

POLICY NOTES

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Addressing Achievement Gaps

Advancing Learning for Our Diverse Adult Population

What does it take to get a good job — the kind that pays enough to support a family? Once, the answer might have been little more than a strong back and a strong work ethic. Today, however, the American economy has changed. High school dropouts who once could earn enough for a middle-class life now find themselves trapped in poverty. Companies that used to recruit locally now export low-skill jobs overseas, to countries where labor costs far less. Many of the jobs that remain require levels of education formerly reserved for a small elite, yet millions of adults lack even basic literacy skills, let alone the advanced skills that will be required. To preserve its economic competitiveness and ensure good lives for its citizens, the United States needs to focus on an urgent new mission: reorienting institutions of government, business and higher education around the task of providing education and training to a new kind of student — the adult worker.

That was the message of “Advancing Learning for Our Diverse Adult Population,” the 13th in ETS’s seven-year-old series of “Addressing Achievement Gaps” symposia. Co-convened by the American Association of Community Colleges and the Council

THIS ISSUE

Advancing Learning for Our Diverse Adult Population

Decades ago, most U.S. companies hired locally, few jobs required a college education and even high school dropouts could find well-paying work. However, the world has changed. With automation and overseas outsourcing eliminating many low-skilled jobs — and, increasingly, many higher-skilled ones — more and more Americans need postsecondary education or training to earn a living wage. Many workers don’t have such credentials, however, and reforming the K – 12 education system will not fully solve this problem, because students will not enter the labor force for years. Today’s workers need to upgrade their skills now. However, with research showing that millions of American adults lack basic literacy skills, let alone more advanced skills, helping adult learners will require new approaches to the funding, organization and delivery of postsecondary education and training.

(continued on page 12)



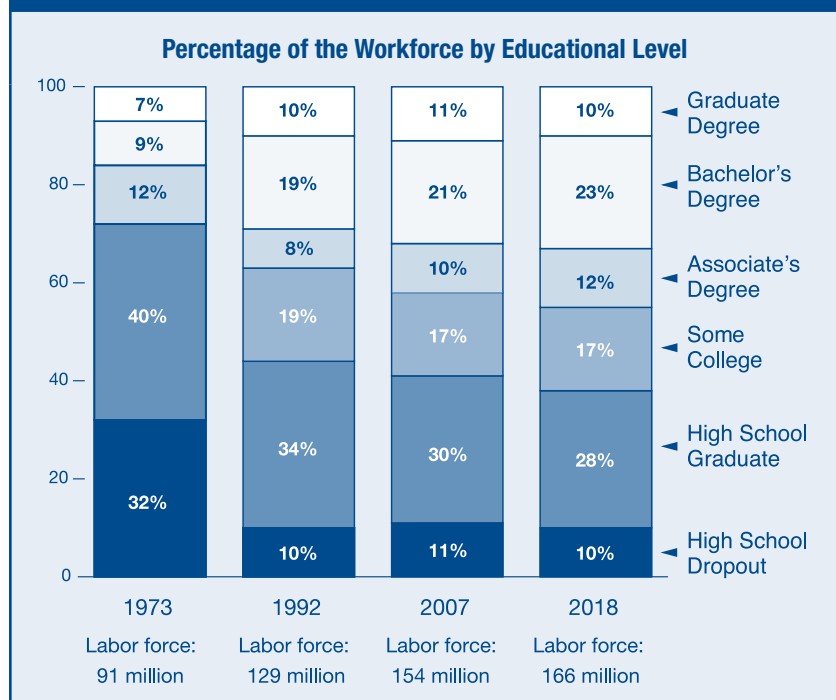
for Adult and Experiential Learning, the conference was held March 3 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., and featured presentations by 16 academics, policy advocates and government officials. “Skills and knowledge are the plant and equipment of today’s global economy,” ETS Senior Vice President **Michael Nettles** told the conference audience of 200. “A deficit of these forms of intellectual capital puts an individual, a family, a community and, ultimately, the national economy at risk.”

