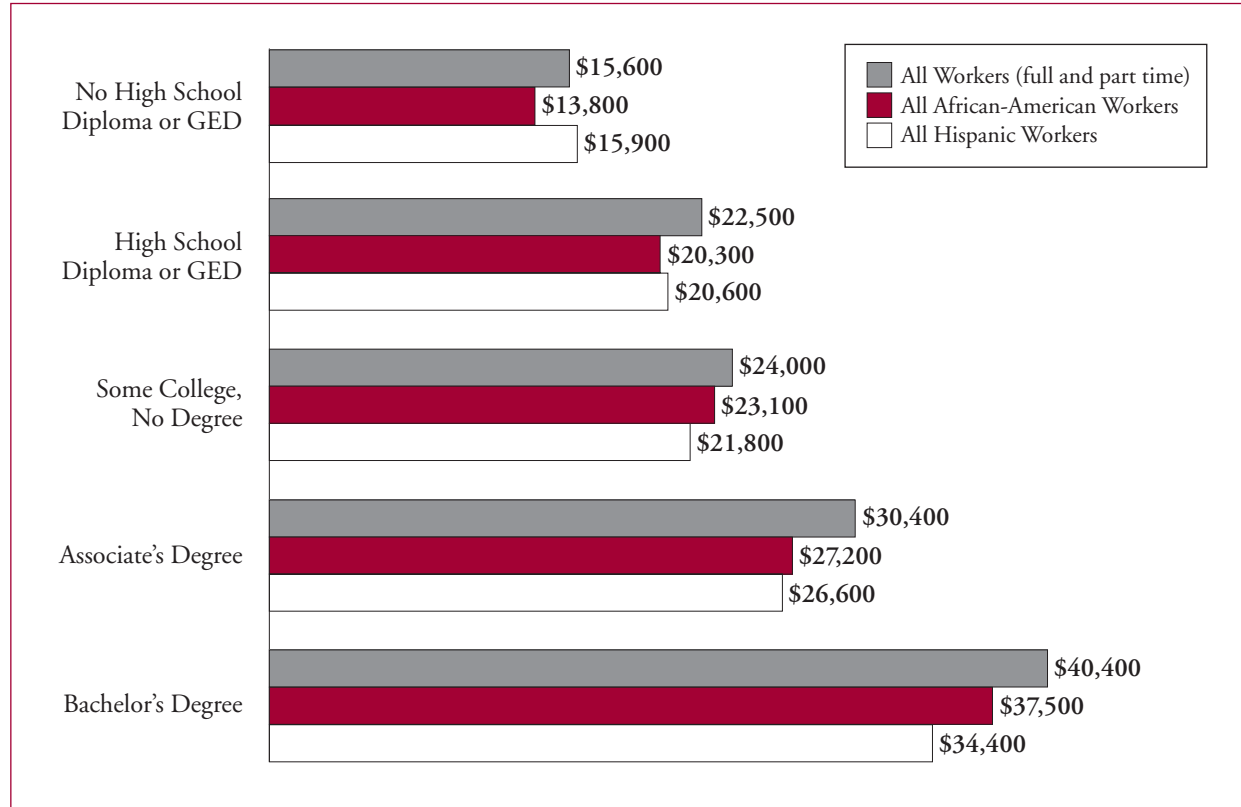
- Unemployment is *four times higher* — 8 percent — among those without a high school diploma, compared with 2 percent for those with a bachelor’s degree.

High school graduation especially benefits African-American workers: Those with diplomas earn on average 47 percent more — nearly \$6,500 per year — than their working counterparts who did not graduate. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3

Median Earnings of U.S. Adults Ages 18 and Older by Race/Ethnicity and Education Attainment, 2002

Education Pays!



Source: U. S. Census Bureau.

■ Better health

Low levels of education also are tied to high health costs for individuals and society, according to research sponsored by the United Health Foundation. The foundation recently ranked all 50 states on health and placed 13 SREB states in the bottom 13 positions in the nation. These same states rank *in the bottom one-third of the nation* on education attainment as well. (See Table 2.)

