

SREB

A Smart Move in Tough Times:

*How SREB States Can
Strengthen Adult Learning
and the Work Force*

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Southern
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CHALLENGE TO LEAD SERIES



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The report is part of the *Challenge to Lead* education goals series, directed by Jeff Gagne. For more information, e-mail jeff.gagne@sreb.org or call (404) 875-9211. *Goals for Education: Challenge to Lead* is available on the SREB Web site at www.sreb.org. A full listing of the goals, including reports on each goal, is printed on the inside back cover.

A Message from the President of SREB

Five years ago, an SREB report called for major improvements to adult learning programs across the region. The report, *Investing Wisely in Adult Learning is Key to State Prosperity*, pointed to a regional employment crisis in which many of the least-educated adults in SREB states were caught in dead-end jobs or not employed at all.

A few states took action based on the report's recommendations — but far too little progress was made. Now, the current economic recession has made matters worse.

Helping a state's poorest and least-employable residents find good jobs depends on strengthening adult learning efforts.

Why should adult learning be a priority when so many issues in education demand our attention?

Quite simply, the economic well-being of our region is at stake if we allow the growing group of less-educated, working-age adults in SREB states to expand further. Their low levels of education contribute to higher health-care costs and unemployment rates, diminish tax revenues and hinder economic development. Where better-trained workers live, good jobs will follow.

Yet SREB states had fewer young adults enrolled in adult learning programs in 2008 than in 2005. Four SREB states actually saw enrollment declines in all three main types of adult education programs — which is alarming, considering the large number of high school dropouts in every state.

Why not offer the region's roughly 10 million working-age adults who dropped out of high school more efficient, convenient GED programs that can lead some of them to become certified mechanics, HVAC repairers or nurse's aides? Our communities will greatly benefit if we do a better job of helping each adult attain a high school credential and then a postsecondary certificate or degree.

The following pages show how your state's modest investment in adult learning programs can pay off at a much higher level. Easier access to GED and diploma programs for adults can open the door for more people to pursue postsecondary career and technical training — and can boost the numbers of college degrees and technical certificates our states produce each year.

This report provides some examples that many of our states can follow to improve adult learning. Florida leads the region in enrolling more adults in programs that ultimately lead to the GED credential. In fact, roughly 20 percent of the adults enrolled in those programs in SREB states are in Florida. Three other SREB states — Alabama, Kentucky and North Carolina — have increased enrollment in all adult learning programs over the past few years, some of them by tremendous percentages.

Some states also are helping young adults who have quit high school to come back and finish their diplomas. You'll find Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland and Virginia doing good work in this area.

Every state can take these steps. The costs are truly minimal, considering the likely return on investment.



Dave Spence

A Smart Move in Tough Times:

How SREB States Can Strengthen Adult Learning and the Work Force

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

One of the SREB *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education

The tough realities of today's economy — high unemployment rates, layoffs and plant closings — have created an urgent demand for high-quality adult learning programs in SREB states. The recession that began in 2008 has displaced millions of workers across the United States, and many adults who once had good-paying jobs despite minimal education levels now find it difficult to survive without additional training. This is especially true for the many undereducated adults in the SREB region who left high school prematurely and took factory or agricultural jobs — just as their parents did before them. As many of those jobs vanish, adult learning in the region is not measuring up to the challenge facing these individuals.

SREB states need to respond by strengthening educational programs that serve more of these adults, help them retool for other jobs and rebuild their incomes. Otherwise, they and their families may become dependent on public services.

A quick look back

When did the current crisis in adult learning begin? In tracking states' progress on the *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education, SREB's 2005 report *Investing Wisely in Adult Learning is Key to State Prosperity* presented an already dismal picture

of adult learning in the region. Today's regional employment crisis is rooted in the same fundamental problems described then: states' poor performance in getting more students through high school and in attracting those who did not finish high school into viable adult learning programs.

The 2005 report urged SREB states to focus greater attention on providing educational services for adults without a high school credential who are already in the work force. It called for more adults without high school diplomas to complete the GED (General Educational Development) credential or a comparable one as a springboard to postsecondary education or further training. It also highlighted several SREB states' adult learning efforts that held great promise as models for other states. A few states began to make some progress in the years following the report.

Around the same time, a National Commission on Adult Literacy report showed that adult learning and work-force development programs were not meeting the needs of the escalating numbers of high school dropouts, immigrants (particularly those with limited or no knowledge of English) and aging baby boomers that they were designed to serve.

With the economy spiraling downward, by 2009 the adult learning challenge became a crisis. The numbers are clear: While SREB states have struggled to improve high school graduation rates, students in the South continue to graduate from high school at rates lower than their counterparts nationwide — adding to the pool of undereducated young adults. And **fewer young adults without high school credentials entered adult education programs in 2008 than in 2005.** Today, only a small percentage of young adults who enroll in these programs actually earn a GED credential.

This state-level crisis has global impact. The United States is no longer among the world's top 10 nations in the percentage of adults with a high school diploma, according to a 2009 report of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). More worrisome, the OECD singled out the United States as the only country among the 30 nations in its ranking in which adults ages 25 to 34 will be **less educated** than adults ages 45 to 54 unless major changes in the education system occur.

Investing Wisely made sound recommendations to boost adult learning in 2005, and some SREB states took them seriously — reorganizing their state agencies, adding funding or expanding programs. Their responses, however, have not been enough to help states adequately meet today's increased economic pressure.

You as a state policy-maker or education leader can help make a difference in your state at this critical time. Urge your state to make a “second investment” in these adults beyond the one your state's K-12 education system has already made in them. This means strengthening your state's adult learning programs and ensuring your state bolsters its investments in adults who need basic job skills, preparation for taking the GED tests, and assistance in learning English as a second language. These efforts that will pay off.



In SREB states, fewer young adults without high school credentials entered adult education programs in 2008 than in 2005.

The return on investment in adult learning is high

State dollars for adult learning are well spent for one simple reason: Individuals with at least a high school diploma or GED credential contribute more to the state's economy and tax revenues — and draw fewer resources from social services — than their less-educated peers.

Your state has already made a substantial investment in these residents. Adjusted for inflation to 2010 dollars, your state has invested about \$100,000 in each resident who completed 10 years of public school but did not graduate from high school. Adding a modest amount of spending on adult learning programs to assure that these adults can complete a GED or comparable program only completes the investment:

- A person with a high school credential is *more likely to have a job*. The U.S. employment rate in 2008 was 13 percentage points higher for adults with high school credentials than for those without them. The rate in the SREB median states was 16 points higher. (See Table 1.)
- In 2008, a person with a high school diploma or GED credential *earned about 50 percent more* on average than an adult who had not completed ninth grade. A person with a bachelor's degree *earned about 75 percent more* on average than an adult with only a high school credential.