“Skills and knowledge are the plant and equipment of today’s global economy. A deficit of these forms of intellectual capital puts an individual, a family, a community and, ultimately, the national economy at risk.” — Michael Nettles

At the root of the new imperative lie changes in the world economy, said conference speakers. Automation has eliminated many repetitive, low-skill jobs; others have been lost to low-wage countries, as improvements in transportation and communications have made it possible for American companies to locate their operations overseas. “The result of that has been a steady decline in average real American wages for more than 20 years,” said conference speaker **Marc Tucker**, President of the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE). “We’ve never seen that before in the history of the United States.” And, increasingly, this same process is affecting higher-skilled work as well, Tucker added.

Meanwhile, more and more of the jobs that remain require postsecondary education. In the decade ending in 2012, the economy will create 24 million new jobs for workers with associate, bachelor’s or graduate degrees, said conference speaker **Pamela Tate**, President of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). Yet, 30 percent of the population — more than 59 million people — have never attended college, Tate said, and nine advanced nations have a higher proportion of young-adult college graduates than the United States’ 39 percent. As baby boomers retire, the country will lack enough people with the educational background to fill the vacancies. By 2025, Tennessee alone expects to have 1.37 million new jobs requiring college degrees, and only 1 million new degree holders, said conference speaker **Richard Rhoda**, Executive Director of the Tennessee

FIGURE 1: TRENDS IN THE EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE WORKFORCE



Source: Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce. Analysis of March CPS data, various years, Center on Education and the Workforce forecasts of education demand to 2018.

Higher Education Commission. “We’re going to require a whole lot more skill in this labor force,” said conference speaker **Anthony Carnevale**, Director of Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce. “When we come out of the recession, a lot of people are going to be left behind.”

Today’s Workers, Tomorrow’s Workers

The payoff to increasing the proportion of educated workers is potentially huge, both for individuals and for the country, speakers said. Between 1979 and 2004, expected lifetime earnings for individuals without high school diplomas fell by nearly 40 percent, and only people with postsecondary education saw any increase in their expected earnings, said conference speaker **Irwin Kirsch**, Director of ETS’s Center for Global Assessments. In 1979, men with college degrees could expect to earn 50 percent more than male high school graduates; by 2004, that edge had grown to 96 percent, Kirsch said. The earnings gap between high school graduates and those with graduate degrees widened even more rapidly, growing from a 67 percent advantage in 1979 to a 254 percent advantage 25 years later.

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE DIFFERENCE IN LIFETIME EARNINGS BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION, 1979 AND 2004

Educational Attainment	1979	2004
HS vs. College	50%	96%
College vs. Graduate School	11%	30%
HS vs. Graduate School	67%	254%

Source: Irwin Kirsch, Henry Braun, Kentaro Yamamoto, and Andrew Sum, *America’s Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation’s Future*, Policy Information Report, Policy Information Center, Educational Testing Service, January 2007, Table A-12.

If every American who currently lacks an associate degree obtained one, and collected the increased earnings that a college credential typically brings, said CAEL’s Tate, the nation’s personal income would grow by \$848 billion. “The core policy for allocating opportunity in the United States is rapidly becoming postsecondary education,” Georgetown’s Carnevale said. “It is becoming our workforce development system.”

Historically, only a small elite achieved high levels of education and training, but the new economy requires that far more people do so, said Tucker of NCEE. “The only way out of this mess is for us to be not only better educated, but far more innovative and creative than our competitors,” he said. “We have to be just as well-skilled as they and have an edge they don’t have, or we will be making what they’re making.”