Analysts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that:

- College graduates are healthier and more health-conscious than the population as a whole, saving states billions of dollars in health care costs.
- Death rates from lung cancer are nearly three times higher for adults without a high school diploma than for those with at least some college. The rate of HIV-infection is nearly five times higher for adults who did not complete high school than for those with some college.
- Pregnant women who did not complete high school are far less likely to receive prenatal care than those who did.

Clearly, poor education and ill health are a devastating combination for individuals and families, but their consequences also play out in society as a whole. Rising public health costs push out other state spending — including education — and the spiral continues downward.

Table 2

National Rank of SREB States by Education Attainment and Health *A Poor Education Can Mean Poor Health*

	By Education, 2000 ¹	By Health, 2004 ²
Maryland	22	34
Delaware	25	32
Virginia	29	20
Oklahoma	34	40
Florida	35	42
Georgia	38	45
North Carolina	39	41
South Carolina	42	47
Tennessee	43	48
Texas	44	35
Arkansas	45	46
Alabama	46	43
West Virginia	47	43
Louisiana	48	50
Kentucky	49	39
Mississippi	50	49

¹ Based on the percentages of adults ages 25 and older without a high school diploma or equivalent.
² Rankings by the United Health Foundation based on combined risk factors and health outcomes, representing health policies and practices, and disease and mortality indices.

Sources: U. S. Census Bureau and United Health Foundation.

■ Greater civic responsibility

Participation of adults in the public life of the nation is vital to a democracy, and better-educated adults participate more fully. About 42 percent of adults over the age of 18 reported in a U.S. Census Bureau survey that they voted in 2002. The voting rate among adults with less than a high school diploma was *dramatically lower — less than 22 percent.*

Better-educated citizens also pay more in taxes. In 2003, households headed by adults who *never*

attended college equaled 47 percent of all U.S. households, yet they generated just 25 percent of all federal individual income taxes, according to researchers at Postsecondary Education Opportunity. In contrast, those headed by individuals with bachelor's degrees made up 27 percent of all households and paid 51 percent of all federal individual income taxes.

In addition, two out of three young adults in prison are high school dropouts, according to the research organization Jobs for the Future.



QUESTION 1:

Do more working-age adults without the basic reading, writing and mathematics skills to begin a high school diploma program enroll each year in Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language classes?

Data are hard to obtain on enrollment in Adult Basic Education, adult secondary education, and English literacy programs for those who do not speak English. Funding comes from many different sources, and many are sponsored by private agencies that do not report their enrollments to states. The Office of Vocational and Adult Education of the U.S. Department of Education does provide an annual report on enrollment in federal and state-funded programs, based on state-reported data. Its most recent report highlights the issues for adults ages 25 to 44.

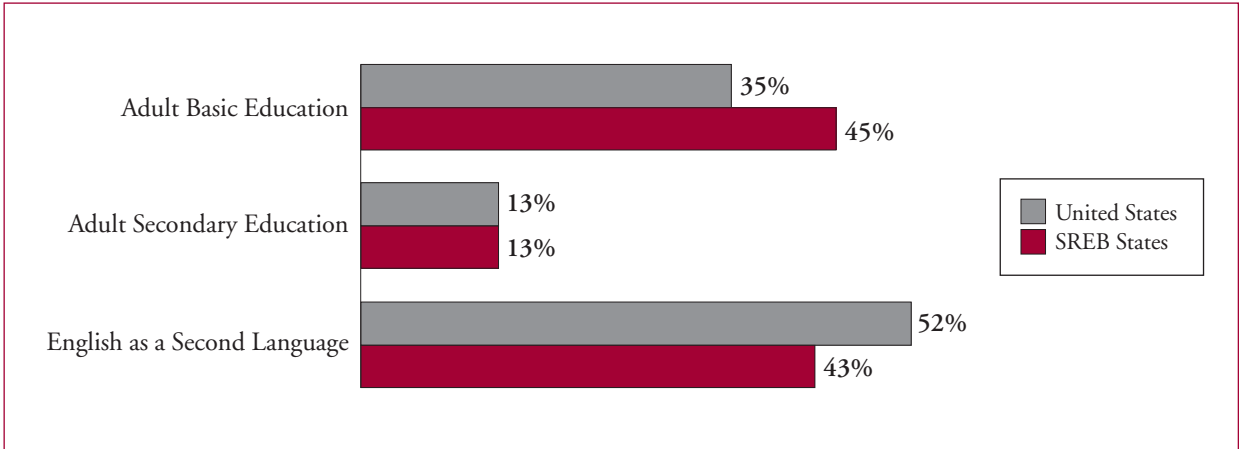
- Only 468,000 working-age adults in 2002 participated in adult education programs in SREB states. *That is less than 10 percent of your young working-age adults who do not have a high school diploma.*
- Most of this enrollment in SREB states — 87 percent — was split nearly evenly between Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language programs. (See Figure 4.)

