

GAO

Report to the Ranking Member,  
Subcommittee on Children and  
Families, Committee on Health,  
Education, Labor, and Pensions,  
U.S. Senate

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July 2009

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

## Diverse Federal and State Efforts to Support Adult English Language Learning Could Benefit from More Coordination



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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-09-575](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Children and Families, Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

Millions of adults in the U.S. report that they speak limited English, and English language ability appears linked to multiple dimensions of adult life, such as civic participation and workforce participation and mobility. GAO examined (1) the trends in the need for and enrollment in federally funded adult English language programs, (2) the nature of federal support for adult English language learning, (3) ways in which states and local public providers have supported English language programs for adults, and (4) federal agencies' plans for research to identify effective approaches to adult English language learning. To conduct this work, GAO analyzed Census and enrollment data and conducted interviews with federal officials within the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Labor and the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL); semistructured telephone interviews with state adult education officials in 12 states; site visits to 4 states; and reviews of relevant laws and literature.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that Education work with HHS, Labor, and other agencies as appropriate to develop coordinated approaches for sharing information and planning and conducting research. The agencies concurred with the recommendations and cited intentions to work together toward their implementation.

View [GAO-09-575](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Cornelia M. Ashby at (202) 512-7215 or [ashbyc@gao.gov](mailto:ashbyc@gao.gov).

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

### Diverse Federal and State Efforts to Support Adult English Language Learning Could Benefit from More Coordination

#### What GAO Found

The number of adults who speak English less than very well grew by 21.8 percent between 2000 and 2007, to roughly 22 million. The Adult Education State Grant Program, the key federal program for adult English language instruction, reported enrollment of about 1.1 million English language learners in 2007—which had remained relatively stable since 2000. However, most state adult education grantees we contacted reported increased demand. Also, there are many federal programs that allow for adult English language instruction for which national enrollment data are not collected.

Federal support is dispersed across diverse programs in Education, HHS, and Labor that allow for English language learning in pursuit of other goals and do not collect data on participation in English language learning or the amount of federal funding that supports it. The agencies have undertaken initiatives and provided technical assistance. However, while there has been some collaboration among federal offices on behalf of English language learning, there is no ongoing mechanism to share information on resources or strategies to expand and capitalize on the agencies' individual efforts.

States GAO contacted generally did not distinguish funding for English language learning from the other components of adult education, but they did vary greatly in the state matching funds contributed to their programs. GAO found states and local providers collaborating with other federal- and state-funded programs that serve populations likely to need this help. Yet such efforts to coordinate were not universal, and some local providers said they did not know how to access additional instructional or financial resources. States and local providers also supported English language learning in various ways.

Education had one research study under way to test the effectiveness of an approach to adult English language learning, and Education and Labor had some ongoing work related to adult English language learners. Education officials said that there had been little research on what approaches are effective for adult English language learning, and noted that federal funds for rigorous research are limited. However, while agencies cited efforts to collaborate, they had not coordinated research planning across agencies to leverage research resources for adult English language learning.

#### Providers of Adult English Language Instruction



Sources: Pui Tak Center, Chicago, Illinois (left); Hubbs Center, St. Paul, Minnesota (right).

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## Abbreviations

ACS	American Community Survey
AEFLA	Adult Education and Family Literacy Act
CBO	community-based organization
ESL	English as a Second Language
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
I-BEST	Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Initiative
IES	Institute of Education Sciences
NAAL	National Assessment of Adult Literacy
NCSALL	National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NHES	National Household Education Surveys Program
NIFL	National Institute for Literacy
NRS	Adult Education National Reporting System
OVAE	Office of Vocational and Adult Education
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
TELL	Transitioning English Language Learners
WIA	Workforce Investment Act of 1998

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United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

July 29, 2009

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Children and Families  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor,  
and Pensions  
United States Senate

Dear Senator Alexander:

Millions of adults in the United States report that they speak English less than very well—that is, they are limited in their English proficiency. English language ability appears to be linked to multiple dimensions of adult life in the United States, including civic participation; workforce participation and mobility; and fulfilling parental responsibilities, such as reading to children and communicating with their schools and teachers. Consistent with these relationships, the top reasons that adults have cited for seeking English language classes include improving the way they feel about themselves, making it easier to do things on a day-to-day basis, attending school, getting a raise or promotion, obtaining a new job, obtaining U.S. citizenship, and helping children with their schoolwork.<sup>1</sup> Regarding workforce participation, the Department of Labor's (Labor) Bureau of Labor Statistics analyses show that foreign-born persons—who are much more likely than native-born persons to lack English proficiency—accounted for about 16 percent of the U.S. civilian labor force in 2007.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as baby boomers retire and U.S. birth rates have declined, foreign-born persons are expected to account for a still larger share of the future workforce, suggesting that the need for adult English instruction is not likely to abate.

To better understand the nature of support for adult English language learning, we examined (1) trends in the need for and enrollment in federally funded adult English language programs, (2) the nature of federal support for adult English language learning, (3) ways in which states and

<sup>1</sup>K. O'Donnell, Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Adult Education Participation in 2004-2005*, (NCES 2006-0777) (Washington, D.C.: May 2006).

<sup>2</sup>Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Foreign-Born Workers: Labor Force Characteristics in 2007* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 26, 2008).

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local public providers have supported English language programs for adults, and (4) federal agencies' plans for research to identify effective approaches to adult English language learning.

To obtain information to address our research objectives, we reviewed available data; identified relevant programs and research; and interviewed a range of federal, state, and local officials. (See app. I for detailed information on our scope and methodology.) Briefly, to determine what is known about trends in need and enrollment, we reviewed and analyzed Census and American Community Survey (ACS)<sup>3</sup> data on English language speaking ability for 2000 to 2007, and reviewed reports of the Department of Education's (Education) National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) and National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES). We also reviewed data on enrollment in the Adult Education State Grant Program—a federal program that funds adult education, including English language instruction—which states report to the Adult Education National Reporting System (NRS). We assessed the reliability of these data and determined that both the Census and NRS data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our report. To examine the nature of federal support for adult English language learning,<sup>4</sup> we examined programs' authorizations to support adult English language learning, actions that federal agencies and programs had taken to support adult English language learning, as well as the available data on spending and effectiveness regarding adult English language learning.<sup>5</sup> We selected three key federal agencies—Education, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and Labor—for review of related programs. We selected these agencies on the basis of their missions to administer education- and workforce-related programs. We also selected these agencies because of

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<sup>3</sup>The ACS is an ongoing mail survey that samples Americans to provide annual data on geographic areas with more than 65,000 people. From 2000 to 2004, the ACS was initially piloted in 1,239 preselected U.S. counties. The ACS was fully implemented in 2005 and draws samples in all U.S. counties.

<sup>4</sup>Generally, federal programs and literature use multiple terms, such as English literacy, English as a Second language, and English language training, when referring to instruction to improve English language proficiency. We use “English language learning” and “English language instruction” interchangeably throughout this report to refer generally to services that improve English language proficiency.

<sup>5</sup>We generally did not examine the relationship between federal support for adult English language learning and efforts to enforce federal immigration laws. Cataloging the requirements or practices of the various programs that we discuss regarding requirements concerning a participant's immigration status was outside the scope of our study.

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their mandate to collaborate with the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), which is tasked with serving as a resource to support literacy—the development of reading and writing skills—across all age groups. While we used several means to identify programs within these agencies that supported English language learning as a primary purpose or allowable use of federal funds, the possibility exists that the programs we identified may not capture all of the programs authorized to support adult English language learning within the three agencies. To examine state and local activities, we selected the 6 states that had the largest adult limited English proficient populations in the nation in 2007 (California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas) and the 6 states that had the highest growth rates in their adult limited English proficient populations from 2000 to 2007 (Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Nevada, and Tennessee). We conducted semistructured telephone interviews with officials responsible for administering the Adult Education State Grant Programs in each of these states. The 12 states accounted for 75 percent of the national adult limited English proficient population and 75 percent of the Adult Education State Grant Program’s national enrollment in English language programs for 2007. We also conducted site visits to California, Illinois, Minnesota, and Washington State to interview officials of related state agencies and local programs. We selected these states for visits to get a mix of states with large (California and Illinois) and high-growth (Minnesota and Washington) limited English proficient populations, as well as diversity in administrative structures and practices under way regarding adult English language learning. To determine what federal research is planned in this area, we interviewed federal officials from Education, HHS, and Labor for the programs included in this review, as well as officials from NIFL and Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), and reviewed related documents. We also identified and reviewed other published research in the field of English language learning. In addition, we consulted with researchers, academics, industry associations, union representatives, and nonprofit organizations.

We conducted our review from May 2008 through July 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

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### Characteristics of Adults with Limited English Proficiency

The adult limited English proficient population in the United States is diverse regarding immigration status, country of origin, educational background, literacy in native language, age, and family status. Generally, adults with limited English proficiency have immigrated to the United States and include legal permanent residents, naturalized citizens, refugees, and undocumented individuals, but some of these adults are native born. The largest numbers of foreign-born persons living in the United States are from Mexico, China, and the Philippines. According to ACS data from the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2007, about two-thirds of the adults who reported limited English speaking ability were Spanish speaking. In terms of educational attainment, in 2007, 27 percent of foreign-born adults had at least a bachelor's degree, similar to the native-born population. However, native-born persons are significantly more likely than foreign-born persons in the United States to have graduated from high school (88 percent versus 68 percent).<sup>6</sup>

Limited English proficiency, by itself, is not necessarily an indicator of demand for instructional services. For various reasons, at any given time, some adults with limited English proficiency are not actively seeking English language instruction. One source of information, the 1995 NHES, estimated that about one-half (44 percent) of the adults who read English less than well were either participating in English language classes or interested in doing so, while the remainder were not.<sup>7</sup> The survey did not inquire about why some adults were not interested, but potential reasons for not actively seeking instruction include the belief that participation is impractical in the midst of competing work or family responsibilities, lack of need for additional English to perform daily activities, or lack of success in past efforts. In addition, persons who are interested in English language classes may not participate because they face barriers. In the 1995 NHES, 30.5 percent of adults with limited English proficiency had not taken an English language class in the last 12 months, even though they

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<sup>6</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Report, *Educational Attainment in the United States: 2007*, P20-560 (January 2009).

<sup>7</sup>The survey asked respondents who speak a language other than English at home how well they read English and about their interest in taking classes in English language instruction. The 1995 NHES was the last year that the survey asked respondents about their interest in taking classes in English.

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expressed interest in doing so.<sup>8</sup> These adult respondents reported they did not take classes because they were unaware of offerings, did not have enough time or money, or were limited by child care or transportation barriers.

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## Research on Adult English Language Learning

There is broad consensus among academics that very limited scientifically based research has been conducted to identify effective approaches to adult English language instruction.<sup>9</sup> Much research in the field has focused on the challenges faced by adult English language learners and the factors that affect the learners' ability to master English. Such factors may include educational attainment and literacy in the learners' native language. Additional factors that may pose challenges include economic issues, such as the competing priorities of work and family and a lack of transportation and child care; cultural background; age; and motivational challenges. Because there appear to be differences between language learning in the early years and language learning that occurs in adulthood, the needs of adult learners and effective approaches may not be similar to those for students in grades K-12 education.

While existing research is limited, some entities have played a role in providing or developing research-based information to providers and instructors. In the past, IES funded dissemination of research on adult literacy through the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). However, funding for NCSALL ended in 2007. Education supports dissemination of research through a contract with the Center for Adult English Language Acquisition, which has disseminated research-based resources for more effective adult English language instruction through its Web site. NIFL, a federal agency, serves as a national resource on literacy across all age groups. NIFL was established in 1991 and was reauthorized by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA),<sup>10</sup> and its role was expanded by the No Child Left Behind Act of

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<sup>8</sup>Kwang Kim and Mary Collins, Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Participation of Adults in English as a Second Language Classes:1994-95* (Washington, D.C.: May 1997).

<sup>9</sup>This statement is based on background interviews that we conducted with researchers, academics, and other knowledgeable individuals in the field as well as various background literature we reviewed. For example, see Julie Mathews-Aydinli, "Overlooked and Understudied? A survey of current trends in research on Adult English Language Learners," *Adult Education Quarterly*, 58, no. 3 (2008), 198-213.

<sup>10</sup>Pub. L. No. 105-220, § 242, 112 Stat. 936, 1073-74 (codified at 20 U.S.C. § 9252).

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2001<sup>11</sup> to help children, youth, and adults learn to read by supporting and disseminating scientifically based reading research.<sup>12</sup>

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## Adult Education State Grant Program

The Adult Education State Grant Program funds English language instruction as well as adult basic education and adult secondary education,<sup>13</sup> and was established under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), as title II of WIA.<sup>14</sup> Eligible participants are those ages 16 and over who are not currently enrolled or required by state law to be enrolled in secondary school and who lack the basic skills needed to function effectively in their daily lives, a high school credential, or English language skills. In fiscal year 2007, the total federal allocation for the Adult Education State Grant Program, for all components of instruction, was about \$564 million. Congress reserves a portion of the state grant funding—\$68 million in 2007<sup>15</sup>—for EL Civics, which supports integrated English literacy and civics education services to immigrants and other limited English populations. In addition, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provided \$53.6 billion in appropriations for the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund to be administered by Education.<sup>16</sup> School districts may use a portion of the stabilization funds for any allowable

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<sup>11</sup>Pub. L. No. 107-110, sec. 101, § 1207, 115 Stat. 1425, 1549 (codified at 20 U.S.C. § 6367).

<sup>12</sup>NIFL is administered under an interagency agreement entered into by the Secretary of Education with the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, which are referred to as the Interagency Group. 20 U.S.C. § 9252(b)(1). In addition, a NIFL Advisory Board, appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate, makes recommendations concerning staff appointments and provides independent advice on operations. 20 U.S.C. § 9252(e). The Interagency Group is required to consider the Advisory Board's recommendations in setting goals and implementing programs to achieve the goals. 20 U.S.C. § 9252(b)(3).

<sup>13</sup>The three main types of instruction offered through the Adult Education State Grant Program are defined by Education as the following: *adult basic education*—instruction in basic skills designed for adults functioning at the lower literacy levels to just below the secondary level; *adult secondary education*—instruction for adults whose literacy skills are at approximately the high school level and who are seeking to pass the General Education Development examination or obtain an adult high school diploma; and *English literacy*—instruction for adults who lack proficiency in English who are seeking to improve their literacy and competence in English.

<sup>14</sup>Pub. L. No. 105-220, tit. II, 112 Stat. 936, 1059-80.

<sup>15</sup>Revised Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2007, Pub. L. No. 110-5, § 101, 121 Stat. 8, 8-9; Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-149, tit. III, 119 Stat. 2833, 2867 (2005).

<sup>16</sup>Pub. L. No. 111-5, 123 Stat. 115, 279.

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purpose under AEFLA as well as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,<sup>17</sup> the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act,<sup>18</sup> or the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (Perkins IV).<sup>19</sup>

Under the Adult Education State Grant Program, states fund English language instruction through various types of providers that offer instruction for free or for a nominal fee. The Adult Education State Grant Program is administered by Education's Division of Adult Education and Literacy within the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). Program funds are distributed by formula to states using Census Bureau data on the number of adults (ages 16 and older) in each state who lack a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent and who are not enrolled or required by state law to be enrolled in school. Twenty-five percent of the expenditures for adult education in each state must come from state or local matching funds.<sup>20</sup> States award a minimum of 82.5 percent of their federal grants to local providers of adult education, and may retain up to 12.5 percent for state leadership activities to be used for program improvement and 5.0 percent for administrative expenses. Education is also tasked with carrying out national leadership activities to enhance the quality of adult education and literacy programs nationwide.<sup>21</sup> Such activities may include providing technical assistance to adult education providers, carrying out demonstration programs, and supporting research.

The states report outcomes for adult English language learners participating in the Adult Education State Grant Program to Education's

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<sup>17</sup>20 U.S.C. §§ 6301-7941.

<sup>18</sup>20 U.S.C. §§ 1400-1482.

<sup>19</sup>Pub. L. No. 109-270, 120 Stat. 683-749. The Vocational Education Act of 1963 (Pub. L. No. 88-210, 77 Stat. 403-19) was named after Carl D. Perkins under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, which is frequently referred to as Perkins I. Pub. L. No. 98-524, 98 Stat. 2435-91 (1984). Intervening reauthorizations are also referred to by number: Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act Amendments of 1990 (Perkins II) and Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Amendments of 1998 (Perkins III). Pub. L. No. 101-392, 104 Stat. 753-843, and Pub. L. No. 105-332, 112 Stat. 3076-3128, respectively.