Table 1

Employment Rates of Working Adults Ages 25 to 64 in SREB States, 2008
Higher percentages of adults with high school credentials hold jobs.

	Percent Employed <i>With</i> a Diploma or GED Credential	Percent Employed <i>Without</i> a Diploma or GED Credential	Percent Difference in Employment Rate
United States	76	63	13
SREB median	74	59	16
Alabama	71	54	17
Arkansas	73	57	16
Delaware	77	65	12
Florida	76	64	12
Georgia	76	61	15
Kentucky	70	47	23
Louisiana	72	56	16
Maryland	80	67	13
Mississippi	71	53	18
North Carolina	76	64	12
Oklahoma	73	60	13
South Carolina	73	56	17
Tennessee	75	56	19
Texas	75	66	9
Virginia	77	63	14
West Virginia	67	45	22

Note: The SREB median is the average of the two SREB middle states.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Your state’s investment in adult learning also pays because less-educated people on average have more health problems and depend on public health services more than better-educated people. In fact, state rankings on health are closely related to the populations’ education levels.



State rankings on health are closely related to education levels.

In 2008, United Health Foundation and its partners ranked SREB states low on measures of both health and wellness in its annual *America’s Health Rankings*. The survey assessed a broad range of issues — from the number of primary physicians, to smoking, infant mortality and cancer deaths.

Nine SREB states ranked among the 10 lowest in the nation in overall health in the report. For the same year, the U.S. Census Bureau ranked eight SREB states among the 10 with the most adults without a high school credential. Conversely, SREB states that ranked better in the number of adults without a high school credential also ranked higher in health: Delaware and Maryland ranked 27th and 22nd nationally in education and had

similar standings in health. (See Table 2.) SREB's *Challenge to Lead* goals are clear: All students in SREB states need a high-quality education, from prekindergarten to at least a high school diploma. But those who do not complete high school need better opportunities to earn a GED credential and learn job skills so they can be productive workers and taxpayers — and able to pursue additional technical training or higher education.

Often, a high school credential helps adults enter college and/or career training programs, particularly those that lead to associate's degrees. Too many states have not been successful in helping adults take this step. States need to make the case aggressively to adults that it is never too

late to return to school and improve their job prospects.

Even for adults who simply need to improve their reading and math skills, adult learning programs can increase their independence on the job and decrease their dependence on supervisors. Employees who lack basic skills in reading, writing and math are limited in the positions they can hold and seldom advance in their careers and pay.

When states provide adult learning programs that lead to GED credentials, they make a solid investment in their work forces, businesses and industries, communities and nation.

Table 2

**National Ranking of SREB States on Education and Health Outcomes
of State Residents Ages 25 and Older**
Most SREB states rank low in the nation on both measures.

	High School Credentials ¹		Health Outcomes	
	2005	2008	2005	2008
Alabama	46	45	45	46
Arkansas	44	43	47	44
Delaware	28	27	33	33
Florida	32	33	40	36
Georgia	38	36	43	41
Kentucky	48	47	42	39
Louisiana	45	46	49	49
Maryland	21	22	34	22
Mississippi	50	49	50	50
North Carolina	39	38	36	37
Oklahoma	33	32	44	47
South Carolina	41	39	46	45
Tennessee	43	41	48	48
Texas	49	50	39	40
Virginia	29	30	24	21
West Virginia	42	44	41	43

¹ Ranking is based on adults without a high school diploma or other completion credential.

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

Making progress toward SREB’s *Challenge to Lead* goal for adult learners likely has never been more important for your state. This report helps you answer four questions about your state’s progress in adult learning and pinpoints what you can do to ensure that more educational services and programs are available for working-age adults in your state:

- *Do more working-age adults without basic reading, writing and mathematics skills enroll each year in adult learning programs?*
- *Are rising percentages of working-age adults without a high school diploma passing the GED tests?*
- *Are growing numbers of working-age adults without a high school diploma aspiring to postsecondary studies?*
- *How can SREB states help more adults without high school credentials complete adult learning programs?*



QUESTION 1:

Do more working-age adults without basic reading, writing and mathematics skills enroll each year in adult learning programs?

Chances are your state has not increased the number of adults ages 25 to 59 in adult learning programs in recent years. Only a few states have. Enrollment for this age group in adult learning has not improved overall in SREB states since 2005. In fact, the numbers of these adults taking Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary

Education (ASE) courses have **dropped** across the region. (See Box 1 for definitions of these programs.)

The drop in enrollment is especially disturbing because more than 10 million working-age adults from ages 18 to 64 in the SREB region did not have a high school diploma or GED credential

Box 1

Main Types of Adult Learning Programs

Adult Basic Education (ABE), roughly equivalent to grades one through eight, is designed to improve basic reading, writing, numeracy (math), and functional and workplace skills to prepare students to move into Adult Secondary Education.

Adult Secondary Education (ASE), also known as GED preparation, is roughly equivalent to grades nine through 12. It is designed to improve reading, writing, numeracy, and functional and workplace skills to prepare students to pass GED tests and earn a GED credential.

English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction focuses on foundational listening and speaking, basic reading and writing, and functional and workplace skills for students who are not native English speakers. Generally, ESL students need to complete ESL instruction before they begin ABE or ASE/GED instruction.

in 2008. About one-third of these adults had not even completed the ninth grade, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. (See Figure 1.) Far too few of these adults are advancing their education through adult learning programs.

To strengthen your state’s work force, you and other policy-makers and education leaders should ensure that your state provides adequate ABE opportunities. Some adults who have completed the ninth grade but not high school may need to take ABE courses before they are ready for ASE courses. States need to attract many more undereducated adults into these programs.

Enrollment in ABE programs in the SREB region fell slightly from 2005 to 2008, and enrollment in ASE programs fell by 6 percentage points during the same period. Enrollment rose modestly in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs over the period. ABE enrollments rose in 10 SREB states, ASE enrollments rose in four states, and ESL enrollments rose in six states. (See Table 3.)

Most of the region’s adults ages 25 to 59 who enrolled in educational programs took ABE courses, followed closely by ESL courses, according to the U.S. Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). In 2008, these two

programs enrolled about 230,000 and 210,000 adults, respectively, in SREB states. ASE, which prepares students for GED tests, had a regional enrollment of nearly 43,000 students that year, compared with 45,000 in 2005.