■ Work force training programs

In addition to federal and state-funded adult education programs, many other providers (including public postsecondary institutions) provide an array of work force training programs. These programs usually focus on job-related tasks for specific populations, including disabled workers, workers for new employers, and welfare recipients. A recent report by the National Center for Education Statistics estimates that nearly 10 million adults are enrolled in work-related training programs nationwide. Often, these programs are disconnected from state and federal literacy efforts, even though the basic skills of communications, reading and computing are essential to today's work force. If these programs were better connected to federal and state-funded programs, more adults might be able to make the transition from them to postsecondary institutions. (See Box 1.)

Figure 4

Percent of Adults Ages 25 to 44 in Adult Education by Program, 2002
More Adults Enroll in Adult Basic Education or English as a Second Language



Note: State and local programs (including nonprofit organizations) that are not funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Workforce Development Act are not reported in these data.
Sources: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Census Bureau.

Box 1

Alabama’s Focused Industry Training program, a 10-week course at community colleges for adults without a GED credential, integrates basic skills with industry training and assesses students using the ACT WorkKeys® instrument. Participants who pass the comprehensive exam at the end of the course receive an Alabama Certified Worker certificate. (See www.acs.cc.al.us.)

QUESTION 2:

Do larger percentages of working-age adults without a high school diploma pass GED tests?

SREB’s *Challenge to Lead* goals focus specifically on the importance of increasing the number of adult high school dropouts who go on to earn equivalency credentials.

How are SREB states doing? Not so well. Only 13 percent (or approximately 61,000) of adult education students in SREB states in 2002 were enrolled in adult secondary education

programs leading to the General Educational Development (GED) credential.

Many potential students are not getting the GED preparation support they need and often prepare on their own. In fact, according to a report by Jobs for the Future and the National Council for Workforce Education, only 30 percent of GED recipients are products of federal

Only 30 percent of GED recipients are products of adult education systems.

Jobs for the Future and the National Council for Workforce Education

and state-funded adult education systems. A full 70 percent prepare for the test in other ways. Reports from the American Council on Education, the exam's administrator, provide a startling snapshot of the outcome:

- About 205,000 adults (ages 18 and older) in SREB states took the GED test in 2002, with 71 percent — roughly 145,000 — passing the exam.
- Those who passed equaled less than 1 percent of the total population of adults without high school credentials. (See Figure 5.)

With the number of working-age adults without a high school diploma in SREB states topping 5 million — and the number earning a GED credential falling short of 1 percent — we know that we have hardly begun to address the education needs of adult learners. The potential for reaching these learners — and the potential benefit to your state — are enormous.

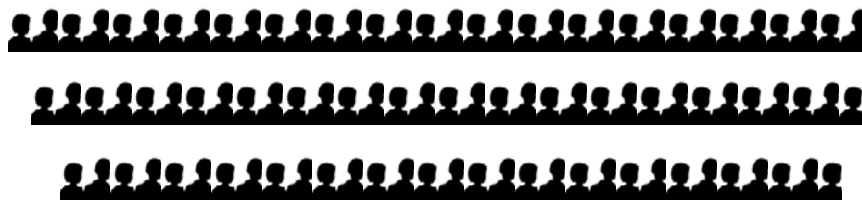
Making it easier for working-age adults to find and complete programs is one key. The U. S. Department of Education reports that only

Less than 1 percent of the total population of adults without high school credentials passed the GED test in 2002 in SREB states.