<sup>20</sup>20 U.S.C. § 9222(b)(1)(B).

<sup>21</sup>20 U.S.C. § 9253.

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NRS using a six-level system<sup>22</sup> that describes mastery of different aspects of English language skills. The percentage of learners who achieved level gains in 2007 was 38.9 percent. In comparison, 31.8 percent of learners did not achieve a level gain during the enrollment year, but remained in the program, and 29.4 percent separated from the program in 2007 before achieving an educational-level gain.<sup>23</sup>

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## Sources of Adult English Language Instruction and Paths to English Language Acquisition

Providers of adult English language learning have varied characteristics and instructional formats and may be supported by many different funding sources. Instruction varies in format, intensity, setting, and focus—such as civics, family, or work-focused topics. Classes may have open or closed enrollment, have varied frequency and hours, and take place in large classroom settings, in small groups, or one-on-one with volunteers. Providers receiving federal funds through the Adult Education State Grant Program include local education agencies (school districts), community colleges, community-based organizations (CBO), and correctional institutions. According to a 2002 survey funded by Education,<sup>24</sup> of providers receiving Adult Education State Grant Program funds, English language learners were a larger percentage of all adult education learners who attended classes sponsored by CBOs than by other provider types—over one-half of adult education learners in CBOs received English language instruction. According to the survey, providers reported receiving funding from a wide range of sources. One-third of providers reported receiving the majority of their funding from the federal government and almost one-half received the majority of funding from state government. Providers reported smaller proportions of funding from local government, private sources, and participant fees. CBOs reported receiving more financial support from a combination of foundation grants and corporate, civic, and individual giving than did other providers. Aside from publicly funded providers, English language learning is also privately

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<sup>22</sup>Beginning in 2006, learners were reported in one of the following six levels: Beginning Literacy, Low Beginning, High Beginning, Low Intermediate, High Intermediate, and Advanced. These new levels reflect slight modifications of the levels previously used by Education. The new levels were created by eliminating the High Advanced level and dividing a larger beginning level into two sublevels: Low Beginning and High Beginning. All other levels stayed the same. 73 Fed. Reg. 2306-24 (Jan. 14, 2008).

<sup>23</sup>NRS data include learners with 12 hours or more of instruction.

<sup>24</sup>I. Kirsch, M. Lennon, C. Tamassia, and K. Yamamoto, *Adult Education in America: A First Look at Results from the Adult Education Program and Learner Surveys* (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2007).

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supported by small faith-based organizations, such as churches, and by privately funded CBOs. English language learners may also access English language instruction from for-profit providers of self-paced materials and software and from some private industry associations or businesses that provide English language learning opportunities to their workers without federal support.

According to data from the 2003 NAAL,<sup>25</sup> among adults who learned English at age 16 or older (regardless of source of instruction), a higher proportion of those who reported past or current enrollment in English language programs scored at least basic levels of literacy compared with those who had never been enrolled.<sup>26</sup> Among adult English language learners who had never been enrolled in English language programs, 61 percent scored below basic prose literacy and 36 percent scored basic prose literacy.<sup>27</sup>

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## Growing Numbers of Adults with Limited English; Extent of Participation in English Instruction Is Unknown

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### Data Indicate a Growing Population of Adults Who Speak Limited English

Census Bureau data indicate that the number of adults in the United States who speak limited English has grown since 2000. According to the 2007

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<sup>25</sup>The 2003 NAAL is an assessment of English literacy among American adults ages 16 and older. Over 19,000 adults participated in interviews and tests in their homes, and some in prisons, to measure their literacy levels. The NAAL asks about language background, including the age at which participants learned English, and current or past participation in English language classes.

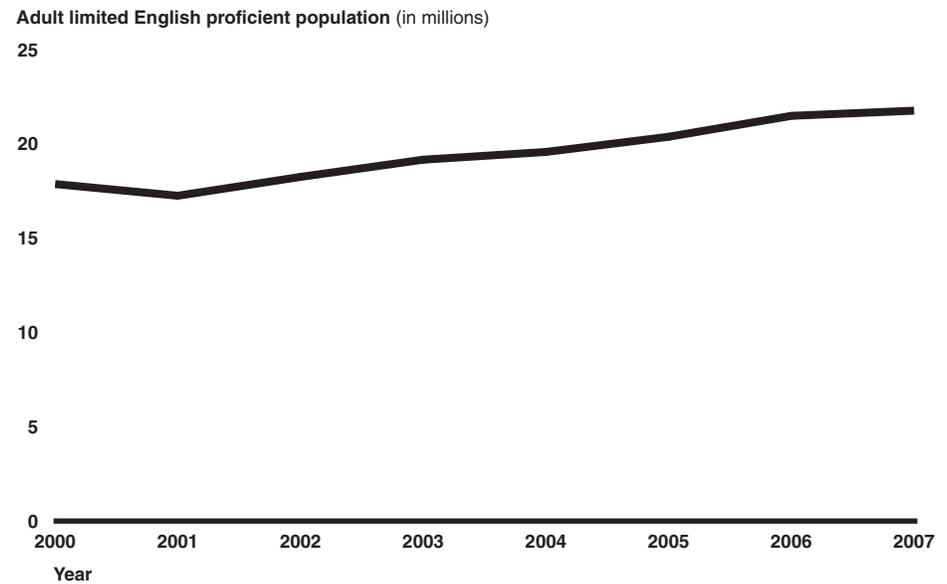
<sup>26</sup>M. Kutner, E. Greenberg, Y. Jin, B. Boyle, Y. Hsu, and E. Dunleavy, National Center for Education Statistics, Department of Education, *Literacy in Everyday Life: Results From the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy* (NCES 2007-480) (Washington, D.C.: April 2007).

<sup>27</sup>Prose literacy is defined as the knowledge and skills needed to search, comprehend, and use information from continuous texts. Prose examples include editorials, news stories, brochures, and instructional materials.

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ACS, about 21.7 million adults who reported speaking a language other than English at home also reported speaking limited English, an increase from 17.8 million in 2000 (see fig. 1).<sup>28</sup> The size of this population increased by 21.8 percent over this time period, and, as a percentage of the total U.S. adult population,<sup>29</sup> it increased from about 8.5 percent in 2000 to 9.5 percent in 2007.<sup>30</sup>

**Figure 1: Adult Limited English Proficient Population from 2000 to 2007**



Source: GAO analysis of Census and American Community Survey data.

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<sup>28</sup>Census Bureau data on English speaking ability is self-reported by adults ages 18 and over who have indicated that they speak a language other than English at home. We included in our calculations of the adult limited English proficient population those who reported speaking English less than “very well” (i.e., “not at all,” “not well,” or “well”). We based this definition on our review of literature using the same data source to assess English proficiency. Information is gathered on speaking ability, as opposed to full English literacy, which would include writing, reading, listening, and speaking.

<sup>29</sup>Beginning in 2006, the ACS was expanded to include people living in group quarters (such as correctional facilities, nursing facilities, residential treatment centers, and college housing). The expansion may account for some of the increase in the adult limited English proficient population for 2006 and 2007.

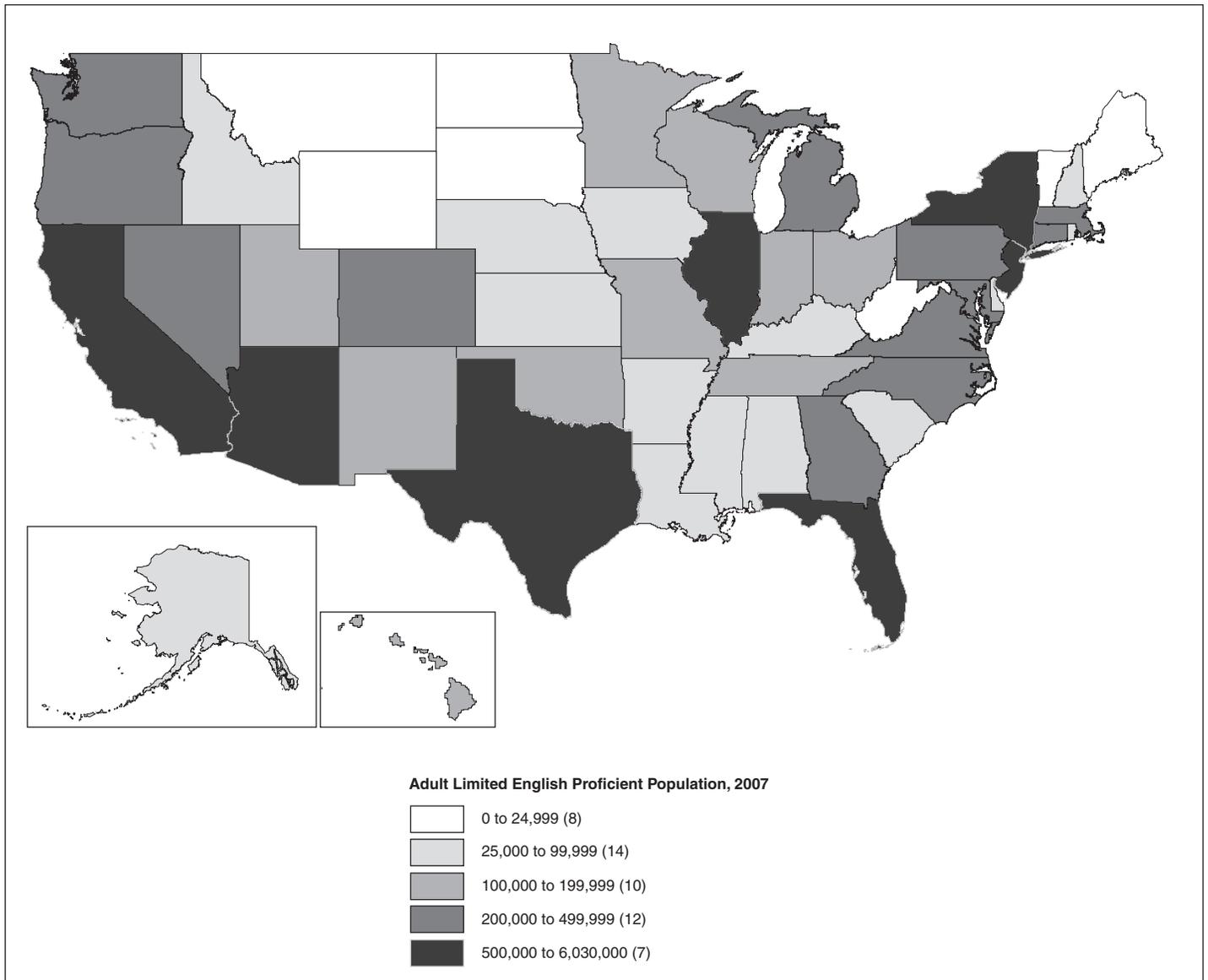
<sup>30</sup>ACS 2007 data were the most recent data available at the time of our review.

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The distribution of reported English speaking ability among those reporting speaking another language at home changed little from 2000 to 2007. For example, in 2007, 4.3 million adults reported speaking no English at all. This represented 20 percent of all limited English proficient adults, which was relatively unchanged from the 18 percent this group comprised in 2000. In addition, the proportions of limited English proficient adults who reported speaking English “not well” (38 percent) and speaking English “well” but not “very well” (42 percent) were relatively unchanged from 2000 to 2007.

The geographic distribution of the limited English proficient population mirrors the general population distribution in some respects; it is concentrated in the most populated states with some sizable representation in most other states (see fig. 2). However, some states have concentrations of limited English proficient persons higher than the state’s proportion of the U.S. population. For example, California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas accounted for 68.1 percent of the national population of adults with limited English proficiency in 2007 and 39.4 percent of the national adult population.

**Figure 2: Adult Limited English Proficient Population in 2007, by State**



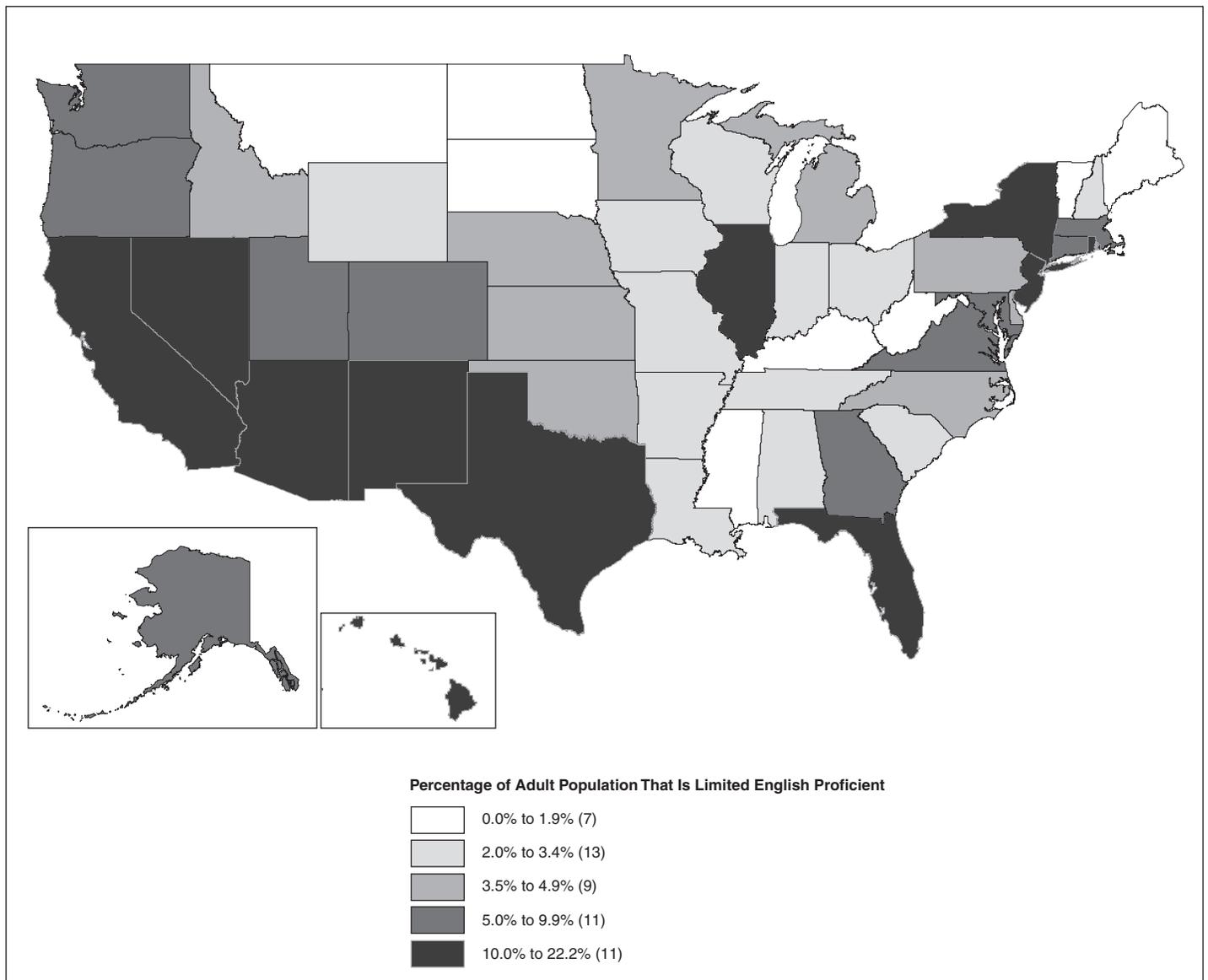
Source: GAO analysis of American Community Survey data.

Note: Data are subject to sampling error that may affect how a few states are categorized.

This handful of populous states and other southwestern states generally had the greatest concentrations of limited English proficient adults as a percentage of total adults (see fig. 3). However, among these states, there

is variation in the concentration. For example, in 2007, about one in five adults in California spoke limited English, whereas one in nine adults spoke limited English in Illinois.