These numbers show that in 2008, SREB states enrolled less than half a million of the more than 10 million adults who would benefit from these educational services — only about 4.6 percent. Enrollments in individual states ranged widely, according to OVAE:

- Florida served more adults in all three programs combined than any other SREB state. In 2008, Florida served 21 percent of the region’s adults who were enrolled in ABE,



SREB states enrolled less than 5 percent of the more than 10 million adults who would benefit from educational services.

Figure 1

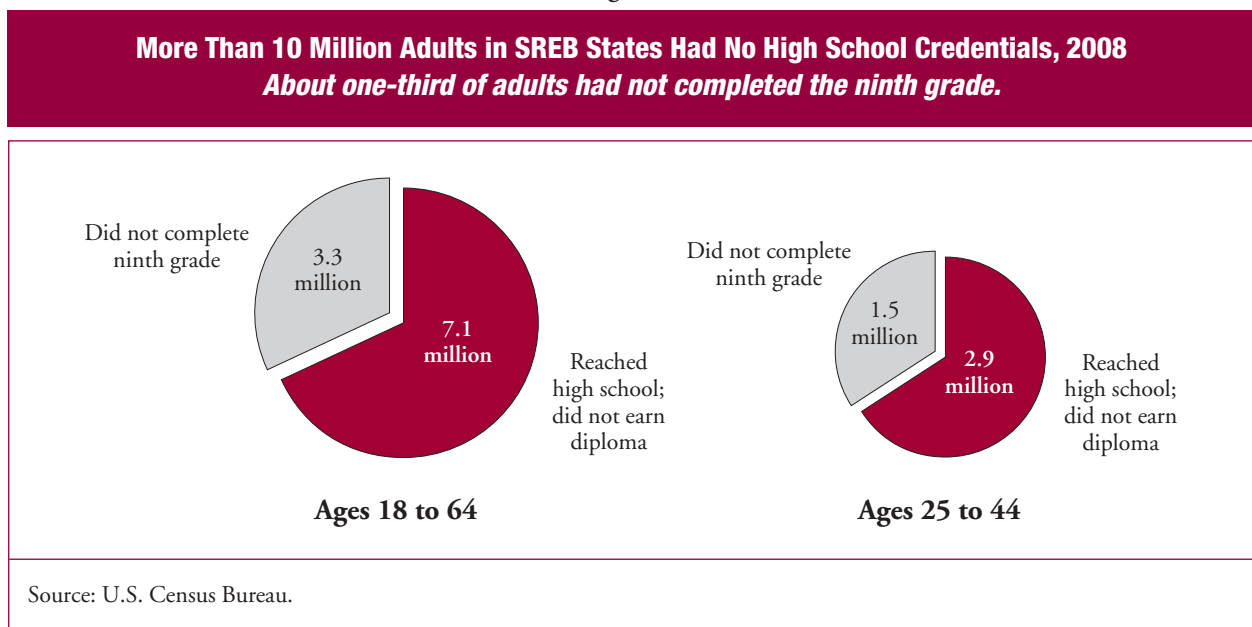


Table 3

Enrollment for Adults Ages 25 to 59 in SREB States, 2005 and 2008									
	Adult Basic Education			Adult Secondary Education			English as a Second Language		
	2005	2008	Percent Change 2005 to 2008	2005	2008	Percent Change 2005 to 2008	2005	2008	Percent Change 2005 to 2008
SREB states	233,121	232,828	0	45,432	42,697	-6	207,011	210,237	2
Alabama	4,904	7,475	52	1,720	1,967	14	1,204	1,568	30
Arkansas	11,193	11,559	3	3,454	2,941	-15	4,064	4,021	-1
Delaware	1,297	1,548	19	415	254	-39	1,215	1,016	-16
Florida	51,061	49,530	-3	8,145	6,756	-17	77,952	86,702	11
Georgia	20,597	20,519	0	3,568	2,176	-39	17,985	16,512	-8
Kentucky	12,393	15,304	23	2,717	4,655	71	2,209	3,069	39
Louisiana	6,356	8,657	36	1,160	1,114	-4	1,074	1,451	35
Maryland	6,378	7,395	16	2,934	2,378	-19	8,435	10,625	26
Mississippi	7,827	7,974	2	1,143	950	-17	361	282	-22
North Carolina	29,598	33,485	13	6,746	7,830	16	20,476	23,731	16
Oklahoma	6,569	6,436	-2	1,134	719	-37	3,112	2,716	-13
South Carolina	24,907	21,244	-15	4,759	4,338	-9	5,078	4,474	-12
Tennessee	18,070	14,096	-22	2,320	1,871	-19	4,643	3,675	-21
Texas	21,220	16,444	-23	1,911	1,307	-32	47,529	39,158	-18
Virginia	7,152	7,382	3	2,228	2,361	6	11,504	11,073	-4
West Virginia	3,599	3,780	5	1,078	1,080	0	170	164	-4

Source: U.S. Department of Education.

16 percent of those in ASE, and 41 percent in ESL. Even so, Florida saw enrollment declines from 2005 to 2008 of 3 percent in ABE and 17 percent in ASE. The state had an 11 percent increase in ESL enrollment over the period. Alabama, Kentucky and North Carolina were the only SREB states with gains in all three programs from 2005 to 2008. ABE increases were dramatic in Alabama (52 percent), Kentucky (23 percent) and Louisiana (36 percent). ASE enrollment in Kentucky rose 71 percent.

- Four SREB states had enrollment declines in all three programs: Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

Because many SREB states have had lower average high school graduation rates than the nation for many years and low, declining enrollments in programs that lead to the GED credential, **SREB states have a growing group of undereducated working-age adults** — more than elsewhere in the nation — at a time when the demand for better-educated adults in the work force is rising rapidly.

While all SREB states have taken steps in recent years to reduce high school dropouts, **more states need to enroll larger numbers of these adults** in adult learning programs.

QUESTION 2:

Are rising percentages of working-age adults without a high school diploma passing the GED tests?

Yes, but the rise in the percentage of adults passing GED tests since 2005 has been modest in SREB states. The good news is that more than half of adults who take GED tests in SREB states pass them, although that rate has risen just slightly in recent years.

Many more adults take the GED tests than enroll in ASE programs. Students may take GED tests without completing an ASE program, although the ASE program is designed to prepare adults for the test.