Figure 5

Too Few GED Credentials Issued to Adults Ages 25 to 44 SREB States, 2002

Of every 100 young adults without high school credentials...



only one earned the GED



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and American Council on Education.

7 percent of the students enrolled in adult education programs in 2002 earned a GED credential in the year after they participated in a program. A Jobs for the Future report observes that the GED program is primarily an alternative for recent high school dropouts to get a high school completion credential rather than a pipeline for other low-skilled adults to re-enter the educational system. An SREB report, *Focus on the GED: Who Takes It and Why*, notes that 68 percent of all test-takers in the SREB states in 2002 were 24 years old or younger.

Unintended consequences of some state policies, unfortunately, contribute to these adults being left out or left behind. Although most adult education programs are tuition-free, financial help for other expenses is rarely available to adult learners in GED programs. Little support is available for such expenses as child care or transportation. In addition, many adult learners have limited time for classes. Inflexible schedules or inaccessible locations of programs create real barriers to balancing school with work and family obligations.

Even more significantly, many SREB states have not developed effective coordination among the many state agencies that provide adult education and training. While all SREB states have established economic and work force development agencies, too often these agencies do not work closely with the education agencies that attempt to coordinate adult education programs. Efforts become disjointed and breakdowns in program linkage are inevitable when separate agencies do not intentionally coordinate program development.

Many SREB states have not developed effective coordination among the many state agencies that provide adult education and training.

When that happens, work force training programs do not lead smoothly to GED programs, and GED programs are not directly linked to collegiate certificate, diploma and degree programs.

Work force development agencies also have not always helped employers support their own employees' efforts to continue their education. Employers can help motivate adult learners and provide incentives to those who complete programs. Employers can also help structure the programs so that they link to other programs, serve broader literacy purposes and meet specific workplace goals. The individual, the employer and the state all benefit when policy efforts help make the GED credential more attainable.

Employers can help motivate adult learners and provide incentives to those who complete programs.



QUESTION 3:

Do larger numbers of working-age adults who pass GED tests pursue postsecondary studies within two years?

SREB's *Challenge to Lead* goals recognize that earning the GED credential isn't enough. SREB states also should focus considerable energy on getting a substantial proportion of adults who pass the GED test to enroll in postsecondary education programs. Unfortunately, it is hard to know how SREB states are doing in this area.

It is hard to know how SREB states are doing in enrolling GED completers in postsecondary education.

Many SREB states track GED recipients as they enroll in or complete programs in postsecondary institutions, but the type of information collected varies by state. Others track them only for periodic studies. Ten SREB states — Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia — have a range of capabilities for tracking this information. Some can collect data on those who enrolled in two-year, four-year, public and private institutions and know which students are seeking degrees, technical training or certificates.

Kentucky, for example, tracks GED recipients who enrolled in postsecondary education within two years of passing the GED test. Kentucky knows that 20 percent of its GED recipients in

2001 enrolled in postsecondary education by 2003. In Oklahoma, 22 percent of those who passed the GED test subsequently enrolled in public postsecondary institutions (primarily community colleges in urban centers) between 2001 and 2003, according to a one-time study conducted for the State Regents for Higher Education in 2004.

Federal data collected and reported through the U.S. Department of Education show that fewer than one in three adult education students who intended to pursue postsecondary education upon completion of the GED program actually did so. In 1998, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy reported that only 4 percent of GED recipients earned an associate's degree.

This statistic holds both promise and challenge. Both the individual and society benefit when adults who complete the GED program go on to complete postsecondary degrees or certificates. These adults should be encouraged to prepare more fully for their next learning opportunity while they are preparing for the GED test.

Only 4 percent of GED recipients earned an associate's degree. This statistic holds both promise and challenge.



What Can You and Your State Do?

As shown by the promising results of several SREB states, progress in adult education can be made through a concerted effort on several fronts, and state policy-makers and education leaders can make a significant difference. Based on interviews with policy-makers and educators around the nation, there is consensus about next steps. Here are three of the most important.