**Figure 3: Percentage of Adult Limited English Proficient Population in 2007, by State**



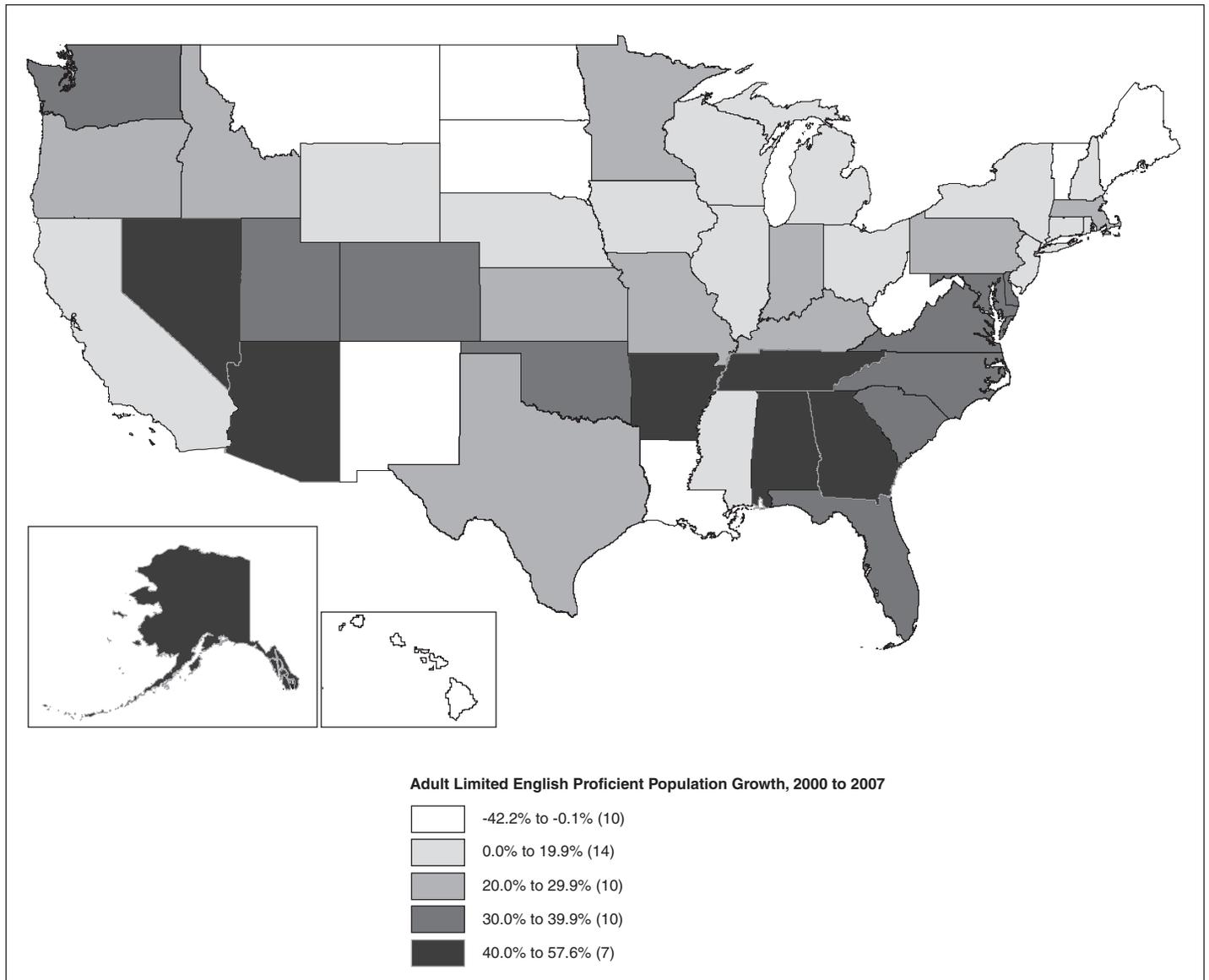
Source: GAO analysis of American Community Survey data.

Note: Data are subject to sampling error that may affect how a few states are categorized.

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Less populous states that have traditionally had smaller adult limited English proficient populations have had the greatest growth rates since 2000. From 2000 to 2007, some southern states with relatively small adult limited English proficient populations had the greatest growth rates, as shown in fig. 4. For example, Tennessee's adult limited English proficient population was below the national median in 2000. However, it experienced about 46 percent growth from 2000 to 2007, moving it above the national median in 2007. In addition to Tennessee, other southern states like Alabama, Arkansas, and Georgia had large growth rates in their adult limited English proficient populations, as did Alaska, Arizona, and Nevada. However, states with the largest limited English populations experienced the greatest growth in sheer numbers.

**Figure 4: Percentage Change in Adult Limited English Proficient Population from 2000 to 2007, by State**



Source: GAO analysis of Census and American Community Survey data.

Note: Data are subject to sampling error that may affect how a few states are categorized.

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**While the Full Extent of Participation in English Instruction Is Unknown, Enrollment in a Key Federal Program Has Remained Fairly Stable, Although State Officials Report Increased Demand**

The full extent of participation in federally funded English language learning programs is unknown, but enrollment in the Adult Education State Grant Program, the federal grant program most directly associated with English language instruction, has remained relatively stable. As we discuss later in this report, we identified many federal programs within Education, HHS, and Labor for which funding may be used to support English language learning opportunities for adults. However, federal officials administering these programs reported that they do not collect national data on participation in English language instruction funded by the programs. Only the Adult Education State Grant Program collects and maintains enrollment data.

In the Adult Education State Grant Program, reported enrollment in English language classes was stable from 2000 to 2007.<sup>31</sup> Reported national enrollment was between 1.0 million and 1.2 million English language learners each reporting year from 2000 to 2007.<sup>32</sup> Enrollment was 1.12 million in 2000 and 1.06 million in 2007, with small fluctuations over the years in between. Throughout this time period, national enrollment in the Adult Education State Grant Program was concentrated in lower literacy-level classes. Specifically, the greatest percentage of learners—70 percent to 75 percent—were in the lowest three levels of classes from 2000 to 2005 (Beginning Literacy to Low Intermediate), while 25 percent to 30 percent of learners were in the highest three levels (High Intermediate to High Advanced).<sup>33</sup>

While national enrollment in English language classes funded by the Adult Education State Grant Program remained stable, enrollment trends from 2000 to 2007 varied widely across states (see fig. 5). The median state

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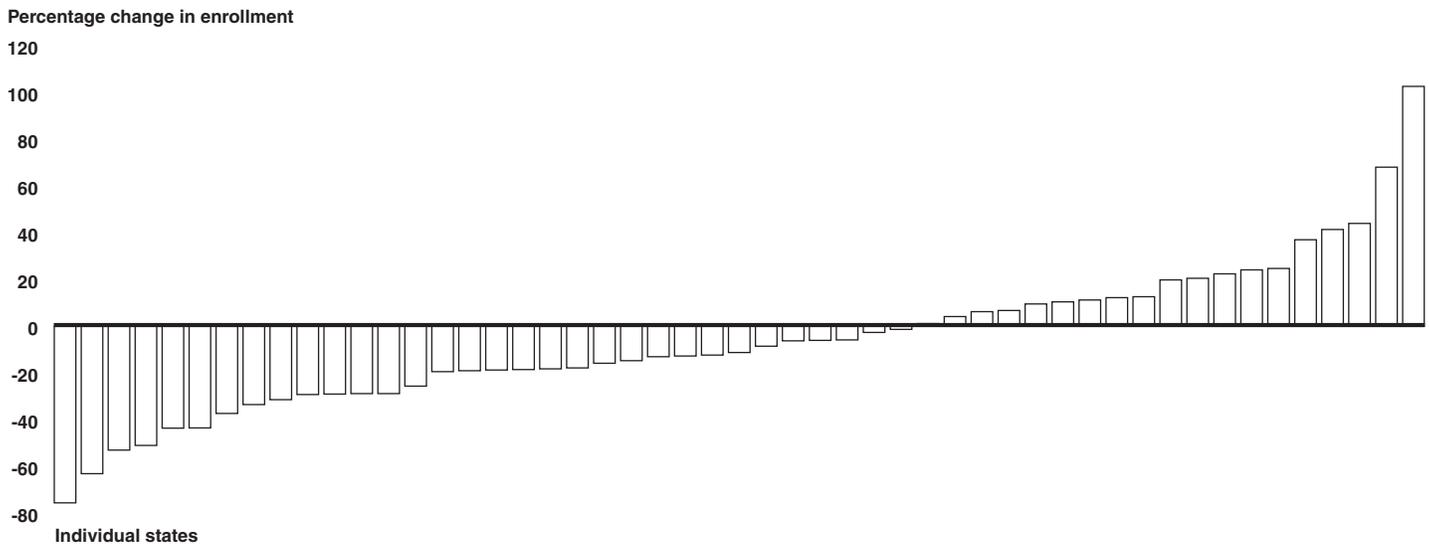
<sup>31</sup>Education's OVAE compiles data through the NRS on the basis of a July 1 to June 30 reporting year. Throughout this report, we refer to the reporting years by the data beginning year. For example, we refer to data from the 2007 to 2008 reporting year as 2007 data. Data from 2007 to 2008 were the most recent data available from the NRS at the time of our review.

<sup>32</sup>National enrollment data include enrollment in EL Civics. The NRS does not distinguish enrollment in EL Civics. In addition, the national enrollment data include U.S. territories, including American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, Palau, and the Virgin Islands.

<sup>33</sup>The definitions of levels were changed in 2006 and affected subsequent data. The 2006 and 2007 levels that are analogous to what were previously the three lowest levels accounted for 71.8 percent and 70.7 percent of enrollees, respectively. Our analysis included data from U.S. territories.

reported an 11 percent decrease, with most states reporting fluctuations no greater than 20 percent. However, changes ranged from a roughly 75 percent reduction to a 100 percent increase, with 10 states having fluctuations of more than 40 percent. These larger variations in enrollment were not reflective of trends in the adult limited English proficient populations or the general adult populations in these states. For example, among the 6 states experiencing the largest growth in the numbers of persons with limited English proficiency, 5 reported decreasing enrollments. Similarly, among the 6 states with the fastest growing limited English populations, 4 reported decreasing enrollments.

**Figure 5: Percentage Change in Adult Education State Grant Program’s English Language Enrollment from 2000 to 2007, by State**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education’s National Reporting System data.

State officials said enrollment in their states’ Adult Education State Grant Programs changed over time because of changes in state funding priorities, data management system changes, and other factors. Most of the state officials we interviewed said funding constraints limited the extent to which programs could expand, and some officials identified obtaining more funding to serve students as a top priority. Additionally, a few state officials with stable or declining enrollment said these trends were the result of improved data management systems or efforts to better validate data, which caused reported enrollments to appear stable or declining. States also identified the economy and natural disasters as other factors that resulted in stable or declining enrollment. In some of the

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states, officials whom we interviewed said immigration may have increased enrollment, while immigrants' fears of accessing government services may have reduced enrollment.

Both state officials and local providers with whom we spoke told us that stable enrollment in English language classes did not indicate stable demand. Of the 12 states we contacted, according to the NRS, most reported declining enrollment in their states' Adult Education State Grant Programs. However, 8 of 12 state officials said that demand was increasing, and 3 said that demand remained the same. One state official said that enrollment would grow exponentially if it kept pace with demand. Although many state officials reported increasing demand, waiting lists for entry into programs were not consistently used to track demand.<sup>34</sup> Not all states required local providers to maintain waiting lists, and, in states without requirements, some local providers did not keep such lists. Some state officials cited their use of Census data as an indicator of demand to distribute resources.

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## Federal Support for Adult English Instruction Is Dispersed across Many Programs That Collect Little Data and Have Limited Coordination

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<sup>34</sup>Some providers have reported waiting lists for services. See, for example, James Thomas Tucker, *The ESL Logjam: Waiting Times for Adult ESL Classes and the Impact on English Learners* (Los Angeles, Calif.: The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, October 2006). However, a variety of factors must be considered in using waiting lists as an indicator of demand. For example, waiting lists may overestimate demand if they are duplicative or not regularly updated and may underestimate demand if their length discourages additional registrants.

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## English Language Instruction Is Authorized under Multiple Federal Programs with Varied Purposes, and Few Have Data on the Extent of Support

Federal support for adult English language learning is dispersed across a diverse array of programs within Education, HHS, and Labor, but most of the programs that allow it do so in support of other program goals, such as self-sufficiency, workforce attachment, or family literacy, and do not collect data that would indicate participation in or spending on adult English language learning. Of all the programs we reviewed, only the Adult Education State Grant Program is explicitly focused on adult English language learning. Administered by Education, this program provides English language learning as one of three program areas. In 2007, about 46 percent of the state grant program's total enrollment was in English language instruction. However, even this program does not collect spending data specific to its English language learning component.<sup>35</sup> The program recognizes learners' multiple goals in learning English, such as employment, citizenship, and increased involvement in their children's education, and, as we have previously mentioned, the federal program collects data from states on educational gains in English language classes.

Other programs within Education, HHS, and Labor allow for English language learning, as shown in appendix II. However, according to federal officials responsible for administering these programs, none systematically collects data on spending or enrollment, and only Even Start, in addition to the Adult Education State Grant Program, collects data on outcomes specific to adult English language learning.<sup>36</sup> Anecdotally, across the federal programs, some of the federal program officials with whom we spoke noted that some of their local grantees provide English language instruction to adult participants directly, while other grantees provide support indirectly by paying English language providers to instruct participants or referring participants to these providers. While the extent to which these numerous programs support English language learning for adults is unknown, during our site visits, we found various federal funding streams being used by some of the community colleges, CBOs, and public schools that we visited. Although most of the providers we visited drew on the Adult Education State Grant Program to support their English

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<sup>35</sup>The Adult Education State Grant Program (including adult basic education, adult secondary education, and English language instruction) also provides separate grants to states for EL Civics. The EL Civics grant funds are tracked separately from the general Adult Education State Grants. In 2007, the total Adult Education State Grant Program was funded at \$564 million, including about \$68 million for EL Civics grants.

<sup>36</sup>While Even Start collects data on the number of adult participants with limited English, the data are not necessarily focused on whether these adults are receiving English language instruction in the Even Start Program, according to an Education official.

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language learning activities, we also found other funding streams being used. For example, among all providers that used more than one funding stream, several providers received the Adult Education State Grant as well as refugee program funding streams. However, some providers used funds from as many as four or five federal programs.<sup>37</sup>

These federal programs—under which adult English language learning is allowable, but the extent of its use is unknown—vary greatly in purpose and focus. In HHS, the Office of Refugee Resettlement provides several funding streams that allow for English language learning. These funding streams include Refugee Social Services formula grants, Targeted Assistance Grants, and matching grants. While English language instruction is provided concurrently with other services, refugee agencies generally have just 8 months to place their clients in employment. Also within HHS, under the Head Start Program, English language learning for adults is allowable as a part of family literacy, and, under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant, states may provide English language instruction as an activity that supports clients' self-sufficiency, generally in the categories of job skills or education directly related to employment, or vocational education.<sup>38</sup>

Within Labor, English language instruction is allowable under key programs, such as Trade Adjustment Assistance, in which it may be provided with other services to retrain workers who have lost their jobs due to trade with foreign countries, and programs for Adults and Dislocated Workers under WIA's title I.<sup>39</sup> Other programs under this title, including the Job Corps and the National Farmworkers Jobs Program, also

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<sup>37</sup>Beyond the federal programs we identified within the three federal agencies on which we focused (Education, HHS, and Labor), some providers cited other federal support for the English language learners they served because they either provided instruction to Food Stamps Employment and Training clients or received Community Development Block Grant funding or in-kind support through the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

<sup>38</sup>GAO reviewed the TANF plans that states submit to indicate how they would count various employment and training activities for their programs, the elements of which were required to be in place by October 1, 2007. The plans for all 50 states and the District of Columbia allowed English language instruction as an element in one of the cited activities. In addition, according to HHS officials, states may also provide English language instruction in their separate state programs and solely state-funded activities. However, except for refugees, immigrants are generally not eligible for TANF benefits for at least 5 years after their entry into the United States. 8 U.S.C. § 1611-1613.

<sup>39</sup>WIA 112 Stat. 939-1059.

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allow English language instruction, consistent with these programs' training and employment missions. In addition, certain of Labor's existing Community-Based and High Growth grants have incorporated English language learning to some degree (see app. III). See appendix IV for the methods used to provide English language instruction among the local grantees we visited that receive funds from these various Labor funding streams.

Additionally, within Education, English language instruction is also allowed as remedial or developmental education within, for example, the Pell Grant program and certain Higher Education Act of 1965<sup>40</sup> programs. Education and HHS manage certain programs, such as Even Start and Head Start, that, while they serve children, may also reach adults through their family literacy activities, and these activities may include English language instruction. In addition, certain of Education's other programs, such as those targeting after-school programs and migrant education, may also reach adults and include English language learning opportunities.