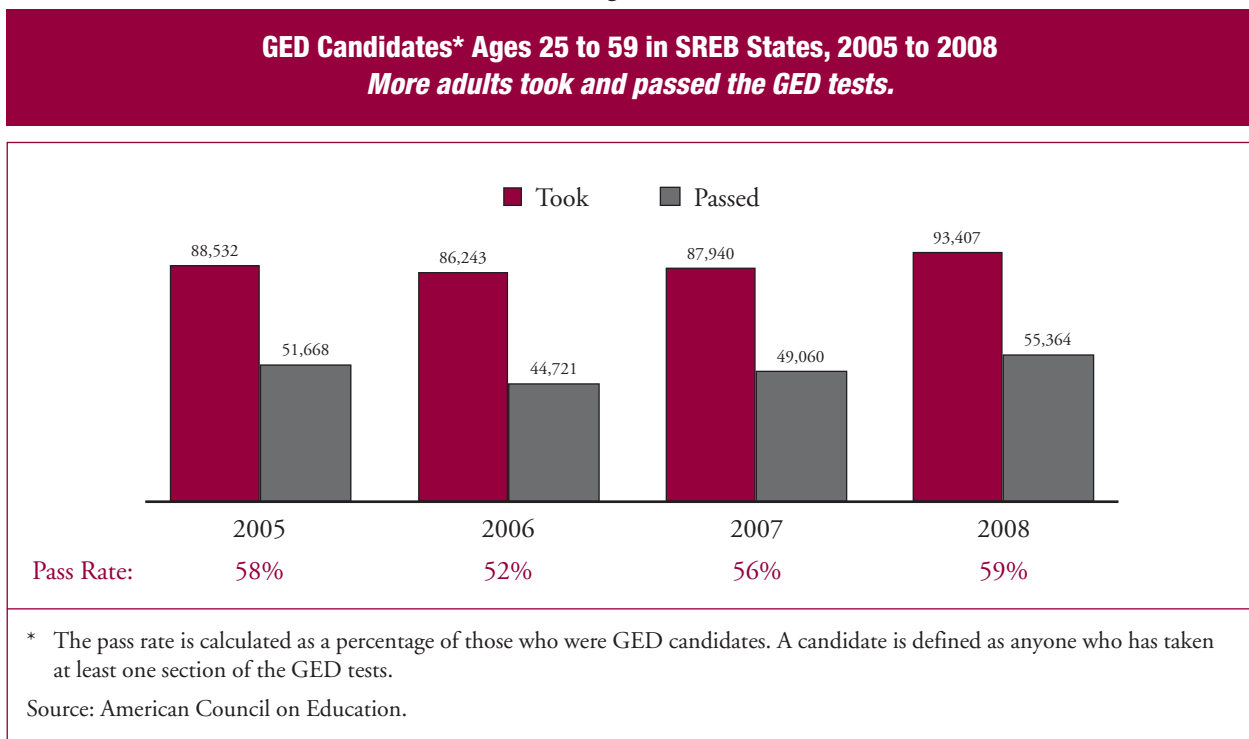
- The number of adults ages 18 and older who **took** GED tests in the SREB region increased from a low of about 205,000 in 2002 — the first year of a new GED test series — to nearly 240,000 in 2008. From 2005 to 2008, the number of these adults taking GED tests grew



Only about 1.5 percent of adults ages 18 and older without a high school credential in the SREB region earned one in 2008.

by about 10,000. The number of adults ages 25 to 59 who took the tests increased from about 88,500 to about 93,400 over the period. (See Figure 2 and Appendix A.)

Figure 2



- The percentage of the region's adults ages 18 and older who took and **passed** the GED tests improved by 2 percentage points from 2005 to 2008 — from 62 percent to 64 percent. For adults ages 25 to 59, the gain was similarly small — from 58 percent to 59 percent. Just over 153,000 adults ages 18 and older in SREB states earned a GED credential in 2008. Adults ages 25 to 59 earned about 55,400 of these credentials.
- Of the more than 10 million adults ages 18 and older without a high school credential in the SREB region in 2008, only about 1.5 percent earned GED credentials that year. Just 1 percent of those ages 25 to 44 earned GED credentials.

Eleven SREB states improved their GED pass rates from 2005 to 2008: Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia. (See Figure 3.)

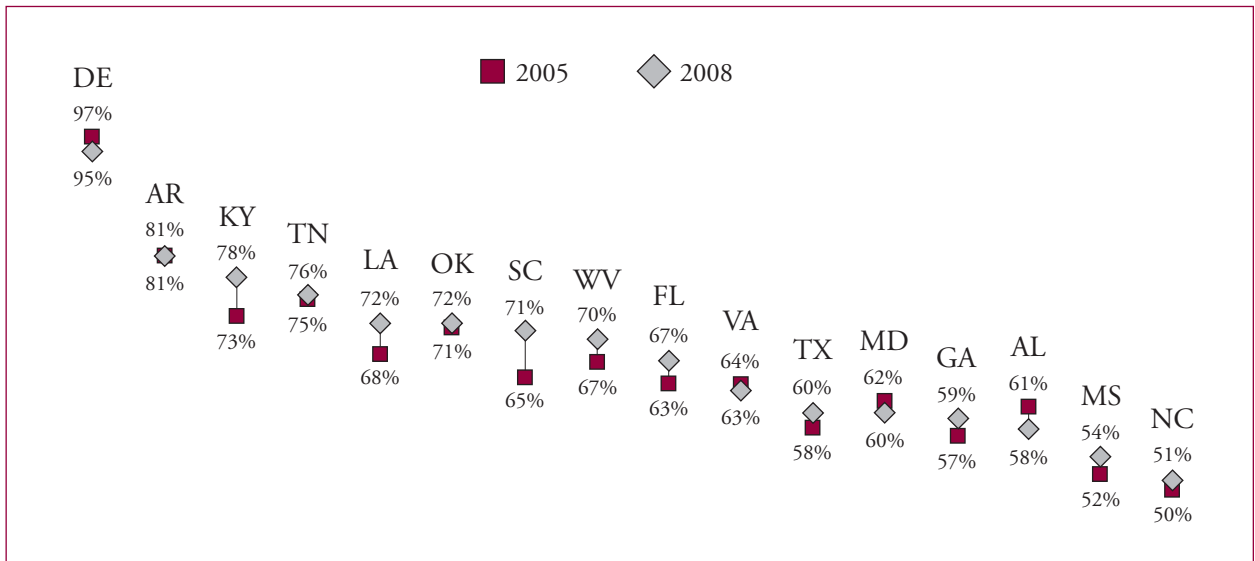
Some states saw larger gains than others:

- South Carolina had the most notable increase during the period, at 6 percentage points.
- Kentucky had an increase of 5 points.
- Florida and Louisiana had increases of 4 points.