■ Establish specific state goals

Few SREB states have adopted specific and measurable statewide goals for adult education. States are more likely to have goals related to the K-12 system and postsecondary education. But few — with some notable exceptions — have focused on goals for *adult learners*. (See Boxes 1 through 4 for highlights of programs in Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, South Carolina and Virginia.) A particular program, such as Title II of the federal Workforce Investment Act, often has its own targets, as do similar programs in some state agencies dealing with labor, social services and corrections.

Among the goals that states should consider adopting for adult education are increases in:

- **Adult Basic Education, secondary and English as a Second Language enrollments;**
- **adults who earn GED credentials; and**
- **participation in — and completion of — postsecondary certificates and degrees.**

These goals should reference your state's position relative to other SREB states and the nation as well as projected quantifiable gains over time. They also should establish a process for accountability that includes local providers of adult education services as well as the state.

Because adult learning is the responsibility of so many different state agencies, tracking progress will require **improved (and coordinated) data collection and reporting.**

■ Make wise investments in adult education

Spending adult education funds as effectively as possible also helps achieve the specific goals your state has set. Kentucky is an outstanding example. **Kentucky has tied funding directly to clear enrollment and performance goals.** As a result, since 2000, Kentucky has seen adult education enrollment double, and in a single year — 2003 — it increased 27 percent, hitting a record high of nearly 110,000 Kentuckians. The state awarded nearly \$880,000 to the 75 counties that had met or exceeded the enrollment and performance goals for 2003. The Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy recognized Kentucky for what it calls “astounding success” and cited it as a national model. (See Box 2.)

SREB states currently spend over \$620 million in combined federal and nonfederal funds on adult education per year, compared with \$2.1 billion in the United States, according to the U.S. Office of Vocational and Adult Education. States must match federal funding, so that a minimum of 25 percent of the total amount spent on adult education comes from the state. Matching contributions among SREB states range from a minimum of 25 percent in Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas to a high of more than 90 percent in Florida.

These variations in funding are dramatic and reflect state funding policies, capacity and commitment to adult education. States may well be spending money on work force training and other adult education efforts that are not reported to the U.S. Department of Education.

The combination of federal and state funds serves nearly 1.2 million students in SREB states, compared with 2.8 million nationally. This means that **SREB states have 42 percent of all students enrolled in adult education in the United States, but they spend only 29 percent of the federal and state funding in the nation.** Except for states like

Kentucky Reforms Adult Education

“Adult illiteracy is the fundamental barrier to every major challenge facing Kentucky.”

Senate Bill 1

The Kentucky Adult Education Act, 2000

Reorganization: Senate Bill 1, which passed unanimously in the 2000 legislative session, set the stage for dramatic improvements in the state. It increased adult education funding and consolidated several efforts into the Council on Postsecondary Education under the banner “Kentucky Adult Education.”

Goals. Senate Bill 1 set specific goals and established five questions to steer Kentucky’s reform of adult education:

- Are more Kentuckians participating in adult education?
- Are more adult students meeting their educational goals?
- Are more adult students advancing to postsecondary education?
- Are more adult students prepared for employment?
- Are Kentucky communities and economy benefiting?

Accountability. Kentucky established enrollment goals for the system as a whole and for individual counties in the state. These goals were based on a percentage of county residents who have tested at the lowest literacy levels according to the Kentucky Adult Literacy Survey. As a result of this focus on enrollment goals, enrollment increased from 60,000 students in 2001 to 115,000 students in 2005. Kentucky has exceeded its goals every year.

Best Practices. Kentucky has initiated a number of changes to improve the success of its programs:

- The state has developed rigorous content standards and has aligned curriculum and assessment to these standards. These efforts have been endorsed by the state P-16 Council.
- All 120 counties in the state offer “family literacy” as part of their adult education program. Kentucky is one of only two states in the nation with family literacy programs in every county.
- The Kentucky Virtual Adult Education Web site is the first of its kind in the nation, providing students and instructors with access to curriculum and resources in easy-to-use formats.

(See www.kyvae.org.)