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### Federal Agencies Have Taken Recent Steps to Focus More Specifically on English Language Learning

In recent years, Education and Labor have developed some special initiatives that involve English language learning as a distinct focus (see table 1). Specifically, Education supported the development of a new distance learning Web site for English language learners, known as USA Learns, which became available in November 2008.<sup>41</sup> Through its Career Connections demonstration, Education addressed the needs of high-skilled English learners, who participated in the funded projects along with other adult education students, by providing access to occupational training and English language learning opportunities. Education also plans to study those English language learners who are transitioning to adult basic education and adult secondary education programs in order to prepare for postsecondary education and the workforce—through an initiative known as Transitioning English Language Learners (TELL). For its part, Labor has undertaken a multifaceted initiative (the Limited English Proficiency and Hispanic Worker Initiative) that relies, in part, on the nation's workforce centers, also known as One-Stop Career Centers

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<sup>40</sup>20 U.S.C. §§ 1001-1140d.

<sup>41</sup>See [www.USALearns.org](http://www.USALearns.org).

(one-stops).<sup>42</sup> Labor developed tools to help one-stops serve limited English clients: that is, it recalculated Census Bureau data on the limited English population by local workforce area and issued guidance for identifying this population's needs. As part of this initiative, Labor issued several grants for English language learning in a workforce setting. In San Diego, for example, workforce-oriented English language instruction was provided to the new and existing employees of a large shipbuilder. Finally, Labor's New Americans grants supported English language instruction at one-stops and promoted referrals to Adult Education State Grant Programs.

**Table 1: Special Initiatives Related to Adult English Language Learning at Education and Labor**

Agency/Initiative	Description
<b>Education</b>	
USA Learns	Distance learning Web site (www.USALearns.org) to help new Americans learn English. The Web site went online in November 2008 and has had more than 500,000 visitors. The contractor also produced other materials related to distance learning, such as a self-assessment tool for teachers, and included links to professional development available online. Also, the contractor briefed Adult Education State Grant Program directors at their annual conference, and helped Education modify its reporting system to allow data collection on distance learning.
Career Connections	Demonstration at five sites to promote career training for Adult Education State Grant Program students to help them transition to postsecondary education and employment in high-demand fields. All five sites involved English language learners. Education expects to produce a manual that highlights practices at the sites in late 2009. <sup>a</sup>
Transitions for English Language Learners	First major effort to study how English as a Second Language students transition to adult basic education and adult secondary education. Education expects to produce a report on this initiative in 2010.
<b>Labor</b>	
Limited English Proficiency and Hispanic Worker Initiative	Undertaken in 2003 to respond to the needs of those with high workforce participation and low English skills, the initiative includes several components, including guidance, a Labor Web site, retabulation of Census Bureau data on the limited English proficient population by local workforce investment area, and projects involving career training, as well as English language learning opportunities in some cases, at five sites around the country. Labor officials stated that evaluations were forthcoming. <sup>b</sup>

<sup>42</sup>WIA requires a single service delivery system—the nation's workforce centers, also known as one-stops—for 16 categories of programs, administered by 4 federal agencies. 29 U.S.C. § 2841. Each local area is required to have at least one comprehensive center where all programs required to participate offer certain key services. In 2007, there were approximately 1,600 comprehensive one-stops nationwide.

Agency/Initiative	Description
New Americans Centers Demonstration Project grants	Grants to workforce agencies in Arkansas and Iowa to develop one-stop-based English language learning services, relying on direct service delivery, software, and referral to the states' Adult Education State Grant Programs. The 3-year grants expired in 2008, but Iowa's effort continues with other state funding. An interim report on the grants has been issued. <sup>c</sup>

Sources: GAO reviews of agency documentation and interviews with agency officials.

<sup>a</sup>Under this initiative, Education awarded \$75,000 to each of the following entities: Blue Grass Community and Technical College, Lexington, Kentucky; Instituto del Progreso Latino, Chicago, Illinois; Jewish Vocational Service, San Francisco, California; Madison Area Technical College, Madison, Wisconsin; and Montgomery County College, Wheaton, Maryland.

<sup>b</sup>The grants that Labor issued under this initiative in 2006 totaled about \$4.9 million and went to the following entities: Resource, Inc., a CBO, St. Cloud and St. Paul, Minnesota; Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, Nebraska; the City University of New York Research Foundation, New York City, New York; the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council, San Diego, California; and SER-Jobs for Progress National, Inc., a national nonprofit organization based in Texas.

<sup>c</sup>Robin Koralek and Joanna Parnes, *Assisting Newcomers through Employment and Support Services: An Evaluation of the New Americans Centers Demonstration Project in Arkansas and Iowa* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, February 2008).

Beyond these initiatives, federal agencies have also provided technical assistance related to English language learning in administering their standing grant programs, and, in Labor's case, regarding one of its special initiatives. For example, within the Adult Education State Grant Program, Education has monitored states' procedures for assessing English language learners' proficiency and for reporting data on their gains, and has also provided training on using data for program improvement. Education has also disseminated information on 3 states' approaches to performance-based funding.<sup>43</sup> In addition to technical assistance aimed at the Adult Education State Grant Program overall, Education has, through a contractor, supported technical assistance that focused on areas such as the training needs of teachers who work with adult English language learners.<sup>44</sup> Also, the Office of Refugee Resettlement has supported technical assistance to agencies serving refugees that addressed English language learning. Likewise, the National Office of Head Start has

<sup>43</sup>MPR Associates, Inc., *Performance-Based Funding in Adult Education*, prepared for the Department of Education (Washington, D.C.: August 2007).

<sup>44</sup>Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA) Network and Center for Applied Linguistics, *Framework for Quality Professional Development for Practitioners Working with Adult English Language Learners* (Washington, D.C.: April 2008). In addition, several state Adult Education State Grant Program directors we interviewed, including those of Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Nevada, and Texas, said that the contractor had provided technical assistance to their states on the subject of adult English language learning.

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supported technical assistance to Head Start programs to inform them about English language learning opportunities through the Adult Education State Grant Program, according to an HHS official. For its part, Labor has sponsored a webinar on its Limited English Proficiency and Hispanic Worker Initiative and also has created a Web site and provided webinars for Job Corps Centers that serve English language learners.

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## Coordination among Agencies Has Been Limited

There has been some coordination among federal agencies on the subject of English language learning. Our previous work has highlighted the benefits of actions that federal agencies have taken to enhance and sustain their collaborative efforts, including the ability to leverage resources, improve quality, expand services, and reach more clients.<sup>45</sup> Yet, while Education, HHS, and Labor all serve populations in need of language assistance, there is no ongoing mechanism to share information or expand and capitalize on the agencies' individual efforts.

The agencies have at times used interagency agreements to support English language learning for adults. For example, Education and the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Citizenship have an interagency agreement to support a Web-based tool for lessons in civics- and citizenship-oriented English language learning,<sup>46</sup> according to Homeland Security and Education officials. To promote mutual understanding of their programs, HHS's Office of Refugee Resettlement and Labor's Office of Workforce Investment temporarily placed employees in one another's agencies and participated in each other's conferences in 2008, with one result being a list of promising practices. Additionally, Labor officials said that they have begun to meet with Education officials to identify effective strategies for adult learning, and that adult English language learning would be included in this effort.

Beyond these collaborations, there have been some interagency task forces established; however, generally these task forces have been temporary and have not focused on adult English language learning. For

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<sup>45</sup>GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005).

<sup>46</sup>See [www.elcivicsonline.org](http://www.elcivicsonline.org). According to Education officials, Homeland Security also provided some funding to support this effort. In addition, in April 2009, Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office announced \$1.2 million for citizenship preparation activities, including civics- and citizenship-focused English language instruction.

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example, all three agencies, as well as other agencies, participated in an interagency Task Force on New Americans, created in response to a June 2006 executive order,<sup>47</sup> and this task force issued a report that touched on English language learning and other issues.<sup>48</sup> The task force, while still technically active, has not met since the issuance of the report in December 2008, according to a Homeland Security official. Also, in 2006, the agencies participated in the Interagency Coordination Group for Adult Literacy to focus on multiple objectives, including improving coordination, leveraging resources and reducing duplication among federal agencies and programs, sharing best practices, and helping states maximize the federal investment in adult education. The group supported the creation of a database of foundations supporting literacy efforts and developed Web-based adult literacy resources, and, according to an Education official, served as the starting point for an interagency group on strengthening adult education, created by an executive order in 2007,<sup>49</sup> that fulfilled its mission with the issuance of a report in 2008.<sup>50</sup> These short-term collaborative efforts point to the interest in and need for collaboration, and others have also identified the need for collaboration specific to adult English language learning. In 2006, NIFL convened a working group on English language learning that, in 2007, recommended to NIFL interagency coordination on adult English language learning “to facilitate collaborative work and information sharing” to better serve this population. However, as of the time of our review, according to a NIFL official, the recommendation had yet to be considered by NIFL. Additionally, we did not identify any federal agency that has been specifically tasked to coordinate information sharing on adult English language learning.

Further coordination between and among the agencies is still uncertain, despite a common interest in English language learners’ employment and

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<sup>47</sup>Exec. Order No. 13,404, 71 Fed. Reg. 33,593 (June 12, 2006).

<sup>48</sup>Department of Homeland Security, Task Force on New Americans, *Building an Americanization Movement for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: 2008). The task force made several recommendations to improve efforts to integrate immigrants into American society, including recommendations to enhance distance learning tools for immigrants that cover English, history, and government and to encourage private sector involvement in integration efforts, including English language instruction.

<sup>49</sup>Exec. Order No. 13,445, 72 Fed. Reg. 56,165 (Oct. 2, 2007).

<sup>50</sup>Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, *Bridges to Opportunity: Federal Adult Education Programs for the 21st Century, Report to the President on Executive Order 13445* (Washington, D.C.: July 2008).

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despite shared challenges in serving learners with certain characteristics. For example, Education and HHS's Office of Refugee Resettlement have discussed but not developed an interagency agreement to provide local refugee programs with information on English learning resources, and no exchange of staff with Education has been discussed along the lines of what had been done with Labor. However, in technical comments on a draft of this report, Education indicated that it is open to collaboration with HHS, as well as other federal agencies, as appropriate. Coordination between Labor and Education on their respective initiatives has been variable. Although Education officials reported helping Labor with its Limited English Proficiency and Hispanic Worker Initiative, they had not involved Labor in Education's employment- and training-related initiative, namely the Career Connections project. For its part, while Labor has provided technical assistance to one-stops and other stakeholders on working with the Adult Education State Grant Program, it has provided no guidance or technical assistance specifically regarding English language instruction, according to Labor officials. Furthermore, although HHS's Office of Refugee Resettlement and Labor's Office of Workforce Investment took temporary steps to coordinate, as we have previously discussed, an Office of Refugee Resettlement official said that it was unclear whether such coordination would be reinitiated, despite the benefits it provided in identifying additional resources available to refugees.

The limited nature of federal efforts to coordinate is apparent in the agencies' efforts to issue guidance and information that could help local providers identify both promising practices for providing English language instruction and additional resources in their communities for providing such instruction. While guidance can support efficient and effective coordination across programs, there has been no recent guidance from HHS, for example, to grantees of the refugee resettlement program for obtaining their language instruction resources through local collaboration, despite an official's acknowledgment that the refugee program's limited funding might require agencies serving refugees to tap additional resources. For the TANF program, HHS officials said guidance has been focused on how to count English language instruction as an activity, but not on how to identify and leverage local resources. Nor has the HHS Office of Community Services, which manages the Community Service Block Grant program, issued any guidance that would help local programs identify English instruction resources in their communities, according to a department official. Also, Labor's update of Trade Adjustment Assistance guidance focused on the conditions under which English language instruction would be allowable, rather than resources for how to best

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provide instruction.<sup>51</sup> Regarding Labor’s 2003 initiative instructing one-stop managers to develop plans for helping clients with limited English proficiency (LEP plans), the guidance offered no specific information on promising practices or information about local resources available through the Adult Education State Grant Program. Additionally, an official of the National Farmworkers Job Program said that this program has issued no guidance on this topic. An exception to the absence of information on resources and opportunities for local collaboration is Education’s Web site, “Community Partnerships for Adult Learning.”<sup>52</sup> This Web site offers information on how to collaborate locally, based on 12 community profiles, and makes it possible to search for examples involving English language instruction. At the same time, however, we found that many local providers were unaware of Education’s USA Learns Web site providing English language instruction, despite federal efforts to publicize it.<sup>53</sup> Although Labor did apprise its regional offices of this resource, 22 of the 28 farmworker program grantees whom we contacted were not aware of it, none of the Job Corps operators we contacted had heard of USA Learns, and an association of refugee agencies also was not acquainted with the Web site.

Representatives of programs serving certain populations of English language learners, including refugees, farmworkers, and Job Corps students, said that greater coordination could benefit their clients by, for example, offering information about innovative practices, access to teacher training opportunities, and the efficient use of scarce resources. For example, certain agencies that serve refugees at the local level expressed interest in information about additional English language learning resources that could benefit refugees after their job placement. Additionally, an official of an association of refugee-serving agencies said that, while some refugee agencies might be aware of the Adult Education State Grant Program’s English language learning component, others might not or might have questions about refugees’ eligibility for it. This official

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<sup>51</sup>Specifically, English language instruction may be provided when combined or integrated with occupational training, or, in rare cases, as a stand-alone activity. See Department of Labor, *Serving Participants Under the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) and North American Free Trade Agreement-Transitional Adjustment Assistance (NAFTA-TAA)*, TEGL 13-05 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 2, 2006).

<sup>52</sup>See [www.c-pal.net](http://www.c-pal.net).

<sup>53</sup>In technical comments to a draft of this report, Education indicated that NIFL had disseminated information about the Web site to over 4,000 literacy organizations and programs nationwide.

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also noted that refugee agencies would be likely to welcome information about additional English language learning opportunities for their clients, given scarce resources in the refugee system. A farmworkers' program grantee said that the benefits of greater coordination could include access to updated and innovative materials, curricula, and teaching methods, as well as access to additional teacher training opportunities, while others pointed to access to additional resources. Among Job Corps Center managers with whom we spoke, the potential benefits cited included additional information for centers inexperienced in serving English language learners, additional information about promising instructional practices, and additional information about curricula that combine English language learning and occupational skills training.

In addition, it is important to note, all three agencies serve subpopulations of English language learners who share some characteristics. For example, providers of services under the Adult Education State Grant Program and refugee funding streams, Job Corps Center managers, and officials of the farmworkers' program all indicated the presence of beginning English learners among their clients, such as those who lack literacy in their primary language. Among those who mentioned this subpopulation, effectively and efficiently serving these learners was frequently described as challenging. In addition, some refugee-serving agencies told us that some refugees are highly educated—precisely the subpopulation targeted by several local programs through Education's Career Connections initiative.

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## States and Service Providers Have Used a Range of Strategies to Support Adult English Language Learning

States have supported adult English language learning in a variety of ways, particularly through the one federal program with an explicit focus on English language learning—the Adult Education State Grant Program—but also beyond this program. They have provided matching funds at various levels for this program and devised additional ways to enhance their support. Moreover, some states are addressing program quality through teacher qualifications and training, content standards, and other means and are developing mechanisms for local planning. Additionally, some states are coordinating with other programs. States and local providers are also taking steps to integrate English language instruction with occupational training. Furthermore, states are supplementing these activities with their own efforts to support English language instruction, such as through libraries and special schools. Some state agencies and local providers are exploring innovative practices and are carrying them out in a great variety of ways and venues, both within and beyond the Adult Education State Grant Program.

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## States Varied in Their Overall Level of Support for the Adult Education State Grant Program and in Their Efforts to Enhance English Language Learning

Within the Adult Education State Grant Program, the 12 states that we contacted—states with either the largest or most rapidly growing limited English proficient populations—varied substantially in the amount of state funding they contributed. While most states did not distinguish the funding they provided for English language learning from the funding provided for other components of adult education, their financial contributions for adult education varied considerably. Specifically, state and local spending used to match Federal Fiscal Year 2005<sup>54</sup> funds ranged from the federally required 25 percent minimum in Tennessee and Texas to 88 percent of total spending in California and 90 percent in Florida.<sup>55</sup> At least 2 states—California and New York—described current or planned reductions to their state contributions to the Adult Education State Grant Program.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, officials for Arizona’s program said that their program has begun to track funding for English language learning separately, to provide a specific focus on such learning as a distinct activity.<sup>57</sup>

The states we contacted reported using a variety of considerations in allocating funding to local areas under the Adult Education State Grant Program, and some reported that they are beginning to use provider performance as a consideration. While Minnesota used factors such as instructional hours in allocating funds to local providers, other states—including Arizona, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey—directed funding to local programs, at least in part, on the basis of the size of the local limited English proficient population, using Census Bureau data. Illinois further emphasizes need, according to a state official, by giving extra weight to the

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<sup>54</sup>At the time of our work, 2005 was the most recent year for which these data were available from Education.