“The core policy for allocating opportunity in the United States is rapidly becoming postsecondary education. It is becoming our workforce development system.” — *Anthony Carnevale*

Since the 1980s, reformers have tackled these issues by seeking to improve the K – 12 education system. But school reform alone cannot address the gap between the needs of the global economy and the skills of current workers, conference speakers said; today’s schoolchildren and their younger siblings will not join the workforce for years. To compete for jobs with the best-performing countries, the United States will need 55 percent of its population to hold college degrees, said CAEL’s Tate, but if current trends continue, the proportion of graduates will reach only 42 percent. “Today’s workforce is tomorrow’s workforce,” said conference speaker **Jill Wakefield**, Chancellor of Seattle Community Colleges. “We need to do a better job serving the students we have.” However, the problems of

adult learners typically get little attention from policymakers, said NCEE's Tucker. For example, he noted, Kentucky spends more than \$5,000 on each schoolchild, but only \$37.50 on each young adult without a high school diploma.

“At a time when the workforce is calling for higher skills, we’re going to be adding literally tens of millions of people to the bottom end of the distribution. And that’s going to create, I think, a significant problem for us.” — Irwin Kirsch

The federal government and the nonprofit world are starting to pay attention, however. In July 2009, President Obama announced the American Graduation Initiative, which sets a lofty goal — that by 2020, the United States will once again have the world's highest proportion of college graduates — and allocates \$12 billion to help community colleges expand and improve their offerings. The Gates and Lumina foundations have launched their own well-funded efforts to increase the ranks of the highly educated. And, already, many adults seem to have realized that more education is crucial to their economic well-being. Last year, nearly 40 percent of the adults attending remedial education programs were unemployed when they enrolled, and another third were employed but hoped to improve their job status, said conference speaker **Brenda Dann-Messier**, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Vocational and Adult Education in the U.S. Department of Education.

Community college enrollments have grown 17 percent during the recession of the past two years, said conference speaker **George Boggs**, President of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). At the 13 colleges participating in AACC's Plus 50 Initiative, enrollment of the older students whom the program targets nearly quadrupled between

2007 – 2008 and 2008 – 2009, said conference speaker **Mary Sue Vickers**, the initiative's director.

However, many of today's workers have a long way to go before they will be ready for the education and jobs the new economy requires, conference speakers said. A series of national and international assessments of adult literacy, conducted over the past 17 years, has shown that “the United States does no better than average in any of these assessments, in any content area,” said ETS's Kirsch. While the top Americans do as well as the top performers in other countries, the gap between best and worst is larger in the United States than elsewhere, Kirsch noted. A 1993 survey found that 70 million American adults fell into the two lowest levels of literacy, and, if current relationships between demographics and literacy levels stay the same, that number could rise to 119 million in 2030, Kirsch said. “At a time when the workforce is calling for higher skills, we’re going to be adding literally tens of millions of people to the bottom end of the distribution,” he said. “And that’s going to create, I think, a significant problem for us.”

Among the people who are leading candidates for GED equivalency degrees — the 15 million U.S. residents under age 45 who lack high school diplomas — some 80 percent are believed to function at an academic level below eighth grade, and less than 2 percent are nearly college-ready, said conference speaker **Shirley Robinson Pippins**, Senior Vice President for Programs and Services at the American Council on Education (ACE), which administers the GED test. Even high school graduates often lag far behind without realizing it, added NCEE's Tucker: they believe their diplomas qualify them to attend college, but their literacy levels leave

them unprepared for the coursework they will be required to do. When such underprepared students enroll in college, the result is usually failure: they are shunted into noncredit remedial courses and, even if they pass those courses, they seldom go on to earn degrees. “They wind up with frustration and a lot of debt,” Tucker said, “and that’s the end of the story for them.”