Kentucky that have linked funding to enrollment and performance, there is little reason to believe that low funding-to-enrollment ratios result from “more outcome” from “less dollars.” Instead, they likely mean that your state should invest more — and more wisely — to create a better-prepared, better-educated work force for the state economy.

■ **Improve coordination and governance**

Because responsibility for adult education and work force training programs is typically scattered across multiple state agencies, states should focus on coordinating these efforts. These agencies can include the departments of education, labor, corrections, economic development, social services, and postsecondary education coordinating and

governing boards, as well as the governor's work force commissions. But among these agencies, seldom is there a single, powerful policy-making group advocating for adult learning.

By placing the policy-making, goal-setting and accountability mechanisms clearly in the hands of a single agency (even while programs continue to be run by multiple entities), your state can achieve greater success in reaching the goals of adult education. For example, in Mississippi and North Carolina, governance and

coordination rest with community college systems. In Kentucky and Alabama, policy-making and accountability are the responsibilities of the statewide postsecondary coordinating board.

Short of a single agency, states can likely make progress through better interagency coordination. These agencies should focus on parceling out responsibilities in order to avoid duplication and on pooling funds for such activities as public campaigns and the development of accountability and data systems that can demonstrate results.

Promising Practices

In addition to Kentucky, several other SREB states can be models for how to tackle more aggressively the adult learning challenge.

Louisiana recently formed an Adult Learning Task Force that has already issued a report describing the challenge in that state. The report commits Louisiana to a series of actions that will address adult learning needs more effectively. (See Box 3.)

Because the needs of adult learners have been the focus of several recent regional and national studies, researchers have already identified many “best practices” in state adult education programs that are worthy of replication in other states.

To help your state get more adults to return to school, you should...

- **Integrate your adult education and work force development programs.** Too often programs designed for adult education have different expectations and strategies from those designed for work force development. As noted in Box 1, Alabama has integrated literacy training into a Focused Industry Training program that includes communications, reading and computing skills — typical topics in adult education programs. **By integrating literacy and job skills**, adults who complete these programs are better prepared to continue their education.
- **Establish standards for adult education that will lead to success in college.** Many GED

recipients (like their counterparts who earned high school diplomas) find that they need remedial courses in English and mathematics to succeed in college. **With a closer working relationship between adult educators and colleges, the gap between completing the GED program and being ready for college can be reduced.** For example, the South Carolina Department of Education and the South Carolina Technical College System have developed a Memorandum of Agreement to improve the transition of adult education students to postsecondary education, including agreements about remedial courses. (See Box 4.)

- **Accelerate learning.** The longer it takes to complete a literacy or skills program, the less likely adult learners are to advance to the next stage, whether in adult education programs, colleges or employment settings. **By customizing learning and intensifying programs, adult educators believe they can increase adult success rates.** Virginia has implemented an accelerated GED program, called Fast Track GED, as part of its Race to GED work force initiative. It enables students to obtain their GED credential in 90 days or less. It has had early success in attracting adults, getting them tested and ultimately achieving the GED credential. (See Box 4.)

Louisiana's Task Force on Adult Education

Under the leadership of Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, **Louisiana** has embarked upon a coordinated effort to address adult literacy. The governor's guiding principle that "Education is Economic Development" establishes all state agencies as stakeholders in providing services to adults. The scope (and decentralization) of adult learning in Louisiana is represented by the numerous departments concerned with adult literacy and work force training programs. In Louisiana, this includes:

- the Department of Education;
- the Board of Regents and the four-year institutions in the state;
- the Community and Technical College System;
- the Department of Labor;
- the Department of Economic Development;
- the Department of Social Services;
- the Department of Corrections;
- the Governor's Workforce Commission; and
- the Office of Student Financial Assistance.

The governor's Adult Learning Task Force seeks more coordination of the state's efforts.

(See www.gov.state.la.us/LALTFJAN26.pdf.) The Task Force "envisions an adult learning system for Louisiana" in which adults in each parish:

- can easily enter educational programs and access support services appropriate to their needs;
- are helped to succeed in their efforts to get more education;
- are helped to develop a portfolio of lifelong learning experiences and credentials;
- can draw on the educational resources of all the education providers in the state of Louisiana; and
- have their level of learning certified in ways that help them move to the next levels of education and improve their employability.