<sup>55</sup>Among all states in 2005, the percentage represented by nonfederal spending in the Adult Education State Grant Program was 75 percent. The required nonfederal contribution may be composed of cash or in-kind donations.

<sup>56</sup>According to state officials, California absorbed a 15 percent cut in the year retroactive to the year that began July 1, 2008, as well as an additional 5 percent cut the following year, and New York is planning for a 5 percent cut this year. Furthermore, in California, local school districts may now access these funds for local educational purposes other than adult education, although the extent to which the districts will do so is not yet clear. We did not ask all 12 states about possible changes to their state contributions.

<sup>57</sup>Specifically, local programs must now file a separate application for English language program funds. Local programs have to address specifically how they are going to provide services; why they are qualified, including how their teachers are qualified; and how they will improve English language learning gains.

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population least proficient in English.<sup>58</sup> In terms of performance-based funding, while California adopted this funding approach after the passage of WIA in 1998, Illinois has considered local provider performance in distributing funding to local programs since 2005, according to officials in each state. According to a Florida official, that state is redesigning its funding formula to emphasize performance, beginning July 1, 2009. Also, Tennessee is also revising its formula to give greater weight to performance, with an anticipated implementation in 2010, according to an official from that state.

Most of the 12 states we contacted through our semistructured telephone interviews also reported taking steps to improve the quality of English language teaching, such as by supporting professional development for English language teachers. Ten states had set minimum requirements for teaching English—typically, a state teacher’s license or a Bachelor of Arts degree—while 2 states had no specific teacher qualifications.<sup>59</sup> Generally, however, in those states that had established qualifications, they were the same as those for other adult education teachers. Two of these states had or were developing qualifications specific to teachers of English language learners: California required a special credential for such teachers, and Arizona, according to state officials, was developing standards that would delineate specifically what teachers of English language learners need to know. Additionally, 1 state—Arkansas—requires certain providers to adhere to standards specifically for volunteers who work with English language learners through the Adult Education State Grant Program.<sup>60</sup> To augment these minimum qualifications, most states addressed teachers’ training needs through professional development activities. Six states had set an annual minimum number of professional development hours,

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<sup>58</sup>That is, the state formula assigns weight to the number reporting that they speak English “not at all” and “not well.”

<sup>59</sup>Among the 10 states, those that reported requirements for a state teacher’s license were Arizona (with an adult education certification), Arkansas, California (with an adult education certification and an endorsement for English as a Second Language), New York, and Tennessee; those that required a Bachelor of Arts degree in any subject were Florida, Georgia, Illinois, and Texas; and New Jersey required a state teacher’s license for teachers in public schools, and a Bachelor of Arts degree for others. Two states—Alaska and Nevada—had no specific teacher qualifications.

<sup>60</sup>In addition, 2 states reported having adopted volunteer standards for volunteers who work in the Adult Education State Grant Program generally, including its adult basic education component. In a number of other states, such as Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, and New York, we were told that volunteer standards are the purview of organizations outside of the Adult Education State Grant Program.

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although this minimum varied widely, from 5 to 60 hours.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, all but 1 of the 12 states reported using most of their Adult Education State Grant state leadership funds to finance their teachers' professional development. For example, Arkansas, Illinois, and Nevada have used such funding for special centers, which can provide professional development opportunities for teachers of English language learners. Furthermore, 8 of the 12 states reported having adopted content standards to guide English language instruction.<sup>62</sup> Among the reasons that these states cited for developing content standards was consistency of instruction statewide.

States and local providers with whom we met also cited ways in which they were using NRS data on English language learners to improve service delivery. For example, in Washington State, the Adult Education State Grant Program agency officials said they discovered through reviewing program data that learners' outcomes were lower in classes that were held at certain locations, and were subsequently able to make changes in those locations by addressing the needs of teachers, actions that the officials said eventually led to better results. Furthermore, this agency has developed a workshop for local providers to train them on how to use data for program improvement. At the local level, one provider in Washington State reported using the data to compare day and evening classes and make adjustments in their scheduling without adversely affecting outcomes. Moreover, officials of California's Adult Education State Grant agency described using the data to determine that numbers of English language learners were not successfully transitioning to adult basic education, and worked closely with a technical assistance provider and held regional meetings to address this issue.

Also within the Adult Education State Grant Program, states reported providing technical assistance to local providers, sponsoring special projects on a variety of topics, or taking other steps to address program

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<sup>61</sup>We were told that 3 states required between 5 to 10 hours of professional development annually; these states were New Jersey (5 hours), Illinois (6 hours), and New York (10 hours). Two states—Tennessee and Texas—required at least 12 hours for existing teachers, with additional training for new teachers. Arkansas required 60 hours of professional development annually. Arizona set a minimum percentage of the budget that local providers must devote to professional development (10 percent), but had no specific hourly requirement. The following 5 states had no minimum number of hours of professional development: Alaska, California, Florida, Georgia, and Nevada.

<sup>62</sup>The 8 states were Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Nevada, and Tennessee.

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quality. For example, Illinois provided training on its new content standards to local providers to support their curriculum development. Florida and New Jersey reported efforts to focus on beginning-level learners by providing special training and issuing targeted grants, respectively. In addition, California provided technical assistance to local programs to find ways to improve student retention. The state has also piloted an electronic English language assessment in certain locations to increase efficiency and reduce teachers' burden in conducting written assessments. Additionally, Arizona has adopted stricter enrollment policies, a step described by state officials as part of their effort to address program quality for English language learners. Finally, Florida and California also supported provider efforts to offer distance learning opportunities for English language learners, and 5 other states are exploring distance learning applications for English language learning through a project sponsored by the University of Michigan.<sup>63</sup>

Mechanisms to guide and coordinate local service delivery have been developed in 2 of the 4 states that we visited—Illinois and Minnesota. According to a state official, Illinois has established about 30 Area Planning Councils across the state comprising a diverse array of providers that are required to meet twice a year and submit annual areawide service plans. These councils can encourage individual providers to focus on specific skill levels to minimize duplication of services. While Adult Education State Grant providers must belong to these councils, they may also include representatives from state agencies and the private sector, and, in some cases, agencies that serve populations outside the Adult Education State Grant Program.<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, Minnesota relies on 53 local consortia of providers for local service coordination, and requires them to submit comprehensive plans every 5 years. For example, the St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium includes both public schools and CBOs; according to state officials, the public schools generally serve more advanced learners, while the CBOs serve more beginning-level learners. In addition to facilitating the targeting of resources in this way, the

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<sup>63</sup>The 5 states are Indiana, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas. According to the project developer, the state with the largest participation to date is North Carolina, with 449 learners enrolled. Also, according to the project developer, some states support their participation in the project with state funds, while others do so using a portion of the Adult Education State Grant that is reserved for state leadership activities.

<sup>64</sup>For example, we found one council that included a refugee-serving agency that received both Adult Education State Grant Program and refugee funding to provide English language instruction to its clients.

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consortium structure has, according to a consortium official, allowed individual providers to work together to respond to emerging trends and explore common interests, such as the uses of technology for English language learners.

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### Some States and Local Providers Coordinated with Other Federally Funded Programs

Some state agencies that manage the Adult Education State Grant Program and the local providers they support have taken steps to coordinate with other federal- and state-funded programs that serve populations likely to need this help—particularly refugees, those seeking assistance through one-stops, and those receiving public financial support. For example, Washington State has established an “LEP Pathway” that refers refugees and TANF clients to providers of English language instruction. According to state officials, many, although not all of these providers, also receive funding from the state’s Adult Education State Grant Program agency.<sup>65</sup> According to state officials, the LEP Pathway has helped ensure timely and culturally appropriate services for refugees, particularly for the majority who are beginning-level English speakers, and given the state a flexible way to respond to changes in refugee flows from different countries and primary languages. In Minnesota, the state agency that administers both TANF and services for refugees uses a state-funded family stabilization program to serve most limited English clients, which serves these clients for 1 year to address a variety of barriers to immediate employment, including limited English.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, Minnesota’s refugee program has transferred funding to its Adult Education State Grant Program agency, to secure seats in English language classes for refugees within the relatively short period before they are placed in employment. In Florida, the refugee Program contracts with local Adult Education State Grant Program providers for English language instruction, according to a state official. By contrast, Nevada’s Adult Education State Grant Program agency has provided funding to that state’s refugee agency, as one of several English language providers.

Among the 12 states we contacted through semistructured telephone interviews, 6 reported formal, state-level coordination between the Adult Education State Grant Program and the TANF program.<sup>67</sup> For example,

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<sup>65</sup>Certain refugees qualify for the TANF program.

<sup>66</sup>The family stabilization program is also used to serve those with other barriers to employment, such as certain mental health conditions.

<sup>67</sup>The 6 states were Alaska, Arkansas, California, New Jersey, New York, and Texas.

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Arkansas officials reported that this coordination helped target learners at the beginning levels. Texas officials reported that such coordination helped prevent duplication of effort and facilitated the cotraining of staff from both the Adult Education State Grant Program and the TANF program. None of the 12 states, on the other hand, reported formal coordination at the state level between agencies administering the Adult Education State Grant Program and those administering services for refugees.

Furthermore, of the 12 states we contacted through semistructured telephone interviews, 8 reported formal, state-level coordination between the Adult Education State Grant Program and the state agency that administers the one-stop system.<sup>68</sup> For example, New York's Adult Education State Grant Program officials said that English language instruction is available at all one-stops in New York City. Other states that reported English language instruction on-site at one-stops were Alaska and Tennessee. Beyond these 12 states, Minnesota's Adult Education State Grant Program specifically requires all local providers to establish formal agreements with their local one-stops to include help for English language learners, as well as other adult education clients, such as those needing basic skills. While Georgia officials did not report formal, state-level coordination, they did report that such coordination, including the co-location of services, occurs on the local level. States reported that their state-level coordination with the one-stop system involved functions such as assessment (Arkansas and Texas), improved referral (Arizona), and a special pilot in 12 sites to electronically assess both literacy and job skills (California). State officials also attested to some benefits from this formal, state-level coordination between the two programs. In Tennessee, officials said this coordination provided better services for clients and reduced the burden of filling out multiple forms in multiple locations, while Texas officials said that it has helped provide access to work and training programs.

Meanwhile, some states reported coordination with other federal or federally supported programs, such as Even Start, postsecondary education, and the federal program for farmworkers. For example, Illinois and Texas reported state-level coordination between English language learning under their adult education programs and the Even Start program,

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<sup>68</sup>The 8 states were Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, and Texas.

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a family literacy program administered by Education.<sup>69</sup> Illinois officials reported that its Even Start program has a representative on an adult education advisory board, in an effort to ensure that the programs' policies are consistent. Additionally, Adult Education State Grant Program agencies in Arizona, Illinois, Minnesota, and New York reported initiatives that focused on transitioning English language learners to postsecondary education.<sup>70</sup> On another front, Florida's farmworkers' program is housed within the same division of the state education department as the Adult Education State Grant Program. According to a state official, coordination between the two programs has reduced testing costs for the farmworkers' program, allowed the farmworkers' program to focus on its primary mission of employment, provided access to information about promising practices in English language instruction, facilitated joint efforts to serve beginning-level learners, and created opportunities for program clients to continue their training.

However, such coordination efforts were not universal, and some providers, particularly refugee agencies in California and Washington State, said they did not know how to access or acquire additional resources through the Adult Education State Grant Program, despite, in some cases, expressing a need for such additional resources. Furthermore, officials of one of these refugee-serving agencies said that it would be prohibitively expensive for the agency to pay Adult Education State Grant Program providers to secure seats for refugees in their classes.

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<sup>69</sup>However, certain states that reported no state-level coordination with Even Start said that local-level coordination took place. The program is designed to serve families in which the parents are eligible for services under the AEFLA, are enrolled in secondary school, or are of compulsory school age under state law. In addition, local Even Start programs are expected to coordinate with other, existing programs, such as the Adult Education State Grant Program, WIA title I programs, Migrant Education, and Head Start. Officials in states we visited all cited examples of Even Start programs that were affiliated with adult education providers.

<sup>70</sup>In some cases, these efforts served clients of the Adult Education State Grant Program generally, not just those who were English language learners.

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## Some States and Local Providers Are Exploring Ways to Integrate English Language Learning and Occupational Training

In a variety of settings, a number of states are combining occupational training with English language instruction to support local workforce development and to improve the ability of new English speakers to gain employment. In 2004, Washington State began to merge English instruction with occupational instruction in its community college classrooms as a pilot program. The project was designed to shorten the time that it was taking new learners to progress from mastering English to mastering an occupational skill. According to state officials, a sequential approach had required as long as 7 or 8 years, in some cases. Today, Washington State has adopted the dual approach of the pilot program for its occupational curricula at community colleges and expanded this approach statewide. Under this program, called I-BEST, or the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Initiative, each classroom has both an occupational skills teacher and a basic skills teacher, who may be an English language instructor. While the particular occupational tracks at the community colleges vary, each reflects jobs that are in demand locally, according to state officials. Occupational programs are available, for example, for English language learners who seek to become nursing assistants, medical assistants, phlebotomists, automotive technicians, welders, accountants, and advanced manufacturing workers, among other occupations. In May of 2009,<sup>71</sup> an evaluation of I-BEST reported better educational outcomes for participants, including English language learners, compared with nonparticipants.<sup>72</sup> Illinois and Minnesota, which we also visited, as well as Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin have been exploring other approaches to integrating English and occupational training under the Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears initiative.

Certain states we contacted had targeted English language learners in high-demand occupations in other ways. Minnesota's workforce agency has used a state-funded program to support workforce-oriented English language learning with projects that required employers to provide

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<sup>71</sup>See Davis Jenkins, Matthew Zeidenberg, and Gregory Kienzl, *Educational Outcomes of I-BEST, Washington State Community and Technical College System's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program: Findings from a Multivariate Analysis*, CCRC Working Paper No. 16 (New York, N.Y.: Community College Research Center, May 2009). See also State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, *I-BEST: A Program Integrating Adult Basic Education and Workforce Training*, Research Report No. 05-2 (Olympia, Wash.: December 2005), and State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, *Increasing Student Achievement for Basic Skills Students*, Research Report No. 08-1 (Olympia, Wash.: January 2008).

<sup>72</sup>GAO did not assess this study for methodological soundness.

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matching funds. To date, the program has sponsored projects in occupational fields such as manufacturing, health care, food processing, hospitality, and horticulture. In addition, its workforce agency and its department of education, which manages the Adult Education State Grant Program, have collaborated on 14 projects, some of which integrate English language learning in fields such as manufacturing and health care. All 14 projects will be evaluated, according to state officials. In Texas, the Adult Education State Grant Program and workforce agencies have collaborated to develop industry-specific curricula for English language learning in the fields of services, manufacturing, and health care. Florida is planning to refine its existing curriculum in order to make it industry-specific, according to a state official. In addition, Arizona has used federal incentive funding for health care education and training for limited English proficient and other low-skilled adults.<sup>73</sup>

Some local providers of adult education programs have also responded to employer requests for customized English language instruction for their employees. An Illinois community college, for example, provided classes to various companies, including a printing company, often with support from certain city and state grants. At the state level, Illinois has a program to support such workplace-based activities that serve English language learners and others with literacy needs, with employers paying part of the cost.<sup>74</sup> Also, a California community college provided English lessons to culinary workers, and a California CBO provided safety-oriented English instruction to warehouse workers. However, some providers told us that their ability to contract with employers to provide such customized English language instruction depends on factors such as having enough

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<sup>73</sup>WIA authorizes incentive grants to each state that exceeds adjusted levels of performance for title I of the act, for AEFLA, and for programs under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Amendments of 1998 (Perkins III). 20 U.S.C. § 9273(a). Education officials reported, however, that because Perkins IV has replaced Perkins III and there are no longer relevant performance data under Perkins III to consider, performance data under the third of these is no longer considered in determining eligibility for such grants. 74 Fed. Reg. 21823 (May 11, 2009). Nonetheless, states receiving incentive grants may use them to support innovative workforce development and education activities under title I, AEFLA, or the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (Perkins IV).

<sup>74</sup>According to a state official, this program was funded at \$500,000 in state fiscal year 2008. While this workplace literacy program is not designed to serve English language learners exclusively, the state official estimated that about 75 percent of the participants have been English language learners.

people enrolled to meet costs, while accommodating different levels of English proficiency.