Remaking the System for a New World

Rewriting that discouraging story will require major changes at every level of the adult education system, conference speakers said — in state and federal funding systems, in the colleges that provide postsecondary education and training, in the GED program that gives high school dropouts a path to an equivalency degree, and in remedial programs designed for adults who lack basic skills. At every level, institutions need to embrace a new flexibility, as they remake a system designed for a very different world — a world in which most college students were young people without jobs or family responsibilities, not adult workers with rent to pay and children to raise. And these restructured institutions will have to be integrated into a seamless system that guides adult learners from basic education, through high school and college, and into the work world. “If you have a job and a family and you’re in your mid-30s or early 40s, it’s more difficult to think about the long-term benefits of taking a liberal arts education,” said conference speaker **Thomas Bailey**, Director of the Community College Research Center at Columbia University’s Teachers College. “You need to be more focused on the employment aspects.”

At both the state and federal levels, funding structures often seem stuck in the world of

the traditional student, conference speakers said. Most states do not provide financial aid to students taking noncredit courses, even though such courses can give adult learners entry points into higher education. Often, states base higher-education funding allocations on full-time enrollment, which can penalize schools that educate people who attend part-time, as many adults do. States often deny tuition aid to part-time students, and federal tuition programs also support part-timers less generously than full-timers, speakers said. And the availability of some aid — including Pell Grants for part-timers — is not always widely known. “I think many more people would decide to go back to school if they realized their tuition could be covered,” said conference speaker **Jane Oates**, Assistant Secretary for Employment and Training in the U.S. Department of Labor.

“If you have a job and a family and you’re in your mid-30s or early 40s, it’s more difficult to think about the long-term benefits of taking a liberal arts education. You need to be more focused on the employment aspects.” — Thomas Bailey

Colleges themselves also need to change, speakers said, adopting newly flexible administrative procedures suited to students who do not match the traditional picture of an 18-year-old, full-time undergraduate. A modified registration process can make college friendlier to older students (“Finding a high school transcript after 50 is a trip,” said the AACC’s Vickers). And burdensome transfer policies — in the Los Angeles area, the 14 local community colleges will not accept each other’s credits — can be eliminated if institutions agree to cooperate, said **Maria Flynn**, Vice President of the nonprofit organization Jobs for the Future.

To accommodate adults with work and family commitments, colleges also need more flexible scheduling, offering classes online, in the evenings, on weekends or in workplaces, speakers said. “The challenge is to make sure that we can deliver those programs essentially anytime, anywhere, so that [students] can do them on their schedules,” said conference speaker **Bill Pepicello**, President of the University of Phoenix, which offers courses both online and on campuses in 41 states. In Seattle, “Airport University” — offered at the airport, for airport workers — provides community-college classes in English, computing and leadership, to help low-wage workers move into higher-wage airport jobs, said Chancellor Wakefield, of the Seattle Community Colleges. In New Jersey, Thomas Edison State College developed a talking web browser, which allows visually impaired students to participate in its online programs, and special hardware that simulates computer connections even for students without access to electricity, like the many currently serving overseas in the military. “I have students right now sitting up in caves in Afghanistan studying their accounting,” said conference speaker **George Pruitt**, Thomas Edison’s President. “Their persistence rate is remarkable, because they have absolutely no distractions.”

“The career-counseling needs of a plus-50 student with a lifetime of experiences are very different from those of the 20-year-old or the 30-year-old student.”

— *Mary Sue Vickers*

However, for many adult students, the distractions can be manifold. Therefore, such nontraditional students also need nontraditional support services, conference speakers said. Sometimes that’s because these students’ lives are precariously balanced: “They’re one

broken-down car, one crisis, away from really dropping off track,” said Flynn, of Jobs for the Future. Sometimes it’s because they are simply at a different point in their lives: “The career-counseling needs of a plus-50 student with a lifetime of experiences are very different from those of the 20-year-old or the 30-year-old student,” said the AACC’s Vickers. And sometimes adult learners need different supports because, unlike traditional students from middle-class backgrounds, they do not understand how to navigate higher education. “Many students come to us who are perfectly capable of being successful, and they get lost in the system,” said the University of Phoenix’s Pepicello. “These are skills that we don’t teach people.” To solve this problem, he said, the University of Phoenix has created a free, three-week, online orientation course that helps students decide whether higher education is right for them, and lets them opt out without incurring any debt.