The Task Force issued a report in January 2005 including a series of recommendations to help link adult education and work force needs:

- Articulate a clear set of goals for adult learning and develop strategies for reaching these goals.
- Create a mechanism for monitoring progress toward the achievement of the goals.
- Designate a lead agency in each parish responsible for adult learning and utilize and encourage both public and private providers.
- Implement an innovative approach of using the ACT WorkKeys® Assessment as the primary way to measure competence and ease transitions among various education providers and into the world of work, and as an alternative credential to a high school diploma or GED credential for entrance into colleges in the Louisiana Community and Technical College System.
- Engage employers in determining the levels of skills needed by their employees and communicating the importance of using WorkKeys® to measure employees' abilities.

- **Show the labor market pay offs.** Many students made what they believed to be rational choices in dropping out of school. As young workers, they see no immediate job benefit from adult education programs. **If states and program leaders can help employers focus their employees' attention on job opportunities, they can keep students motivated and involved.** As part of a growing trend over the past 15 years, many industries now provide some sort of **skills-based certification**. Perhaps the best-known of these are certifications sponsored by Microsoft Corporation and Cisco Systems.
- **Provide comprehensive services.** Most adult learners lead busy, complicated lives and need a variety of services to make returning to school feasible. **Online learning** can help many of them prepare for the GED test more efficiently and also may help them develop the skills they need to pursue and be successful in postsecondary education. SREB's *Electronic Campus* has online services for adult learners, including financial aid and career information, postsecondary online admission and a link to each state's information and services.

Many adults also need child care and help with transportation, for example. Few SREB states make state aid available to adult learners who study part time.

- **Launch public campaigns.** Media campaigns that seek to reach adults who are likely to enroll in adult education or work force training programs can make a difference. Six SREB states have aggressively marketed “go to college” campaigns aimed at youth. Kentucky is one of the few that have launched a **specific adult learning campaign**. SREB, with funding from Lumina Foundation, set out in 2004 to remedy this situation. SREB states are developing a tool kit modeled on successful college access marketing campaigns and on campaigns related to health and safety. The tool kit will help states know how to undertake a successful campaign, including how to:
 - conduct a thorough analysis of potential student enrollments;
 - set goals and develop indicators of progress;
 - develop clear and consistent messages that address the barriers and benefits of education that are important to adult learners;

Box 4

Programs in SREB States Set Specific Goals for Adult Education

The **South Carolina** Department of Education and the South Carolina Technical College System developed a local Memorandum of Agreement to improve the number of adult education students beginning postsecondary education and reduce the number of remedial courses these students take. In a yearlong process, South Carolina conducted focus groups to streamline its efforts and ultimately develop a seamless delivery system. The agreement clearly identifies the educational offering that each entity will provide to the community and encourages partnering efforts.

(See www.myscschools.com/news/more.cfm?articleID=360.)

Virginia's Race to GED is a work force initiative that expands the Education for Life Program and is designed to double the number of GED certificates earned by workers in the state. One part of this initiative is the Fast Track GED program that enables students to prepare for the GED test in 90 days.

(See www.vaged.vcu.edu/.)

- identify partners at both the state and local levels;
- identify the best media to reach adult learners; and
- promote easy first steps to help them enroll.

■ **Increase employer commitment.** Employers are critical to the success of states' adult education and work force training programs. Because the most effective literacy programs are those that teach communications, reading and computing skills **in the context of the workplace**, states need the commitment and advice of the state's major employers. Some states have provided tax incentives and other sources of support to employers who provide education services, but often states

have unintentionally discouraged employers from participating because of complex reporting requirements and other red tape. And some employers simply haven't seen the benefits of providing adult learning and training to their employees, especially those in entry-level and low-skill jobs.

Among the most important employers in any state are state and local governments. A campaign that begins with increasing the educational achievement of governmental workers, as proposed in Louisiana, will set an example for other employers and have direct pay offs in worker productivity in public services. It may also be easier and less expensive to reach these workers.