In the course of our site visits, we visited a number of local providers involved in combining English language instruction with occupational training. These providers were involved with a wide range of industries and venues for training or retraining workers, and they used a wide range of funding sources (see table 2). For example, one community college provider in California placed an English language instructor in the same classroom with the occupational instructor, who taught advanced carpentry. In other cases, to accommodate workers' schedules, providers delivered English language and occupational instruction at different times, or—when it was delivered on-site—between shifts. Another model, used at community colleges, such as City College of San Francisco and Cerritos College in Norwalk, California, involves offering a “support course” with terms and concepts specific to certain occupations; college officials told us this English language support course may precede or follow the occupational course.

**Table 2: Examples of Local Workforce-Oriented English Language Instruction**

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Provider type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Description of activity</b>
Cerritos College	Community college	Norwalk, California	Collaborated with local one-stop to provide workforce-oriented English language instruction to dislocated workers in automated machining industry in 2007.
City College of San Francisco	Community college	San Francisco, California	Provides several models of workforce-oriented English; has developed courses for English language learners in early childhood development, culinary occupations, and health.
The English Center	Community-based organization	Oakland, California	Provides English language instruction and career readiness services.
Hubbs Center for Lifelong Learning	Public school	St. Paul, Minnesota	Provides “preoccupational” English language instruction to prepare learners for work as nursing assistants, commercial kitchen workers, boiler maintenance technicians, child care workers, and commercial drivers.
Instituto del Progreso Latino	Community-based organization	Chicago, Illinois	Combines English language instruction with community college occupational training in health to allow trainees to become certified as nursing assistants or pursue additional training in health careers.

Provider	Provider type	Location	Description of activity
Jewish Vocational Service	Community-based organization	San Francisco, California	Combines English language instruction and occupational training to retrain those who have lost jobs as garment workers to pursue careers in health; also provides English language instruction to foreign-born medical professionals.
Laney College	Community college	Oakland, California	Combines English language instruction and occupational training to students in advanced carpentry and other fields.
St. Cloud Workforce Center	One-stop	St. Cloud, Minnesota	Collaborated with Adult Education State Grant Program most recently in 2008 and 2009 to provide on-site English language instruction at a food processing company that provided some matching funds.

Sources: GAO interviews with representatives of the entities shown in this table.

## Some States Funded Their Own Programs

Aside from their use of Adult Education State Grant Program funds, some states and local jurisdictions have supported English language learning through additional programs of their own, such as through state literacy organizations, libraries, and special schools, and some states aim to offset employers' costs by offering tax credits or other incentives. In 2007, California had enrolled some 466,000 adults in its own English language learning program for adults—almost as many as were enrolled (528,000) in its Adult Education State Grant Program. The state has also invested \$50 million annually in its Community-based English Tutoring program, which officials said has, heretofore, reached about 1.5 million adults each year.<sup>75</sup> New Jersey also funds a separate state-funded program to provide English language learning opportunities through the one-stop system, that, according to state officials, has reached about 6000 individuals annually.<sup>76</sup> Also, Illinois has a state-funded program to provide civics- and citizenship-oriented English language instruction that it has funded at about \$2 million annually.<sup>77</sup> At the local level, New York City funds an initiative that serves

<sup>75</sup>However, according to a state official, under the new state budget, school districts may now access these funds, for purposes other than adult English language learning.

<sup>76</sup>According to a state official, this program, called the Workforce Learning Link, is available through 55 community centers, some of which are on-site at the one-stop and which learners can access by referral at other one-stops.

<sup>77</sup>According to a state official, this program, called the Refugee and Immigrant Citizenship Initiative, has been cut by 3 percent under the new state budget. Also, while it is outside the Adult Education State Grant Program, services are provided by about 35 organizations, some of which also receive Adult Education State Grant Program funding, according to a state official.

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about 30,000 English language learners annually, according to a city official.<sup>78</sup>

Family literacy programs, which can include English language instruction for parents as well as children, have also been an area of state and local activity. Illinois has such a program, which aims to serve those whose child care responsibilities may prevent them from accessing other services. According to a state official, the program was funded at \$1.2 million in state fiscal year 2008 and served about 900 adult participants, the majority of whom were English language learners.<sup>79</sup> A local agency in Los Angeles County has used revenue from a state tobacco tax to provide English language learning opportunities through family literacy activities. According to an agency official, this project served 688 adults in state fiscal year 2008. Additionally, local public schools in 75 locations across the country, including in Memphis, Tennessee, have developed family literacy programs that focus specifically on English language learners, with support from Toyota and the National Center for Family Literacy, according to a representative of the center.<sup>80</sup>

Other states have supported English language learning indirectly, by supporting the volunteers who work with English language learners and others enrolled in Adult Education State Grant Program activities. In Illinois, a state agency—the Office of the Secretary of State—has provided access to training and set standards for volunteers who work in these programs. By contrast, in Washington State, a private association that receives state funding fulfills these functions. In fact, when we asked about standards for volunteers, officials from 5 of the 12 states we

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<sup>78</sup>This initiative, the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative, receives about \$5 million in city funding annually, and involves a partnership of the City University of New York, the New York City Department of Education, the city's libraries, and about 30 CBOs, according to a city official. In addition, the New York City Council controls two smaller funding streams that support English language instruction; however, funding for both of these funding streams was reduced in 2008, according to a city official.

<sup>79</sup>The annual competitive grants are issued to partnerships that include Adult Education State Grant Program providers, children's programs (which may include Head Start or Even Start), and libraries.

<sup>80</sup>According to a representative of the National Center for Family Literacy, the Toyota Family Literacy Program has issued grants totaling \$3 million annually for this purpose since 1991, and the program is currently active in 23 states.

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contacted said that such standards had been set by entities other than the Adult Education State Grant Program.<sup>81</sup>

Public libraries have been another venue by which states and local governments have provided funds for English language learning. Officials of the California State Library, for example, told us that the Library has a program that reaches more advanced English language learners and some libraries in the state also use local resources, grants, and fund-raising to support their own English language learning activities. Officials of Arizona's Adult Education State Grant Program also noted that their agency has transferred funding to the Arizona State Library to support services for English language learners. Some have estimated that a significant portion of public libraries across the country provide English language instruction.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, in seven communities around the country, libraries and other entities, including some adult education providers, have begun to develop an Internet tool, known as the Learner Web, that can help adult English language learners access online and community resources.<sup>83</sup> Public support for people learning English through their libraries was also augmented in 2008 with a grant from the American Library Association and the Dollar General Foundation, which awarded one-time grants to 34 libraries in 18 states to better serve adult English language learners.<sup>84</sup>

Also aside from activities associated with the Adult Education State Grant Program, some states have supported adult English language learning through special schools. For example, Washington State provides funding for a vocational school for farmworkers, the Community Agriculture Vocational Institute. According to the local farmworkers program director, the school incorporates workforce-oriented English language instruction

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<sup>81</sup>These states were Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, and New York.

<sup>82</sup>Rick J. Ashton and Danielle Patrick Milam, *Welcome, Stranger: Libraries Build the Global Village* (Chicago, Ill.: Urban Libraries Council, January 2008).

<sup>83</sup>The initiative is supported by a 3-year grant of \$1 million from a federal agency, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, issued in September 2007, but each community must raise its own resources to participate. According to the project's developer, the participating communities are Boston, Massachusetts; Portland, Oregon; Providence, Rhode Island; St. Paul, Minnesota; Union County, New Jersey; the District of Columbia; and Westchester County, New York.

<sup>84</sup>See [www.americandreamtoolkit.org](http://www.americandreamtoolkit.org).

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as part of tractor, ladder, and pesticide safety classes.<sup>85</sup> In Arizona, there are charter schools managed by both a National Farmworkers' Jobs Program grantee and a Job Corps Center that provide English language instruction to young adults.<sup>86</sup> In the District of Columbia, a charter school for adults, the Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School, combines English language instruction with occupational training in computer technology and culinary arts.

Finally, a few of the state officials we interviewed reported that their states have devised incentives for employers to provide English language learning opportunities. According to state officials, employers in Florida and Georgia may claim a tax credit for providing training for their employees, and this training can include English language instruction. In New Jersey, according to state officials, employers can be reimbursed for one-half of their employees' salaries while the employees are in training, including English language instruction.

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## Federal Agencies Have Undertaken Some Research, but Have Not Coordinated Research Planning across Agencies on Adult English Language Learning

At the time of our review, Education had one research study under way to test the effectiveness of a particular approach to adult English language learning, and Education and Labor had some ongoing work related to adult English language learners. Education officials said that there had been little research on what approaches are effective for adult English language learning, and that there are limited federal funds for rigorous research. However, while agencies cited a few efforts to collaborate on specific projects, they had not coordinated research planning across agencies to systematically leverage research resources for increasing the knowledge base regarding adult English language learning.

Education was funding a study, led by IES, evaluating the effectiveness of one instructional strategy for low-literacy English language learners. Funded using \$6.9 million in AEFLA national leadership dollars over

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<sup>85</sup>According to this official, the local farmworkers' program grantee also provides English language instruction directly, by hiring a teacher who provides evening classes at a one-stop, and refers clients to local Adult Education State Grant Program providers (i.e., community colleges).

<sup>86</sup>The farmworkers program's charter schools serve students ages 15 to 22. According to an official of the Job Corps Center, the charter school employs a full-time English language teacher and serves youth ages 16 to 21 and, in some cases, those ages 22 and over.

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multiple years, the study's final report is expected in the summer of 2010.<sup>87</sup> The impetus for this research, according to Education officials, was that while English language learners made up the largest share of participants in the Adult Education State Grant Program, there had been little research on what approaches are effective for adult English language learners and few instructional strategies are available for low-literacy English language learners. The particular literacy textbook being tested, according to the study's design report, was chosen on the basis of its consistency with characteristics identified in literature as promising, as well as through recommendations from experts in the field.<sup>88</sup> Depending on the results of the study, Education officials said they expect that the results could be disseminated for use at the classroom level and could make classroom materials more research-based.<sup>89</sup>

Also at the time of our review, Education and Labor were doing analyses of the NAAL survey data looking at literacy levels of adults, including those of English language learners. Education's OVAE and Labor's Employment and Training Administration had a memorandum of understanding covering a contractor's preparation of four issue briefs on the NAAL data, including one brief on the literacy of nonnative English speaking adults. According to Education and Labor officials, the briefs are expected to be released in the late summer of 2009. In addition to this joint effort, according to Labor officials, the contractor is using the NAAL data to prepare a separate report for Labor's Employment and Training Administration, expected in early 2010, that will address the literacy of the working poor, workers in high-growth and declining occupations and

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<sup>87</sup>AEFLA National Leadership funds are administered by OVAE, which also administers the Adult Education State Grant Program. According to OVAE officials, National Leadership dollars are directed to IES, which then administers the contract for the study.

<sup>88</sup>According to the study's design report, the instructional strategy selected for this study is the *Sam & Pat* intervention, which includes a textbook, as well as teacher training and technical assistance. The *Sam & Pat* textbook was written by three English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors and is described as a textbook that tailors the methods and concepts of the Wilson and Orton-Gillingham reading systems developed for native speakers of English to meet the needs of adult ESL literacy-level learners.

<sup>89</sup>The study's three key research questions are as follows: (1) How effective is instruction based on the *Sam and Pat* textbook in improving the English reading and speaking skills of low-literate adult English as a Second Language learners? (2) Is *Sam and Pat* more effective for certain groups of students (e.g., native Spanish speakers)? (3) Do impacts on student outcomes vary with the level of service contrast (differences between instruction delivered in classrooms taught by teachers assigned to the *Sam and Pat* condition and instruction delivered in classrooms taught by teachers assigned to the control condition)?

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industries, and nonnative English speaking workers, and address how this information may be utilized when serving these populations in the public workforce system. Separately, Education's NCES was finalizing two studies, according to an NCES official, expected to be released in one report in 2009, examining the oral reading and contextual reading skills of adults with the lowest levels of literacy. The NCES official with whom we spoke about the studies said that the studies will discuss the results for different subgroups, including nonnative English speakers.

Federal officials cited interest in identifying effective approaches to adult English language learning but said that little research on adult English language learning has been conducted or planned by federal agencies because of cost and competing priorities. However, officials did not identify steps to coordinate research planning on adult English language learning across agencies. Education officials said that there are limited funds for rigorous research and multiple research priorities within the department. Furthermore, officials noted that sound research takes years of investment and strategic planning. However, at the same time, officials from the agencies did not identify efforts to coordinate research planning across agencies on adult English language learning, which could help leverage resources used for research. For example, the NCES official responsible for the NAAL studies reported being unaware of Labor's NAAL work at the time that we spoke, and asked for more information about Labor's effort to avoid duplicating efforts. NIFL prepared a working document of research themes and priorities in adult literacy, with input from experts in the field, as well as Education's OVAE. However, the document was submitted to its Interagency Group in January 2008 and, according to a NIFL official, no further action has occurred.

In 2007 and 2008, two working groups identified the need for better collaboration across Education, HHS, Labor, and NIFL on adult education and English language learning research. In September 2007, a planning group, organized to help NIFL consider options for its future work on issues related to adult English language learners, recommended a system to coordinate research efforts on adult English language learner education across organizations and agencies to ensure that strong research methodologies are used and to develop a common knowledge base. However, implementation of this recommendation has not yet been considered by NIFL. Similarly, in July of 2008, the Interagency Adult

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Education Working Group, convened to fulfill Executive Order 13445,<sup>90</sup> reported that there was no unified federal research agenda for adult education, and that, across Education, HHS, Labor, and NIFL, each entity invested in research addressing its individual programmatic needs without considering holistically what educators and policymakers need to know about adult learning. The group recommended greater collaboration in research planning efforts to leverage funds to invest in high-quality scientific research. Specifically, the group recommended that federal agencies meet annually to discuss current and planned research efforts to provide agencies with the opportunity to coordinate their efforts and permit them to plan joint research efforts when possible.<sup>91</sup> In technical comments on a draft of this report, Education indicated that it intends to address the recommendations of the working group, but is “awaiting any final decisions until appropriate leadership positions at Education have been filled under the new administration.”

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## Conclusions

The landscape for providing English language instruction to adults is multifaceted. In addition to the numerous federal programs identified in this report, English language instruction can also be provided by for-profit vendors, private employers, and volunteer organizations. Regarding federal support, there is a wide array of federal programs that may provide English language instruction to adults, yet little data on the extent to which these programs are providing English language instruction. Because they vary greatly in purpose and focus, it is understandable that these programs do not collect data on the extent of support for adult English language instruction; however, in our view, more coordinated information sharing across these programs and their agencies would have a number of possible benefits. Specifically, coordinated information sharing may help agencies assess the demand for services and find the best ways to deliver those services, help agencies discover inefficiencies in program operations and make improvements that may reduce program costs or increase the number of people served, and help to improve the quality of services by learning about the most effective way to deliver services and obtain

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<sup>90</sup>The September 27, 2007, Executive Order on Strengthening Adult Education, required the Secretary of Education to establish and serve as chair of an interagency adult education working group of representatives of federal agencies to report to the President on federal programs, with the primary goal of supporting adult education within 9 months of the date of the order. Exec. Order No. 13,445, 72 Fed. Reg. 56,165 (Oct. 2, 2007).

<sup>91</sup>*Bridges to Opportunity: Federal Adult Education Programs for the 21st Century.*

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positive outcomes. During our review, we found a few instances in which agencies shared information about their initiatives, but we also found instances of missed opportunities to use resources and information to benefit the missions of more than one agency. Similarly, during our review, we found that the agencies invested resources in research studies without taking steps to consider other research needs or plans across agencies. Greater collaboration in research planning could ensure that limited funds for research are put to the best possible use in a field in which there is little research indicating what is effective. Such planning efforts would allow agencies to think more globally about the needs and priorities for research in this area and could help to build a common base of knowledge to inform practitioners on effective approaches to English language instruction for adults. The speed with which adult English language learners acquire English proficiency not only affects the livelihood of these learners and their children, but also their ability to effectively participate in civic life. Without a more coordinated approach, the limited resources available to facilitate English language learning among those who seek it may not be used to their optimal benefit.