Most SREB states do not collect information on whether adults who earn a GED credential continue their education and enroll in postsecondary institutions. In fact, most states find it difficult to keep track of GED recipients once they have completed their credentials. Even the U.S. Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) has trouble contacting students once they complete the GED preparation program. Its attempts to survey adults three to six months later yield few returns. Few SREB states have their own survey processes, and they have been unable to locate students from the information available.

Figure 3

GED Pass Rates for Adults Ages 18 and Older in SREB States, 2005 and 2008
Eleven states saw gains in the percentages of adults passing the tests.



Source: American Council on Education.

Some states provide options beyond the GED

Because of many states' weak record of helping adults without high school diplomas take GED tests, several SREB states have adopted other strategies to help adults earn high school credentials — either diplomas or alternative credentials. Several states have developed adult high schools through which adults can complete regular high school diplomas, and two SREB states offer a nationally recognized external diploma in addition to the GED credential.

Delaware has established the James H. Groves Adult High School, a multi-campus school for out-of-school youths and adults ages 16 or older. (Most students are 16 to 23.) Groves allows these students to earn a regular Delaware high school diploma by completing required high school credits. Schedules are flexible, but students must attend at least 85 percent of the required course hours and earn grades of C or better in courses to receive credit. Students also may qualify for credit from previous high school courses, work or training experience, technical or military courses, community service, higher education courses, independent study, or online learning through Delaware's Diploma-At-A-Distance Program. Since 2006, Groves has graduated more than 400 students per year and has increased the state's overall high school graduation rate by more than 4 percentage points.

Kentucky's Jefferson County High School is "an open-entry/open-exit program," designed to help students, primarily ages 16 to 20, earn a high school diploma. The school also serves adults 21 or older. On six campuses, it provides flexible schedules that can be changed for a student in just 24 hours. The school also offers correspondence and online programs. It serves more than 3,000 students at a time and graduates more than 400 students annually.

North Carolina, Florida and Virginia offer similar schools for adults who wish to pursue high school credentials. **North Carolina's** adult high schools are offered through its community colleges, and students receive a diploma from

Two SREB states offer a nationally recognized external diploma in addition to the GED credential.



the community college and local school system. **Florida's** program is available through colleges and adult education agencies. It serves adults who have withdrawn from high school and those still in high school who need additional credits to earn their diploma or who have unique scheduling needs. In some Florida locations, adults with a high school diploma who need additional high school credits for a specific reason (such as high school science courses needed to enter a college nursing program) also may enroll. **Virginia's** adult high schools enable adults no longer enrolled in high school to complete course work leading to a diploma. At some locations, students can earn both college and high school credit while pursuing a diploma.

Maryland and Virginia offer students the National External Diploma Program (NEDP). In 2008, it was responsible for 20 percent of all high school credentials issued to students who had not earned the traditional diploma in Maryland. The NEDP is a competency-based assessment system that requires adults to demonstrate total mastery of specific job- and life-based skills. Students complete competency-based projects and activities and assemble a portfolio to demonstrate their accomplishment. Students must be at least 18 years old.

All of these states recognize the importance of helping more adults earn a high school credential. The benefit far outweighs the costs to states, since the credential sets the stage for adults to pursue postsecondary education or further training — and become more independent workers and higher-earning taxpayers.

QUESTION 3:

Are growing numbers of working-age adults without a high school diploma aspiring to postsecondary studies?

Only about 4 percent of all adults participating in adult learning programs in 2007 in SREB states reported that they aspire to participate in postsecondary studies, according to OVAE reports. The reports do not indicate whether these adults are preparing for GED tests or are enrolled in ABE or ESL courses. Nevertheless, the responses indicate that the percentage of adults without a high school diploma who aspire to postsecondary education is astonishingly small.

The little information available from an OVAE follow-up survey indicates that about 45 percent of adult education students who set a goal to enter postsecondary education achieved that goal. What the OVAE reports do not reveal is the percentage of students who pass GED tests and then enroll in postsecondary education.

Some SREB states have taken steps to use GED preparation programs to encourage students to continue their education after they earn the GED credential. Some programs have brought college counselors to GED prep programs, some have offered scholarships, and some have used GED graduation ceremonies as opportunities to discuss the benefits of career/technical programs.

Some SREB states have begun to develop better tracking systems so they can provide information on postsecondary programs to adults once they have completed GED credentials. Many state-funded ABE, ASE and ESL programs are part of their state's community and technical college system or the work-force education department. In these states, the GED program can have a natural link to career/technical programs. More efforts of this type are needed.

Many states, however, no longer view the GED credential as a necessary steppingstone to

postsecondary institutions. **Instead, for many students, success in postsecondary occupational courses is a steppingstone to GED programs.** Some SREB states admit students to postsecondary technical programs if students can show they can benefit from the instruction, often through placement tests such as ACT's COMPASS and College Board's ASSET. In these instances, the GED credential is not necessary for admission.

For example, in 2009 about 6 percent of the students enrolled in credit classes in the Technical College System of Georgia had not completed high school and did not have a GED credential. Students who are admitted to the associate of applied science degree programs offered at these colleges must have a high school diploma or GED credential. Anyone who is 16 or older, however, is eligible for admission to the system's occupational and career programs, which are designed to develop or improve occupational competencies. Once students are acclimated to these institutions and are successful in occupation and career certificate or diploma programs, they are often willing to complete a GED program and tests so they can be admitted to degree programs.



For many students, success in postsecondary occupational courses is a steppingstone to GED programs.

QUESTION 4:

How can SREB states help more adults without high school credentials complete adult learning programs?

SREB's 2005 *Investing Wisely* report still provides the right advice for states in planning for effective adult learning programs, and the current economic recession makes the call to action even more urgent. The report identified three significant keys for states in improving adult learning:

1. Establish specific state goals.
2. Make wise investments in adult learning.
3. Improve coordination and governance among agencies that provide education services to adults.

In 2008 and 2009, SREB surveyed all of the key state agencies across the region involved in adult learning to check for progress since 2005 in improving services. SREB found that a few states have taken new steps to assist adult learners — and that **those efforts are paying off**. Yet the general lack of progress in most SREB states indicates that adult learning is still not a priority. This needs to change now. What can states do to take immediate action?

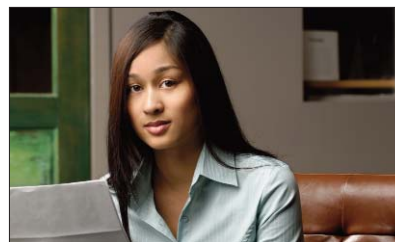
1. Establish Specific State Goals

SREB states need to set specific goals for improving adult learning — moving beyond the minimum goals that states must set in order to receive OVAE grant funding. States also should set minimum goals for their programs — including targets for increasing the number of adult learners enrolled and GED credentials earned; and for increasing the placements in training programs, postsecondary education, and in jobs. SREB's survey revealed that two SREB states had set goals higher than the minimum required by the federal grant program: **Alabama** and **Kentucky**.