New Instruction for New Kinds of Students

Even more fundamental than the organizational changes colleges must make to better serve adult learners are the new instructional approaches they must adopt, conference speakers said. Colleges need new ways of thinking about adult students who may lack basic skills, but have years of valuable work experience. CAEL promotes a process called Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), which enables colleges to award credits for skills acquired off campus, including in the workplace. Academic programs should be accelerated so that students need not wait years before earning credentials that can help them improve their work lives. In Tennessee, higher education official Rhoda

noted, a study group recently recommended using PLA, among other approaches, to compress courses into fewer than 16 weeks.

“The problem we face is figuring out how to help adults learn, rather than figuring out what to teach them.” — *Barry Sheckley*

Another way to accelerate academic programs is to integrate basic skills instruction into college classes, rather than requiring students to complete remediation before moving on to more advanced coursework. The University of Phoenix calls that approach “just-in-time skills,” Pepicello said — letting students acquire the skills they need when they need them, rather than insisting that they possess those skills from the beginning. Similarly, the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program, developed by community and technical colleges in Washington State, weaves basic skills instruction into courses in everything from child care to welding, adding an English as a Second Language teacher to a nursing-assistant program, for example, said Wakefield, the Seattle community colleges’ chancellor. Such initiatives have already shown promise: I-BEST participants scored better on basic skills tests and were far more likely to earn college credits than students taking the traditional remediation-first path, added Bailey of Teachers College, whose research center evaluated the program. And health care employers participating in the Jobs to Careers program run by Jobs for the Future, in which low-paid workers build skills and earn college credits for on-the-job experience, already have seen a financial payoff, Flynn said: better-educated workers are filling patients’ charts out more completely and earning higher insurance reimbursements as a result.

Such experiential approaches to instruction build on what conference speaker **Barry Sheckley** described as current knowledge about how the human brain works. “The problem we face is figuring out how to help adults learn, rather than figuring out what to teach them,” said Sheckley, who heads the Department of Educational Leadership in the University of Connecticut’s School of Education. While 30 percent of our complex understanding is “explicit knowledge” (what we are directly taught), 70 percent is “tacit knowledge” — the subconscious, intuitive ability to recognize patterns tangled in experience, Sheckley said. Such tacit knowledge — what we think of as our “feel” for a situation — develops when we first grasp new information and then transform it by applying it to new circumstances, he said. When he took over his university’s Ph.D. program, Sheckley noted, he eliminated half of its content-based courses and replaced them with practicums that took education students into schools, where they could begin transforming their explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge. “*What* we teach them doesn’t matter,” Sheckley said. “It’s *how* we teach them.”

Remaking the GED

Just as colleges must change to better serve adult learners by offering greater flexibility, cutting red tape and taking new approaches to teaching and learning, other institutions serving adult learners need to change in comparable ways, conference speakers said. Among those institutions is the GED program, which also needs to accelerate and improve instruction, increase access and provide newly flexible delivery systems, said ACE’s Pippins.

Although millions of adults lack high school diplomas, only 778,000 take the GED test each year, and fewer than 500,000 earn the credential, Pippins said. ACE's GED 20/20 Initiative aims to increase those numbers by improving both the test itself — currently available only in a pencil-and-paper format — and the instructional and evaluation components of the programs that prepare students to take it. Ultimately, the initiative would transform the GED from a substitute for a missing high school diploma into a gauge of college and career readiness, pegged to the Common Core academic standards — the still-developing national blueprint for the skills and knowledge students are expected to acquire from kindergarten through high school.