Adult Education: A Challenge Still to Be Met

SREB states have not been fully committed to adult learners. State leaders need to focus their attention more directly on the learning needs of more than 5 million young adults who are without high school diplomas. These adults need a second chance for further education, and states need for them to be successful.

You will know that your state has been successful if your adult learners gain the skills

and credentials they need to succeed in life and contribute to the public good.

The number of young adults who need more education is growing, and you cannot afford to ignore them. A few SREB states have already seen their commitment to adult learners pay off and have demonstrated some first steps that work. It is time for all SREB states to address this growing problem and change our dismal record on adult learning.

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The following reports may be found on the SREB Web site at www.sreb.org.

■ **Challenge to Lead Education Goals Series**

Building a Foundation for Success by Getting Every Child Ready for School, 2005.

This report reviews SREB states' progress in getting young children prepared to start first grade ready to learn. SREB states have a long history in this endeavor, particularly in addressing the needs of young children from low-income families. The report documents that this group of children is increasing, profiles SREB states' efforts to meet standards set for high-quality preschool programs and shows how SREB states assess school readiness. The report also addresses health and social services that are available in SREB states to children at risk of not being ready for school.

Creating College Opportunity for All: Prepared Students and Affordable Colleges, 2005.

SREB's *Challenge to Lead* goals call on states to ensure that many more youth — particularly from minority groups and low-income families — prepare for, enroll in and graduate from college. This means that college must be affordable for these students. This report examines the current affordability gap and what steps could make college a possibility for more young people. It focuses on the need for state-funded financial assistance and ways that states can help prepare a new generation of residents for the future.

Getting the Mission Right in the Middle Grades, 2004.

This report documents SREB states' progress in getting middle grades students ready for high school. The analyses are based on scores and standards of state achievement tests and on results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The report also describes promising practices for preparing middle grades students for high school, based on technology applications that have been implemented in SREB states and on the work of SREB's *Making Middle Grades Work*.

Mastering Reading and Mathematics in the Early Grades, 2004.

This report documents SREB states' progress in getting early grades students ready for the middle grades. The analyses are based on scores and standards for state achievement tests and on results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The report also outlines how federal funds for reading programs are distributed to districts and schools, what states are requiring of students who do not meet state standards at the end of third or fourth grade, and what retention and promotion policies states have developed for students who do not meet standards.

Progress Being Made in Getting a Quality Leader in Every School, 2004.

This report documents SREB states' progress in redesigning the preparation and development of school principals. The analyses are based on information collected in interviews with state agency personnel on six key indicators. The report also outlines actions that states can take to make progress on each indicator, describes promising practices being implemented by some states and identifies challenges states face in creating new policies that can drive more effective programs and practices.

Resolve and Resources to Get a Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom, 2004.

Every student deserves qualified teachers, but states do not have enough qualified teachers for every subject in every school. This report documents SREB states' progress toward getting a qualified teacher in every classroom. It highlights the essential policies that SREB states should resolve to develop and to support with adequate resources.

Challenge to Lead Goals for Education

1. All children are ready for the first grade.
2. Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
3. Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
4. All young adults have a high school diploma — or, if not, pass the GED tests.
5. All recent high school graduates have solid academic preparation and are ready for post-secondary education and a career.
6. *Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.*
 - *More working-age adults without the basic reading, writing and mathematics skills to begin a high school diploma program enroll in Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language classes.*
 - *Larger percentages of working-age adults without a high school diploma pass the GED tests.*
 - *Larger numbers of working-age adults who pass the GED tests pursue postsecondary studies within two years.*
7. The percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates exceeds national averages.
8. Every school has higher student performance and meets state academic standards for all students each year.
9. Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.
10. Every student is taught by qualified teachers.
11. The quality of colleges and universities is regularly assessed and funding is targeted to quality, efficiency and state needs.
12. The state places a high priority on an education *system* of schools, colleges and universities that is accountable.

The Southern Regional Education Board has established these Goals for Education. They are built on the groundbreaking education goals SREB adopted in 1988 and on a decade-long effort to promote actions and measure progress. The new goals raise further the sights of the 16 SREB states and challenge them to lead the nation.

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