Alabama increased its enrollment in adult learning significantly — including boosting participation in ASE by 86 percent — from 2005 to 2006, and enrollment has remained relatively steady since then. What made the difference? In 2005, the chancellor of the Alabama Community College System made improving adult literacy in the state one of three main missions of the community colleges. The decision was part of the system's interest in attracting and keeping new industry in the state.

Then in December 2008, the Alabama Board of Education, which oversees both K-12 education and the Community College System, charged the system with developing a process for recruiting high school dropouts into adult learning programs. The board expects this link between high school dropouts and GED programs to further increase adult learning enrollments when the recruiting process is fully implemented.

The **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) launched an effort in 2007 —



Kentucky Adult Education set the target for 15,000 GED credentials to be awarded annually and for 35 percent of all adults who complete GED credentials to be enrolled in postsecondary institutions.

known as “Double the Numbers” — to double the number of state residents who have bachelor’s degrees by 2020. Officials realized that the number of high school graduates in the state was insufficient to expand greatly the number of state residents with bachelor’s degrees. State leaders also recognized that Kentucky could not meet its goal without increasing the number of GED recipients and then boosting the college-going rate for those adults. Thus, as part of the campaign, the state set goals to increase both the number of GED recipients *and* the number of them who enrolled in postsecondary education.

Kentucky Adult Education (KYAE), part of the state’s CPE, set a target that by 2020, 15,000 GED credentials would be awarded annually and 35 percent of all adults who complete GED credentials would be enrolled in postsecondary institutions. Policy leaders knew it would take time for the state to grow toward these targets. So they set intermediate goals, including 10,939 GED completers and a college-going rate of 24 percent for GED graduates in 2009. From 2007 to 2008, Kentucky improved GED completion from 9,282 to 10,307 but has since lost some ground. The state is well on its way to meeting the college-going goal: 21 percent of its 2007 GED graduates enrolled in the state’s colleges and universities within two academic years.

If SREB states are to meet targets like the ones in Kentucky, they need better data systems so they can follow the progress of adults who enter adult education programs. They also should urge adults who leave the programs to return and finish them — and to pursue postsecondary degrees and certificates. Without good data systems, this will be difficult.

2. Make Wise Investments

Only a few SREB states invest significantly more in adult learning programs than the minimum financial commitment required by the

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OVAE grant program. Using a funding formula based on each state’s number of adults without high school credentials, OVAE provides funding for adult learning programs and requires states to match the funding so that the total equals at least one state dollar for every three federal dollars granted. Each state can provide more dollars — its own investment — and thereby increase its contribution to adult learning.

Since 2005, all SREB states have consistently contributed the required 25 percent of funding and received the federal grant. But states that meet only the minimal financial targets stipulated by the grant program barely make a dent in their adult learning deficits. **Reaching well beyond the minimum funding requirement is a key way in which states can make significant progress.**

Arkansas, Florida and North Carolina allocated significantly more funding to adult learning than required by the federal grant — an amount that represented 75 percent or more of the funding for adult learning in each state.

In **Florida**, the amount was 90 percent of the total program budget. In 2007, for example, the state received \$33.6 million in federal grant funds and was required to match these dollars with \$11.2 million, to yield a total minimum program budget of \$44.8 million. Instead, the state allocated \$312.4 million, for a total program budget of nearly \$346 million. This investment means that Florida can serve many more adults who need services. (See Table 4.)

Table 4

Office of Vocational and Adult Education Funding, 2007						
	Federal Funds	State (Non-Federal) Matching Funds	Total Funding	Minimum State Funding Required	Met Match Required	State Funds as Percent of Total
Alabama	\$9,203,005	\$8,593,883	\$17,796,888	\$3,067,668	Yes	48
Arkansas	5,604,088	18,404,179	24,008,267	1,868,029	Yes	77
Delaware	1,543,689	1,376,660	2,920,349	514,563	Yes	47
Florida	33,573,869	312,375,752	345,949,621	11,191,290	Yes	90
Georgia	15,972,245	12,687,054	28,659,299	5,324,082	Yes	44
Louisiana	9,374,791	6,965,745	16,340,536	3,124,930	Yes	43
Kentucky	8,738,279	20,378,769	29,117,040	2,912,760	Yes	70
Maryland	9,079,847	13,922,234	23,002,081	3,026,616	Yes	61
Mississippi	6,320,001	3,367,732	9,687,733	2,106,667	Yes	35
North Carolina	15,310,346	58,858,665	74,169,011	5,103,449	Yes	79
Oklahoma	6,206,664	2,325,609	8,532,273	2,068,888	Yes	27
South Carolina	8,102,229	14,856,197	22,958,426	2,700,743	Yes	65
Tennessee	11,508,019	4,513,692	16,021,711	3,836,006	Yes	28
Texas	46,415,264	15,471,755	61,887,019	15,471,755	Yes	25
Virginia	12,813,960	6,823,829	19,637,789	4,271,320	Yes	35
West Virginia	3,902,198	3,726,950	7,629,148	1,300,733	Yes	49
Totals	\$203,668,494	\$504,648,705	\$708,317,191	\$67,889,498		

Source: Office of Vocational and Adult Education.

Federal and state allocations associated with the OVAE grant budget do not represent all the funds that states can spend on adult learning programs. State agencies' staffs reported in the SREB survey that additional state investments from the Departments of Corrections, Rehabilitation Services, Work Force Education and Training, Social Services and others are considerable, but hard to quantify and verify. This is because many states have distributed the funding and the responsibility for adult learning services to several agencies — showing the need for states to coordinate their adult learning efforts more effectively.

Investments in adult learning allow states to provide professional development and enhance their programs in many ways. For example, **Mississippi** has conducted three- to four-day academies each

year for new adult learning teachers. The academies also certify the teachers through an exam.

States reported that they have convened state-wide panels to study adult learning, provided scholarships to GED graduates and paid for GED testing and marketing to make the public aware of the programs. **North Carolina's** Appalachian State University offered a two-week institute in teaching the basic skills of reading, writing and math for adults. Both North Carolina and Mississippi hold an annual conference for adult learning professionals.