GED curricula and instruction would be customized to individual students' needs, and pilot programs would explore ways to speed up an educational process that can seem arduous to people who left school long ago. "If you're 40 years old and you're performing at the sixth-grade level," Pippins explained, "you don't want to take six years to get your GED." The task is urgent, she said, because 36 million Americans lack a high school diploma, and every year another 1.3 million students drop out. "We can't accomplish our goals — we can't get there from here — unless we do something about that pipeline and provide more support for individuals who don't have high school credentials," Pippins said.

Like higher education and the GED, remedial adult education — known as Adult Basic Education, or ABE — also needs to change to better serve the nation's new imperatives, conference speakers said. Currently, 82 percent of ABE teachers work part-time, and only 29 states require them to hold bachelor's degrees,

said Dann-Messier, of the U.S. Department of Education. But as Congress considers reauthorization of the 12-year-old Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the federal law that funds job training and adult education, the Obama administration is pushing to upgrade and professionalize the adult-education workforce, in part by allying with colleges to train ABE teachers and offer them professional development. Increasingly, the field demands top-notch, innovative instruction, Dann-Messier said. For example, she added, with Latinos now the largest single ethnic group enrolled in ABE, teachers need to know how to reach a wide range of English-language learners — from immigrants illiterate in even their native languages to professionals holding doctorates.

Creating a Seamless Whole

As educational institutions and government bureaucracies adapt to the realities of the new economy, a key element in that process is the building of stronger bridges to the world of work, conference speakers said. In both its budget proposals and its work on the WIA reauthorization, the Obama administration is trying to break down walls between the federal departments of Labor and Education, speakers said, in hopes of integrating elements of K – 12 education, adult education and workforce development into a seamless whole.

That newly integrated approach would supersede an existing system that conference speakers described as often fragmented, bureaucratic and counterproductive. Whether adult learners enter the federal workforce-development system as ABE students, welfare recipients, newly unemployed workers, released prisoners

or returning military veterans, “the common denominator is they need two things: they need academic skills, and they need occupational skills,” said Oates, the assistant labor secretary. “What we offer them is a process that’s too long, too cumbersome and too far removed from a job. We are right now incapable of offering any of those populations coordinated services in a systemic way.”

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— *Jane Oates*

The reasons are manifold, Oates said. Rigid regulations make local officials fearful of risking innovation, lest they face a federal audit, and high-level federal interest in productive experimentation is not always communicated to the grassroots. Under current law, too, the operators of the Labor Department’s “one-stop” service centers for the unemployed must show results within a year, an unrealistically short deadline. Many of the people the one-stops serve “are not going to get where they want to be in a one-year time frame,” Oates said. “We need to create a system that recognizes initial gain and allows somebody to be case-managed until they finally get to their aspirational level.” The failings of the current system carry significant human and economic costs, Oates noted: frustrated participants too often give up and walk away, accepting work that is below their potential and pays too little to support them.

To encourage better integration between adult education and the broader education system, the administration is launching a \$30 million innovation fund, said Dann-Messier. Competitive grants will support efforts to get state and local

entities working together, sharing information about how best to improve outcomes for adult students. As part of the WIA reauthorization, she said, the U.S. Department of Education also is promoting efforts to integrate ABE data into existing state education databases and to link ABE programs to programs that prepare immigrants for the U.S. citizenship test.

Equally crucial, Dann-Messier added, are efforts to link ABE more closely to the worlds of higher education and work, by aligning ABE program standards in reading and math with established standards. ABE’s goal must be more than “what’s just needed to minimally pass the GED,” she said — programs should prepare students for postsecondary education and for work. Indeed, research conducted by Bailey’s center at Teachers College found that only one-third of ABE students in Washington State ever earned a college credit, and only 5 percent persisted long enough to earn a work-related credential that could bring them higher wages. Students’ educational journeys were marked by “momentum points,” Bailey said, key milestones they had to pass to achieve measurable gains in the work world. The challenge, he said, is to find ways of getting ABE students past these momentum points — perhaps by rewarding colleges financially for the number of students who successfully complete a degree program, not just for the number who enroll.