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## Recommendations for Executive Action

To ensure that federal programs, states, and local providers are able to optimize resources and knowledge in providing adult English language instruction, we recommend that the Secretary of Education work with the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, and other agencies as appropriate to develop a coordinated approach for routinely and systematically sharing information that can assist federal programs, states, and local providers in achieving efficient service provision. Such coordination may include the following activities:

- developing interagency agreements for sharing information on resources that states and local programs may leverage for adult English language learning,
- devising a plan for routinely sharing information on available technical assistance,
- reviewing the extent to which federal guidance assists local providers in leveraging resources,
- meeting regularly to discuss efforts under way in each agency and to consider potential for joint initiatives, or
- establishing clear time frames for the accomplishment of joint objectives.

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To ensure the most efficient use of available research resources and to inform practitioners and other stakeholders in the area of adult English language instruction, we recommend that the Secretary of Education work with the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, and the National Institute for Literacy to implement a coordinated strategy for planning and conducting research on effective approaches to providing adult English language instruction and disseminating the research results.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, and the National Institute for Literacy for review and comment. Education, HHS, and Labor provided written responses to this report (see apps. V, VI, and VII). The three agencies concurred with our recommendations. Education and Labor also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. NIFL indicated that it had coordinated with Education, and had nothing to add to Education's comments.

In its formal comments, Education noted that the recommendations were consistent with those of the Interagency Adult Education Working Group, whose July 2008 report, pursuant to Executive Order 13445, identified the potential benefits of coordination at the federal level on adult education. Education also noted that a coordinated federal approach to research is necessary to address the most important issues in adult education, including English language learning, and would help ensure that the federal investment in research is optimized. Additionally, Education expressed the intent to pursue relevant opportunities for increased coordination with other federal agencies.

HHS's formal comments emphasized the need for broader resource mapping and coordination across all levels of government and nonprofit entities to ensure the successful delivery of English language instruction.

Finally, Labor, in its formal comments, indicated that it agreed that a coordinated approach to sharing information and conducting planning and research is key to optimizing resources and knowledge in providing English language instruction. Labor added that it is committed to strengthening cooperation with Education and HHS. Additionally, in a separate e-mail, Labor indicated the concurrence of the National Office of Job Corps.

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We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Director of NIFL, and other interested parties. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on GAO's Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or [ashbyc@gao.gov](mailto:ashbyc@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix VIII.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cornelia M. Ashby". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C' and a distinct 'y' tail.

Cornelia M. Ashby  
Director, Education, Workforce,  
and Income Security Issues

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# Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

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Our review focused on (1) trends in the need for and enrollment in federally funded adult English language programs, (2) the nature of federal support for adult English language learning, (3) ways in which states and local public providers have supported English language programs for adults, and (4) federal agencies' plans for research to identify effective approaches to adult English language learning. Overall, to address these research objectives, we selected three key federal agencies—the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Labor—to be included in the scope of our review. We selected these agencies on the basis of their missions to administer education- and workforce-related programs. We also selected these agencies because of their mandate to collaborate with the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), which is tasked with serving as a resource to support literacy—the development of reading and writing skills—across all age groups.

To answer all of our research objectives, we also conducted state and local interviews in California, Illinois, Minnesota, and Washington State. We selected these states for our site visits because they provided a mix of large, adult limited English proficient populated states (California and Illinois) and high-growth states (Minnesota and Washington State). We also selected these states for diversity in administrative structures and practices under way regarding adult English language learning. For example, Minnesota's and California's Adult Education State Grant Programs are housed within their state education agencies, while Illinois' and Washington State's are housed in the community college agencies. In addition to these site visits, we selected 12 states for semistructured telephone interviews with state officials responsible for administering the Adult Education State Grant Program. Of these 12 states, 6 were selected because they had the largest adult limited English proficient populations in the nation in 2007 (California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas), and the other 6 states were selected because they had the highest growth rates in their adult limited English proficient populations from 2000 to 2007 (Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Nevada, and Tennessee). To determine the states with the largest and highest growth adult limited English proficient populations, we used U.S. Census Bureau data on the English speaking ability of adults ages 18 and over who speak a language other than English at home.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, we used American

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<sup>1</sup>Specifically, we included in our calculations of the state adult limited English proficient populations those who speak English “not at all,” “not well,” or “well.” We based this definition on our review of literature using the same data source to assess English proficiency.

Community Survey (ACS) data for 2007 to determine the largest adult limited English proficient populated states, and we used 2000 Census data and 2007 ACS data to determine the states with the highest growth. Together, the 12 states account for 75 percent of the national adult limited English proficient population and 75 percent of the Adult Education State Grant Program's national enrollment in English language classes for 2007. In addition, we consulted with outside researchers, academics, industry associations, union representatives, and others—including the American Library Association, AFL-CIO, Asian-American Justice Center, Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs, Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Center for Law and Social Policy, Institute for the Study of International Migration, Literacywork International, Migration Policy Institute, National Association of Manufacturers, National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, National Center for Family Literacy, National Coalition for Literacy, National Council of La Raza, National Job Corps Association, Pew Hispanic Center, Proliteracy, Refugee Council USA, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

To determine what is known about trends in the need and enrollment in federally funded programs, we reviewed and analyzed Census and ACS data on English language speaking ability for 2000 to 2007. Both the decennial Census and ACS collect self-reported information on the English language speaking ability of respondents who speak a language other than English at home. Specifically, respondents are asked whether they speak English “very well,” “well,” “not well,” or “not at all.” To assess the reliability of the Census Bureau data, we (1) reviewed Census Bureau documents and external literature on the reliability of the data and (2) met with internal GAO staff knowledgeable about the reliability of the Census Bureau data. We also reviewed Adult Education State Grant Program enrollment data for 2000 to 2007 reported in the Adult Education National Reporting System (NRS). To assess the reliability of data reported by Education, we (1) reviewed NRS implementation guidelines, (2) interviewed agency officials knowledgeable about the data, and (3) interviewed officials responsible for administering their Adult Education State Grants in the 14 states included in our review about procedures used to ensure the reliability of the data they report to the NRS. We determined that both the Census Bureau and NRS data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our report. However, it is important to note a few limitations of and modifications to the data. Regarding the Census Bureau data, the data are self-reported by respondents, and are not based on any standard assessment of speaking ability. Additionally, the data are limited to English speaking ability, and do not ask respondents to assess their abilities in reading or writing

English. Regarding the NRS data, the definitions of the NRS English language levels changed in 2006. Specifically, the highest level was removed and one of the lowest levels was broken into two levels. We note this change when we discuss enrollment trends by level in the report. In addition, Education officials within the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), as well as state officials responsible for administering their Adult Education State Grant programs, reported federal and state efforts to improve NRS data over the last several years. Specifically, OVAE also issued a data quality checklist for use by states to certify compliance with assessment policies and developed monitoring tools for OVAE monitoring site visits. OVAE and state officials reported training and technical assistance, and some of the state officials with whom we spoke reported state data systems that have improved their ability to ensure the data are reliable. It is also important to note that the NRS only includes data for programs funded by the Adult Education State Grant Program. We also reviewed information on adult literacy from the National Household Education Surveys (NHES)<sup>2</sup> and the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL),<sup>3</sup> both sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics. To identify whether other federal programs that allow for adult English language learning have national enrollment data specific to such instruction, we also interviewed federal agency and program officials for agencies included in the scope of our review.

To assess the nature of federal support, we identified federal programs that allow for adult English language learning within Education, HHS, and Labor. To do this, we began by interviewing federal agency officials about programs within their agencies supporting adult English language learning and reviewing the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* and other relevant literature. We reviewed federal laws and interviewed federal officials responsible for each program to verify that the programs allow for English language learning for adults and to learn about the extent that they collect data on spending and other data related to adult participation in

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<sup>2</sup>NHES surveys focused on adult education in select years. English language learning was among the types of education activities included in the Adult Education Survey of the NHES. Respondents are asked about participation in classes in the 12 months prior to the interview and reasons for taking the classes.

<sup>3</sup>The 2003 NAAL is an assessment of English literacy among American adults ages 16 and older. Over 19,000 adults participated in interviews and tests in their homes, and some in prisons, to measure prose, document, and quantitative literacy. The NAAL asks about language background, including the age at which participants learned English, and current or past participation in English language classes.

English language instruction in their programs. We also identified some of the federal programs through interviews and data gathered from local providers of English language programs in the 4 states we visited, and corroborated this information with our review of the law and interviews with federal program officials. For the purposes of identifying programs, we generally defined adults as those who were at least age 16 and not enrolled in secondary school. The programs identified in this report may not capture all programs that support English language learning for adults within the three agencies. We reviewed agency strategic plans, and for the programs included in our review, performance reports and the Office of Management and Budget's Performance Assessment Rating Tool. We interviewed Job Corps Center managers and obtained information from 28 National Farmworkers' Job Program grantees about their experiences in serving English language learners. In addition, in the 4 states we visited, we also met with state program officials responsible for administering their Adult Education State Grant, Even Start, refugee and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families programs, and Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) title I programs. We visited multiple WIA one-stops, Even Start providers, a Head Start grantee, a Community Services Block Grant grantee, a Job Corps Center, a Youthbuild site, a National Farmworkers' Job Program grantee, two community-based organizations (CBO) receiving Trade Adjustment Assistance funds, and grantees of special Labor initiatives.

To determine ways in which states and local providers support English language learning for adults, we conducted semistructured telephone interviews with officials responsible for administering the Adult Education State Grants in the 12 states that we have previously mentioned. In the 4 states we visited, in addition to interviewing state officials responsible for administering federal programs as we discuss in the previous paragraph, we also interviewed providers of adult English language programs. In sum, we interviewed 16 CBOs, 11 community colleges, and 8 adult schools. In selecting providers to visit, we considered recommendations from state officials. We asked state officials responsible for administering their adult education and refugee programs to recommend local providers with the following criteria in mind: demonstrated effectiveness and cost-effectiveness, leveraged community resources or developed private partnerships, exhibited promising practices, or reduced waiting lists. We selected providers from their recommendations to get a range of different types of providers. These interviews focused on ways in which English language instruction is provided, spending and cost, coordination with other public and private entities, and challenges to supporting English language learning.

To determine what federal research is planned in this area, we met with federal officials from Education, HHS, and Labor for the programs included in this review. We also met with the officials from the Institute of Education Sciences and NIFL to learn about ongoing research and research priorities regarding English language learning for adults, as well as efforts to coordinate research across the agencies. We also identified and reviewed published research in the field of adult English language learning. We conducted our review from May 2008 through July 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

# Appendix II: Education, HHS, and Labor Programs Authorized for Funds to Be Used for Adult English Language Learning

Program/ Funding stream	Program purpose/Goal	Adult English language learning allowable under the activity outlined in law
<b>Department of Education</b>		
Adult Education State Grant Program  20 U.S.C. §§ 9201-9276	To assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency; to assist adults who are parents to obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children; and to assist adults in the completion of secondary school education.	English literacy programs designed to help individuals of limited English proficiency achieve competence in the English language
Even Start  20 U.S.C. §§ 6381-6381k	To help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy and improve the educational opportunities of low-income families, by integrating early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program.	Adult literacy
Migrant Education Even Start Program  20 U.S.C. §§ 6391-6399	To help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy and improve the educational opportunities of low-income families, by integrating early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program.	Adult literacy
Migrant Education High School Equivalency Program  20 U.S.C. § 1070d-2	To assist migrant and seasonal farmworker students in obtaining the equivalent of a high school diploma and, subsequently, to begin postsecondary education, enter military service, or obtain employment.	Essential supportive services
Pell Grant Program  20 U.S.C. § 1070a	To help ensure access to high-quality postsecondary education by providing financial aid in the form of grants in an efficient, financially sound, and customer-responsive manner.	Noncredit or remedial courses (including English language instruction) determined to be necessary to help the student prepare for the pursuit of a first undergraduate baccalaureate degree or certificate or, in the case of courses in English language instruction, to be necessary to enable the student to utilize existing knowledge, training, or skills
English Language Acquisition State Grants  20 U.S.C. §§ 6821-6827	To improve the education of limited English proficient children and youth by helping them to learn English and meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards.	Family literacy, parent outreach, and training activities designed to assist parents to become active participants in the education of their children
21st Century Community Learning Centers Program  20 U.S.C. §§ 7171-7176	To provide opportunities to establish or expand activities in community learning centers that provide academic enrichment and additional services to students who attend low-performing schools to help meet core academic achievement standards and to offer families of students opportunities for literacy and related educational development.	Programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy

**Appendix II: Education, HHS, and Labor  
Programs Authorized for Funds to Be Used for  
Adult English Language Learning**

<b>Program/ Funding stream</b>	<b>Program purpose/Goal</b>	<b>Adult English language learning allowable under the activity outlined in law</b>
Select TRIO Programs: Talent Search, Veterans Upward Bound, <sup>a</sup> Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers  20 U.S.C. §§ 1070a-11, 1070a-12, 1070a-13, 1070a-14, and 1070a-16	To carry out a program of making grants and contracts designed to identify qualified individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, to prepare them for a program of postsecondary education, to provide support services for such students who are pursuing programs of postsecondary education, to motivate and prepare students for doctoral programs, and to train individuals serving or preparing for service in programs and projects so designed.	Programs and activities that are specially designed for students of limited English proficiency
Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution Program  20 U.S.C. § 1059g	To support institutions of education in their effort to increase their self-sufficiency by improving academic programs, institutional management, and fiscal stability.	Academic tutoring and counseling programs and student support services
Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions Program  20 U.S.C. § 1059f	To support institutions of education in their effort to increase their self-sufficiency by improving academic programs, institutional management, and fiscal stability.	Academic tutoring and counseling programs and student support services
Strengthening Institutions Program  20 U.S.C. §§ 1057-1059b	To improve the academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability of eligible institutions, to increase their self-sufficiency and strengthen their capacity to make a substantial contribution to the higher education resources of the nation.	Tutoring, counseling, and student service programs designed to improve academic success, including innovative, customized, instruction courses designed to help retain students and move the students rapidly into core courses and through program completion, which may include remedial education and English language instruction
Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education  20 U.S.C. §§ 1138-1138d	To enable institutions of higher education, combinations of such institutions, and other public and private nonprofit institutions and agencies to improve postsecondary education opportunities.	Introduction of reforms in remedial education, including English language instruction, to customize remedial courses to student goals and help students progress rapidly from remedial courses into core courses and through postsecondary program completion
Hispanic Serving Institutions Program  20 U.S.C. §§ 1101-1103g	To develop and carryout activities to improve and expand the institution's capacity to serve Hispanic and other low-income students.	Tutoring, counseling, and student service programs designed to improve academic success, including innovative and customized instruction courses (which may include remedial education and English language instruction) designed to help retain students and move the students rapidly into core courses and through program completion

**Appendix II: Education, HHS, and Labor  
Programs Authorized for Funds to Be Used for  
Adult English Language Learning**

<b>Program/ Funding stream</b>	<b>Program purpose/Goal</b>	<b>Adult English language learning allowable under the activity outlined in law</b>
<b>Department of Health and Human Services</b>		
Refugee Social Services <sup>b</sup>	To help refugees become economically self-sufficient.	English language training
8 U.S.C. § 1522(c)(2)		
Refugee Resettlement Targeted Assistance Grants <sup>c</sup>	To help refugees become economically self-sufficient.	English language training
8 U.S.C. § 1522(c)(2)		
Refugee Resettlement Matching Grant Program	To help refugees become economically self-sufficient within 120 to 180 days.	English language training
8 U.S.C. § 1522(c)(1)		
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF)	To provide assistance to needy families; end dependence on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and encourage two-parent families.	Education directly related to employment, vocational education training, and job skills training directly related to employment
42 U.S.C. §§ 601-619		
Head Start Program	To promote the school readiness of low-income children by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development.	Family literacy
42 U.S.C. §§ 9831-9852c		
Community Services Block Grant Program	To reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities, and empower low-income families and individuals to become fully self-sufficient.	Literacy/Family literacy
42 U.S.C. §§ 9901-9926		
<b>Department of Labor</b>		
Youth Activities, Adult and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training Activities	To provide workforce investment activities that increase the employment, retention, and earning of participants and increase the occupation skill attainment by participants, which will improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the nation's economy.	Adult education and literacy activities combined with occupational and job skills training (under training services)
29 U.S.C. §§ 2811-2872		
National Farmworker Jobs Program	To strengthen the ability of eligible migrant and seasonal farm workers and their families to achieve economic self-sufficiency.	Educational assistance, literacy assistance, and English language programs
29 U.S.C. § 2912		

**Appendix II: Education, HHS, and Labor  
Programs Authorized for Funds to Be Used for  
Adult English Language Learning**

<b>Program/ Funding stream</b>	<b>Program purpose/Goal</b>	<b>Adult English language learning allowable under the activity outlined in law</b>
Youthbuild Program 29 U.S.C. § 2918a	To assist disadvantaged youth ages 16 to 24 in obtaining education and employment skills to achieve economic self-sufficiency; to foster leadership skills; and to expand the supply of affordable housing.	Language instruction for individuals with limited English proficiency
Job Corps Program 29 U.S.C. §§ 2881-2901	To assist eligible youth ages 16 to 24 who need and can benefit from an intensive program operated in a group setting in residential and nonresidential centers, to become more responsible, employable, and productive citizens.	Education and access to core and intensive services provided through WIA one-stop system
Trade Adjustment Assistance 19 U.S.C. § 2296	To provide adjustment assistance to qualified workers adversely affected by foreign trade.	Remedial and other education and training to assist in obtaining suitable employment
WIA Incentive Grants <sup>d</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 9273	To award grants to states that exceed performance levels of WIA title I, title II, and Perkins III <sup>e</sup> to carry out innovative programs consistent with the requirements of each program.	Innovative programs consistent with the requirements of WIA title I, title II (Adult Education), and Perkins IV

Sources: Federal laws, regulations, program guidance, and program officials.