In **Maryland**, the Superintendent's Panel on Excellence in Adult Education produced a 2005 report, *Stepping Up to the Future*, which recommended a series of steps to improve adult learning in the state. The panel engaged a nationally

known labor economist to research the impact of the state's investment in adult learning, revealing a three-to-one return on state investments through higher wages. These results led to a 2006 state law that significantly increased the funding for adult learning by \$3 million, added in appropriations in the 2007 and 2008 fiscal year budgets.

Funding in some states has helped students pay for GED testing. **Arkansas, Delaware and West Virginia** provide free GED testing, and adult learners may request help with testing costs in **Georgia and Maryland**. Civic groups and literacy organizations in a few states also provide financial assistance to low-income adult learners for GED testing.

Generally, SREB states that lag behind others in funding also have low performance. **Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas** have the highest rates of adults without high school diplomas or GED credentials — but they are three of the four SREB states with the lowest percentages of state investment in adult learning linked to federal grants.

What else states can do

Some states have found that these additional investments in adult learning can make a difference:

Use technology to advance adult learning. While SREB states lead the nation in the use of technology at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels, they have made only limited use of technology for adults working toward a GED credential. Yet technology can offer adults tremendous potential: For example, in a unique partnership, Kentucky Adult Education (KYAE) and Kentucky Educational Television (KET) provide students enrolled at KYAE adult learning centers with KET's GED Connection study materials. Students enrolled at KYAE centers have their skills assessed and may register for the GED program through KET for \$40, which includes workbooks, instruction, practice tests and GED test fees.

Although representatives in several other SREB states reported that GED programs are



SREB states must aggressively market adult learning programs.

available online, these efforts are often local, sporadic, and not well advertised. **More online options for adult learning would give busy working adults the opportunity to take courses at their own convenience.** Moreover, online courses could remove the stigma many adults feel in returning to school, where they may be intimidated by attending classes with younger students or those with stronger academic skills.

Strengthen marketing and communications campaigns. Some SREB states have realized they must aggressively market adult learning programs. Many adults, particularly those who did not finish the ninth grade, are caught in cycles of job turnover and unemployment. These adults need classes in Adult Basic Education programs, followed by GED preparation. Many others need help learning English or do not have good memories of their school days. They need to be convinced that adult learning can meet their current needs and that they can earn a GED credential or reach other goals efficiently, without much bureaucracy or inconvenience.

Maryland has done just that. Drawing on information from focus groups of recent high school dropouts, the state designed radio advertisements, print materials and an easy-to-remember, toll-free literacy hotline number (1-888-goGEDgo) and Web site (www.goGEDgo.org). All Maryland counties have access to GED-I, a free, teacher-supported online program for GED test preparation for state residents. Its goal is to serve adult learners who are unable to attend face-to-face GED preparation classes.

Kentucky (GoHigher Kentucky) and **Virginia** (the Race to GED) were successful with similar campaigns in 2001 just before the new, more rigorous GED tests were implemented. Students who had already passed part of the tests were encouraged to pass the remainder before the changes began.

Other SREB states, too, have created elements of public outreach campaigns to encourage more adults to obtain GED credentials:

- The **Delaware** Coalition for Literacy provides public service announcements for radio and has collaborated with a telecommunications company to develop a Web site that describes the state's adult learning programs. The state's free GED online classes are publicized in local newspapers and on public-access TV.
- **Georgia** adult educators speak at community events. They distribute bookmarks, door hangers and other materials at community functions to promote adult learning; they also sponsor radio/TV announcements and billboards across the state.
- **West Virginia** uses newspapers, radio/TV, brochures, newsletters, posters and billboards with the slogan "Make a Date to Graduate" to encourage adults to complete an alternative high school credential.

Your state likely can attract more people to adult learning programs. Your state also should seek out business and industry leaders and ask them to encourage their workers and potential



Your state should seek out business and industry leaders and ask them to encourage their workers to continue their education.

employees to continue their education — and to help the state provide courses for those workers. Businesses can help build Web sites or add a flyer from the state about adult learning to paycheck envelopes or newsletters. State education agencies can work with utility companies to distribute a short message and Web address with monthly bills, or they can team with state and local organizations to promote special adult learning events. These strategies do not require considerable new funding.

For example, **South Carolina** publishes an *Annual Report* as well as a small *Fast Facts* publication that spells out program success. Businesses receive and share the state's information readily. **Mississippi** works with foundations and businesses such as Walmart and Dollar General to underwrite publicity for GED programs.

3. Improve Coordination and Governance

Just as in 2005, SREB states need to improve the coordination and governance of adult learning programs. Typically, governance for adult learning programs has been distributed among various state agencies, with little oversight by a single agency. Unless a single agency is responsible for ensuring that adequate services are consistently provided and that state and federal dollars are well invested, the state risks gaps in important services, duplication of effort and fragmented responses to the public's needs.

In 2005, SREB found that many states in the region had not established a single coordinating agency to oversee activities among the various agencies. (See Appendix B for the current state agencies responsible for adult learning in the SREB region.)

Since 2005, several SREB states have established special committees or groups to coordinate adult learning services or to undertake new efforts. In 2007, Governor Mike Beebe of **Arkansas** convened the Governor's Workforce Cabinet, consisting of directors of education and work-force departments, and charged them with studying duplication of services.

In **Delaware**, the Interagency Council on Adult Literacy (ICAL) operates through the lieutenant governor's office and brings state agencies together to address adult literacy efforts. In July 2008, an ICAL Summit focused on issues of low-skilled and ESL adults without a GED credential or high school diploma. Information from the summit was shared with business leaders to begin discussions on the skill levels of the current and future work force.

Governor Brad Henry of **Oklahoma** established the Governor's Council on Work Force and Economic Development in late 2005 so that state agency representatives could work together to improve coordination of work-force activities and services. Agencies' representatives also participate in the Workforce Staffing Solutions Team to support the work of the Governor's Council.

Texas has created a tri-agency workgroup to coordinate activities of the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Workforce Commission. TEA facilitated a resource team with members from the three agencies that meet quarterly to coordinate their efforts. The Texas Workforce Commission awarded \$750,000 in grants in 2007-2008 to providers to integrate adult learning and work-force development,

although it did not require that GED completion be an outcome of the grant project.

Other recent changes in adult learning governance in SREB states:

- The Louisiana Governor's Task Force on Adult Learning and the Board of Regents' Workforce Development Sub-Committee for the Master Plan for Higher Education both recommended in 2009 that adult learning be moved to the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS), but the final decision awaits a feasibility study.
- Effective in mid-2009, administration of adult learning in Maryland was transferred to the Maryland Department of Labor.