Just as ABE needs stronger ties to higher education and the work world, colleges also need to build bridges to the labor market, speakers said. Career counselors need to know much more about the kinds of jobs their students can expect: “Colleges have to become experts on the world of work and emerging industries,” said CAEL’s Tate. Too often, warned conference

participant **Arthur Rothkopf**, Senior Vice President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and ETS Board of Trustees member, “much of the training that goes on is not necessarily for jobs that exist.”

“Colleges have to become experts on the world of work and emerging industries.”

— *Pamela Tate*

Employers, too, need to rethink the ways they support employees seeking further education, speakers said. The traditional approach, reimbursing workers for tuition, is no help to people who can’t afford the initial outlay. A better approach, said CAEL’s Tate, is the Lifelong Learning Account (LiLA), modeled on the 401(k) retirement account, which allows employees to save up for education and training, sometimes with matching funds from an employer. In its budget, the Obama administration has proposed money for so-called “learn and earn” programs, such as apprenticeships and co-ops, which allow adults to earn salaries while simultaneously pursuing postsecondary training. However, such programs are not always an easy sell to employers, said Georgetown’s Carnevale: “They want to buy their people — they don’t want to train people,” he said. Ultimately, Carnevale suggested, the nation should develop online exchanges that clearly connect job skills to educational requirements, so that “when you find the job, you find where you go to get the skills you need to get the job.”

To the NCEE’s Tucker, this disconnect between the world of education and the world of work — students don’t know whether their educations are preparing them for the jobs they want; employers don’t know whether applicants’ coursework qualifies them for the jobs at hand —

cries out for a radically new way of bridging the divide. In the United States, the key educational credential, the high school diploma, certifies how much time a student has spent in school, Tucker said, not necessarily what he or she has learned. Because the skills high school graduates possess vary widely, employers don’t know what the diploma means. And once they reach their early 20s, dropouts can’t go back and earn the diploma they missed. Other countries do it differently, Tucker said. Their key educational credentials certify that students have met well-established performance standards, and people of any age can study for and attain those qualifications. “Everybody knows what the standards are,” Tucker said. “And because they all know it, employers honor it.”

“These [educational] attainment goals are clear social justice goals, not just at a national level, but also on a personal level.” — *Shirley Pippins*

NCEE is researching the literacy prerequisites for the most popular community college programs, in hopes of codifying those requirements in exams that could become an American version of such a qualification, Tucker said: a universal credential certifying readiness for community college. Eventually, he said, the system also should include a lower-level credential certifying possession of the basic skills supposedly gained in primary school. Young people and adult learners alike could study for these qualifications, whenever and wherever they preferred, Tucker added. “You would have enormous variety with respect to how the service is provided, but the standard to which people aspire would be constant, and people would know what standard they’d have to meet in order to realize their dreams,” Tucker said. “There would be no mystery about that.”