Note: The federal programs and funding streams listed in this table were identified during interviews with federal agency officials and state and local providers, and reviews of laws and regulations. The programs listed are limited to those for which adult English language learning activities appear to be authorized under the law and federal program officials confirmed that they are allowable. The list of programs may not capture all programs authorized to support adult English language learning activities within the three agencies. Furthermore, because of the limited data available, it is not known to what extent these programs do support adult English language learning. Eligibility for services under the programs listed in this table can vary on the basis of immigration status; for example, while refugees generally are eligible for TANF services, legal permanent residents in the country for less than 5 years generally are not.

<sup>a</sup>The Veterans Upward Bound project is one of three types of grants under the overall Upward Bound program.

<sup>b</sup>45 C.F.R. § 400.140 (2008).

<sup>c</sup>45 C.F.R. § 400.310 (2008).

<sup>d</sup>Although funded through the Department of Education (and codified in title 20 of the U.S. Code with provisions generally administered by the department), incentive grants are administered by the Department of Labor in collaboration with Education.

<sup>e</sup>According to Education officials, because Perkins IV has supplanted Perkins III and removed the requirement that funds be reserved for WIA Incentive grants, performance under Perkins III is no longer considered in determining eligibility for such grants.

# Appendix III: Selected High-Growth and Community-Based Labor Grants That Align with the Limited English Proficiency and Hispanic Worker Initiative

Locations	Grantee type	Amount of grant	Description
Texas	College	\$837,424	Offered training that involved an English language learning component to 120 individuals in automotive technology.
New York	Community college	494,386	Provided English language and occupational skills training to hospitality industry workers.
Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania	Private training corporation	1,500,000	Supported occupational training and English courses to limited English proficient Job Corps participants to prepare them for health care careers.
Washington State	Community college	2,762,496	Provided occupational training and English language instruction to meet the needs of health care employers in critical areas.
Maryland	Community college	1,649,348	Builds on existing occupational program focused on the transportation sector, and provides remedial English language instruction for trainees whose primary language is not English.

Sources: Labor summaries of these grants; GAO interviews with Labor officials and grantees.

# Appendix IV: Methods for Providing English Language Instruction among Labor Grantees That We Interviewed

Labor program	Site provided English Language Instruction through Adult Education State Grant services and resources				
	Site provided English language instruction directly	Site was itself an Adult Education State Grant provider	Site referred clients to Adult Education State Grant providers	Site used Adult Education State Grant provider to develop English language curriculum	Site used Adult Education State Grant provider to provide English language instruction
Job Corps (1 visited* of 120 centers) <sup>a</sup>					•
National Farmworkers Jobs Program (1* of 52 grantees) <sup>b</sup>	• <sup>c</sup>		•		
Youthbuild (1* of 107 grantees) <sup>d</sup>	• <sup>e</sup>				
Limited English Proficiency and Hispanic Worker Initiative (LEPHWI) Site: Minneapolis <sup>f</sup> (1* of 5 sites)					•
LEPHWI Site: San Diego (1 of 5 sites)	•			•	•
Community-Based Job Training grantee: Seattle Community Colleges (1* of several grants that align with LEPHWI)		•			
New Americans Centers Demonstration Project grant: Arkansas <sup>g</sup> (1 of 2 state grants)	•		•		
New Americans Centers Demonstration Project grant: Iowa <sup>h</sup> (1 of 2 state grants)	•		•		

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by Labor grantees visited during our review, and provided during interviews with grantee and Labor officials.

Note: An asterisk indicates interviews that GAO conducted in person.

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**Appendix IV: Methods for Providing English Language Instruction among Labor Grantees That We Interviewed**

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<sup>a</sup>In addition to visiting this Job Corps Center, we obtained information from officials who manage 41 Job Corps Centers in multiple states. These officials stated that the centers they manage provide English language instruction both directly, with their own resources, and indirectly, through other providers.

<sup>b</sup>In addition to visiting this grantee, we obtained information from 28 farmworkers' program grantees, 27 of which offered or provided access to English language instruction. About one-half of these grantees provided instruction both directly, with their own resources, and indirectly, through relationships with Adult Education State Grant Program or other providers.

<sup>c</sup>This site provided English language instruction directly in the following two ways: through a vocational school for farmworkers and through an English language teacher hired directly, who led classes at a nearby one-stop.

<sup>d</sup>In addition to visiting this grantee, we conducted a telephone interview with another grantee who told us that the program had referred participants to a local community college for English language instruction, but was about to acquire language software to provide this service directly.

<sup>e</sup>Officials at this site explained that English language instruction was integrated into the curriculum, not delivered through separate classes.

<sup>f</sup>When the Labor grant expired, this grantee applied for and received a grant from the Office of Refugee Resettlement to support English language instruction, according to grantee officials.

<sup>g</sup>English language instruction was provided at four one-stops. According to officials, most participants were referred to Adult Education State Grant providers. However, some instruction was provided at the one-stops by non-Adult Education State Grant community-based organizations.

<sup>h</sup>English language instruction was provided at 12 one-stops. Clients at the one-stops accessed commercially available English language software, with some support provided by one-stop staff, some of whom were former English language teachers, according to the officials. In addition, referrals were made to Adult Education State Grant Program providers.

# Appendix V: Comments from the Department of Education



## UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL AND ADULT EDUCATION

June 23, 2009

Ms. Cornelia M. Ashby  
Director, Education, Workforce,  
and Income Security Issues  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Ashby:

I am writing in response to your request for comments on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO's) draft report (GAO 09-575) dated July 2009, entitled "English Language Learning: Diverse Federal and State Efforts to Support Adult English Language Learning Could Benefit from More Coordination." The Department of Education (Department) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the GAO draft report.

The following are responses to the two recommendations in the report for the Secretary of Education to coordinate with other federal agencies in the sharing of information and in developing a strategy for conducting research that supports adult English language learning.

**Recommendation 1:** The Secretary of Education should work with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Labor (Labor), and other agencies as appropriate to develop a coordinated approach for routinely and systematically sharing information that can assist federal programs, states, and local providers in achieving efficient service provision.

**Response:** The Department concurs with this recommendation. GAO's finding corresponds to the Interagency Adult Education Working Group's recommendation in its report pursuant to Executive Order 13445 (Executive Order), "Bridges to Opportunity: Federal Adult Education Programs for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," that was published in July 2008. This Working Group, chaired by the Secretary of Education, consisted of the Secretaries of HHS, Labor, the Interior, Housing and Urban Development, and Veterans Affairs, as well as the Attorney General. The Working Group stated that the federal government should promote a unified approach to the dissemination of information on adult education services. The Working Group further stated that coordinating the dissemination of information on available programs would help many more eligible adults enroll in adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), and English as a second

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language (ESL) programs. The Department will explore with HHS, Labor, and other agencies appropriate options for better interagency collaboration on this issue.

**Recommendation 2:** The Secretary of Education should work with HHS, Labor, and the National Institute for Literacy to implement a coordinated strategy for planning and conducting research on effective approaches to providing adult English language instruction and disseminating the research results.

**Response:** This position is also consistent with the Working Group's recommendation in its Executive Order report. The Working Group recommended that federal agencies coordinate research efforts across federal agencies on issues related to adult education and employment. The Department believes that a coordinated federal approach to planning and implementing research is needed in order to help ensure that research addresses the most important issues in adult education, including research on providing English language instruction, and to ensure the federal investment in adult education research is maximized. The Department will work with its federal partners to determine the appropriate options for accomplishing this objective and the next steps for implementing GAO's recommendation.

The Department continues to seek out relevant opportunities to coordinate with other federal agencies. As the report notes, the Department has collaborated with Labor on such projects as Labor's Limited English Proficient Hispanic Worker Initiative. The Department is also working in partnership with Labor on its adult learning strategies workgroup, as well as on the National Assessment of Adult Literacy secondary data analysis related to adult English language learners. The Department also worked closely with representatives from federal, state, and regional Labor offices on our Adult Education Coordination and Planning project. Likewise, in addition to Department staff collaborating with Health and Human Services staff on a number of health literacy initiatives and on issues related to adult English language learners, we have assisted the HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement at its annual stakeholders' conference by disseminating information on opportunities for adult English language education programs. Along with Labor and HHS, the Department has also collaborated with the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Citizenship on a number of activities important to adult English language learners, including the naturalization test redesign, creating an online professional development course for adult educators to teach English literacy and civics, and working closely with DHS on work related to its New Americans Taskforce (including the design and launch of the USALearns web portal). The Department remains committed to working strategically with our sister federal agencies to improve the access and overall quality of adult English language learning services.

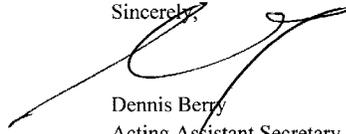
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**Appendix V: Comments from the Department  
of Education**

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I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the GAO report. If you have any questions or concerns regarding our response, please contact Cheryl Keenan at (202) 245-7810.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dennis Berry", is written over the word "Sincerely,".

Dennis Berry  
Acting Assistant Secretary  
for Vocational and Adult Education

# Appendix VI: Comments from the Department of Health and Human Services



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Assistant Secretary for Legislation  
Washington, DC 20201

JUL 6 2009

Cornelia M. Ashby, Director  
Education, Workforce, and  
Income Security Issues  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street N.W.  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Ashby:

Enclosed are comments on the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) report entitled: "ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: Diverse Federal and State Efforts to Support Adult English Language Learning Could Benefit from More Coordination" (GAO-09-575).

The Department appreciates the opportunity to review this report before its publication.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Pisaro Clark".

Barbara Pisaro Clark  
Acting Assistant Secretary for Legislation

Attachment

**COMMENTS OF THE ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ON  
THE GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE DRAFT REPORT TITLED,  
“ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: DIVERSE FEDERAL AND STATE EFFORTS  
TO SUPPORT ADULT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING COULD BENEFIT FROM  
MORE COORDINATION” GAO-09-575**

The Administration for Children and Families appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report.

GAO Recommendations

To ensure that federal programs, states, and local providers are able to optimize resources and knowledge in providing adult English language instruction, we recommend that the Secretary of Education work with HHS, Labor, and other agencies as appropriate to develop a coordinated approach for routinely and systematically sharing information that can assist federal programs, states, and local providers in achieving efficient service provision. Such coordination may include:

- developing interagency agreements for sharing information on resources states and local programs may leverage for adult English language learning;
- devising a plan for routinely sharing information on available technical assistance;
- reviewing the extent to which federal guidance assists local providers in leveraging resources;
- meeting regularly to discuss efforts underway in each agency and to consider potential for joint initiatives; or
- establishing clear timeframes for accomplishment of joint objectives.

To ensure the most efficient use of available research resources and to inform practitioners and other stakeholders in the area of adult English language instruction, we recommend that the Secretary of Education work with HHS, Labor and the National Institute for Literacy to implement a coordinated strategy for planning and conducting research on effective approaches to providing adult English language instruction and disseminating the research results.

ACF Comments

In addition to recommendations noted in the GAO report, a broader resource mapping is essential. The identification of needs and the activities to locate resources should be comprehensive and well coordinated. For example, many refugees and other newcomers have transportation limitations, particularly new arrivals. Coordination should include Federal, State, local and non-profit entities to facilitate the successful delivery of English as a Second Language services. The location and the scheduling of adult English training is a significant factor in determining availability and access.

# Appendix VII: Comments from the Department of Labor

**U.S. Department of Labor**

Employment and Training Administration  
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20210



JUN 29 2009

Ms. Cornelia M. Ashby  
Director  
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G. Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Ashby:

This letter is the Department of Labor (the Department), Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) response to the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) draft report entitled, "ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: *Diverse Federal and State Efforts to Support Adult English Language Learning Could Benefit from More Coordination.*" We appreciate the opportunity to comment.

GAO notes a number of statistics of concern in their report. Specifically,

- The number of adults who speak English less than "very well" grew by 21.8 percent between 2000 and 2007;
- 4.3 million adults reported speaking no English at all in 2007; and
- Foreign born persons – who are much more likely than native born persons to lack English proficiency – accounted for about 16 percent of the U.S. civilian labor force in 2007.

Because limited English proficiency often contributes to lower levels of income and educational attainment, these statistics demonstrate the need for increased Federal, state and local efforts to remediate the English language ability of the American workforce.

While the Department has taken a number of steps to aid the needs of adults with limited English proficiency to improve their skills and obtain employment, we agree that a coordinated approach for sharing information and conducting planning and research is key to optimizing resources and knowledge in providing adult English language instruction. The Department is committed to further strengthening our cooperative partnership with the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services in the area of adult basic education and other areas of shared programmatic activities, and looks forward to working with our Federal partners in implementing GAO's recommendation to increase coordination.

The report highlights some of our special initiatives in ETA to aid those with limited English language ability to acquire the language skills necessary to succeed in the workplace. Specifically, the report cites our Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and Hispanic Worker Initiative, which was a strategic effort to improve access to employment and training services for LEP persons and to address the specific workforce challenges

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**Appendix VII: Comments from the  
Department of Labor**

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facing Hispanic Americans through our workforce programs. The report also mentions our New Americans Centers Demonstration Grants which provides job placement, community service referrals, translation, language and occupational training, resettlement assistance, supportive services, small business assistance, and technical and legal assistance concerning documentation, civic responsibilities and other appropriate services to immigrants in becoming part of the local community and economy.

The report also describes a number of activities under our existing statutory and formula programs that allow for the use of English language assistance for adults such as language instruction for individuals with limited English proficiency, remedial and other education and training, adult education and literacy services combined with occupational and job skills training. The report also summarizes some of our research efforts to better understand the language needs and barriers of those adults with limited English proficiency, such as our work conducted as a result of the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

The Department has also issued guidance to the workforce investment system to educate and alert the system of the needs of adults with limited English language ability and refer them for further assistance. Most recently, on March 18, 2009, the ETA issued Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) Number 14-08 which provided policy guidance and direction for implementation of the Workforce Investment Act and Wagner-Peyser Act funds in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. In that guidance, ETA places an emphasis on serving low-income, displaced and under-skilled adults, including those with limited English ability. Specifically, TEGL 14-08 notes that:

“...WIA funds may be used for adult education, including basic or English language education, as delivered through community colleges and other high quality public programs and community organizations that provide such services....”

Finally, ETA utilizes credentials and common performance measures (e.g., obtained employment, increases or gains in earnings, and career advancement) to determine the success of individuals upon completion of job training programs. For those programs that provide language training, these measures demonstrate that individuals will be self-sufficient and capable of supporting their families.

If you would like additional information, please do not hesitate to call me at (202) 693-2700.

Sincerely,

  
Jane Oates  
Assistant Secretary

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# Appendix VIII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

Cornelia M. Ashby, (202) 512-7215 or [ashbyc@gao.gov](mailto:ashbyc@gao.gov).

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## Staff Acknowledgments

Betty Ward-Zukerman, Assistant Director, and Cady S. Panetta, Analyst-in-Charge, managed this report. Other staff who made key contributions to all aspects of the report include Chris Morehouse and Anthony Mercaldo. Alexandra Edwards and Meredith Trauner assisted with data collection. Craig Winslow provided legal assistance. Ashley McCall assisted in identifying relevant literature and background information. Ken Bombara, Ron Fecso, and Cindy Gilbert assisted with the methodology and statistical analysis. Sue Bernstein, Melinda Cordero, and Jena Sinkfield helped prepare the final report and the graphics.

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