SREB states have made only limited progress in the last five years in improving the percentages of adults who earn a GED credential — or who gain critical career/technical skills in other adult learning programs. Today's economic downturn has placed more hardship on less-educated workers than others. **Greater investments in adult learning are urgently needed** to help them find better jobs, reduce unemployment, strengthen the tax base and help rebuild the economic vitality of the region.

Summary: What can you and your state do?

This report calls for you as a policy-maker or education leader to take steps to ensure that adult learning programs meet your state's work-force needs. State programs need to serve more adults who did not complete the ninth grade or earn a high school diploma, including those with poor English language skills. The programs should be able to help all interested adults build sufficient skills to pursue a post-secondary degree or career/technical program.

- *Ensure that adult learning efforts are coordinated statewide.* Each state needs one agency to coordinate all agencies responsible for adult learning, to account for all of the state and federal resources available, and to determine the most cost-effective means to make substantial improvements in educational services, career development and advocacy for adult learning in the state.
- *Set statewide goals for adult learning.* All state agencies with a responsibility for adult learning need to participate in setting statewide goals for improving the education attainment of adult workers who did not complete high school, and they should accept responsibility for helping the state meet the goals. While state leaders should develop statewide strategies together, each agency head should take responsibility on behalf of the agency for helping the state meet the state's adult learning goals. State leaders also need to conduct marketing campaigns that capture adults' attention and help them return to education programs that will meet their career goals and help the state improve its work force. In addition, states should seek business leaders' support for the campaigns and work creatively to link adult learning with workplaces.
- *Be bold and creative in working to meet the goals of adult learning programs, even when you cannot be generous with new resources.* State leaders need to be strong advocates for wiser stewardship of existing adult learning resources and push for the most creative, effective programs possible, without compromising quality. Strong advocacy and maximized use of all available current resources can lead to positive results, the experiences of several SREB states show.

As a state policy-maker or education leader, you need to re-double your efforts to tackle the adult learning challenge — promoting as many programs as possible to help more adults earn a high school credential — even those who once gave up on high school. The promising practices from the few SREB states that have taken major actions in recent years provide strategies you can put to use **now**.

Appendix A

Adults Who Passed the GED Tests in SREB States

	2007		2008	
	Ages 18+	Ages 25 to 59	Ages 18+	Ages 25 to 59
SREB states	137,895	49,060	153,894	55,364
Alabama	3,710	1,180	6,715	2,281
Arkansas	4,400	1,758	4,685	1,659
Delaware	545	183	655	231
Florida	24,420	6,940	27,975	8,135
Georgia	15,085	4,938	16,765	5,681
Kentucky	7,610	3,048	7,970	3,231
Louisiana	4,910	1,567	4,785	1,536
Maryland	3,950	1,277	4,360	1,556
Mississippi	4,880	1,564	5,790	2,040
North Carolina	10,100	4,325	11,660	5,022
Oklahoma	5,100	2,111	5,270	2,099
South Carolina	4,860	1,677	5,360	1,746
Tennessee	9,155	3,578	10,615	4,336
Texas	25,410	10,033	25,870	10,084
Virginia	11,030	3,978	12,390	4,711
West Virginia	2,730	903	3,030	1,016

Note: The numbers for ages 25 to 59 are calculated from percentages.

Source: American Council on Education.

Appendix B

Adult Learning Program Governance

	Agency or Department	Type
Alabama	Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education, Adult Education and GED Testing	Postsecondary Education
Arkansas	Arkansas Department of Workforce Education	Workforce Education
Delaware	Delaware State Department of Education, Adult Education and Workforce Development	State Department of Education
Florida	Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Workforce Education	State Department of Education
Georgia	Technical College System of Georgia, Office of Adult Literacy	Postsecondary Education
Kentucky	Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, Kentucky Adult Education	Postsecondary Education
Louisiana	Louisiana Department of Education, Division of Dropout Prevention, Adult and Family Services	State Department of Education
Maryland	Maryland Department of Education, Division of Career Technology and Adult Learning, Adult Education and Literacy Services Branch	Postsecondary Education
Mississippi	Mississippi State Board for Community and Junior Colleges, Adult Education and GED Testing	Postsecondary Education
North Carolina	North Carolina Community College System, Basic Skills Department	Postsecondary Education
Oklahoma	Oklahoma State Department of Education, Lifelong Learning	State Department of Education
South Carolina	South Carolina Department of Education, Adult Education	State Department of Education
Tennessee	Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Adult Education	Workforce Education
Texas	Texas LEARNS Office ¹	Other
Virginia	Virginia Department of Education, Office of Adult Education and Literacy	State Department of Education
West Virginia	West Virginia Department of Education, Office of Adult Education and Workforce Development	State Department of Education

¹ Texas LEARNS is a third-party organization that is contracted with the Texas Education Agency to provide nondiscretionary grant management functions, program assistance and other statewide support services to Texas Adult Education and Family Literacy Providers.

Sources: SREB 2008-2009 survey of states and state education agency Web sites.

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Challenge to Lead Goals for Education

The reports listed below for each goal, and other reports on the goals, are found at www.sreb.org.

1. All children are ready for the first grade.
Ready to Start: Ensuring High-Quality Prekindergarten in SREB States
2. Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
Set for Success: Improving Reading and Mathematics Achievement in the Early Grades
3. Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
Keeping Middle Grades Students on the Path to Success in High School: Increasing Engagement and Achievement in SREB States
4. All young adults have a high school diploma — or, if not, pass the GED tests.
Gaining Ground on High School Graduation Rates in SREB States: Milestones and Guideposts
5. All recent high school graduates have solid academic preparation and are ready for post-secondary education and a career.
Getting Students Ready for College and Careers
6. Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.
A Smart Move in Tough Times: How SREB States Can Strengthen Adult Learning and the Work Force
7. The percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates exceeds national averages.
Creating College Opportunity for All: Prepared Students and Affordable Colleges
8. Every school has higher student performance and meets state academic standards for all students each year.
Focusing on Student Performance Through Accountability
9. Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.
Schools Need Good Leaders Now: State Progress in Creating a Learning-Centered School Leadership System
10. Every student is taught by qualified teachers.
Resolve and Resources to Get a Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom
11. The quality of colleges and universities is regularly assessed and funding is targeted to quality, efficiency and state needs.
Holding Colleges and Universities Accountable for Meeting State Needs
12. The state places a high priority on an education system of schools, colleges and universities that is accountable.
From Goals to Results: Improving Education System Accountability

These goals are built on the groundbreaking education goals SREB states adopted in 2002 and challenge the 16 SREB states to lead the nation in educational progress.