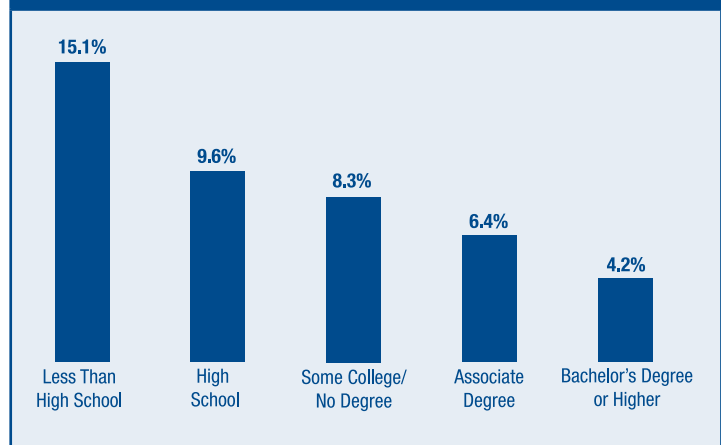
Time to Move

Years ago, as a community college president, ACE's Pippins recalled, she witnessed fierce competition for admission to nursing programs. "People would fight to get into a nursing program, because they knew when they got out, their life was changed forever," she said. "They were going to be middle class the day they got out." In the years since, economic change has forged even tighter links between educational attainment and middle-class prosperity; the days when even the poorly educated could hope to get good jobs — and the good lives those jobs bring — are gone forever (see Figures 2 and 3). Thus, the educational-attainment goals in the president's American Graduation Initiative go to the heart of the country's hopes for the future, conference speakers said. "These attainment goals are clear social justice goals, not just at a national level, but also on a personal level," Pippins said. And with federal support and foundation funding, the moment for achieving those goals is at hand. "We've got the strategies; we know what works," added Tate, of CAEL. "In spite of the economy, the time is right for moving these changes at a public policy level."

The importance of the task cannot be overstated, speakers emphasized: the viability of American democracy may stand or fall on how well institutions of government, business and higher education adapt to an economy that demands that more adults become

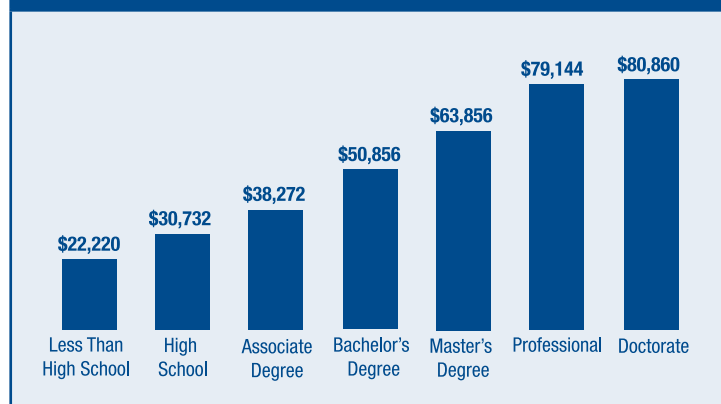
better educated. "It is more and more the case that, in this society, if you can't get a job, you can't really participate in the civic life of the nation or in the culture," said Georgetown's Carnevale. "In the final analysis, Americans will judge the effectiveness of their education system, as well as their government, to the extent it provides them with a job."

FIGURE 2: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY EDUCATION (AGE 25 AND OLDER), 2009.



Source: American Council on Education.

FIGURE 3: MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS BY EDUCATION (AGE 25 AND OLDER), 2008.



Source: American Council on Education.

THIS ISSUE *(continued from page 1)*

Bridging the divide between the skills today's workers possess and the skills the global economy requires was the subject of "Advancing Learning for Our Diverse Adult Population," the 13th in ETS's series of "Addressing Achievement Gaps" symposia, launched in 2003. The conference, co-convened by the American Association of Community Colleges and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, was held March 3 in Washington, D.C., and featured presentations by 16 academics, policy advocates and government officials.

Marc Tucker, President of the National Center on Education and the Economy, delivered the luncheon address, and sessions were moderated by **Maria Flynn**, Vice President of Jobs for the Future; ETS Senior Research Scientist **Catherine Millett**; ETS Senior Vice President **Michael Nettles**; ETS Board of Trustees Chair **Piedad Robertson**; and **Arthur Rothkopf**,

Senior Vice President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and ETS Board of Trustees member.

The conference included sessions on the following topics:

- Examining the demographics, education, skills and workforce readiness of adults
- Accounting for alternative types of adult education and training
- Promoting innovations in private sector and government policies
- Recognizing multiple needs, levels and markets for adult education

More information about the conference, including PowerPoint presentations, is available from www.ets.org/research/aag.

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e-mail: pic@ets.org

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Director: Richard J. Coley

This article was written by Deborah Yaffe and edited by Richard J. Coley and Eileen Kerrigan.

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