



## **Keep Adult Education in the Pennsylvania Department of Education!**

**S**tudents are in a classroom, preparing to take the GED® exam. A tutor is working with a new adult reader. Recent immigrants are learning English and civics. Parents and children are learning together. Workers are brushing up on reading and math. Looks like education. Works like education. This is adult education, and it *is* education.

What Department should administer such programs? The answer is obvious: the Department of Education. In Pennsylvania, that is who has overseen adult basic education funding since 1965. But if the Governor endorses a key recommendation from a report by the Pennsylvania Economy League (PEL), commissioned by the Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board, and the legislature agrees, adult education would move to the Department of Labor and Industry.

That doesn't make sense. The Department of Education's Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) runs an effective, accountable system of programming and professional development. ABLE programs in every county serve 50,000 people each year, from out-of-school youth to grandparents, and every description in between. These people know they need to be able to read, get a high school diploma, learn English, help their children with homework, or improve their basic skills in any number of ways, to make a better life for themselves and their families. ABLE programs help people meet their goals as community members, parents, and workers.

In fact, ABLE addresses work readiness and postsecondary transition head on. ABLE funds the Workforce Education Research Center (WERC) at Penn State, which operates the PA Workforce Investment Network (PA WIN), working with CareerLinks and employers to provide basic-skills instruction, and WorkABLE, helping adult education programs provide sound work-based curriculum. ABLE's Career Gateway program supports students' transition to postsecondary education and training. The joint Education-Public Welfare Move Up program helps move people from welfare to work.

To be able to get a job, or a better job, is a major reason many adults come back to school. ABLE programs help thousands earn a diploma or become work-ready. But employment is not the only goal, and you don't have to think too hard to understand that education is much more than job training and readiness. Moving adult education would be akin to moving all public education programs to Labor & Industry because most students will eventually be part of the workforce.

What would happen to adult education programs not directly related to work? You can bet that smaller adult literacy programs that do not have a work focus will not be the priority for limited funds. Even larger agencies will be in jeopardy of losing all but their work-related education programs. What are the survival chances of basic literacy, ESL, and family literacy programs?

Quite simply, the recommendation to move Adult Basic and Literacy Education to the Department of Labor is ill-advised, short-sighted, unwise, unfair, and utterly misguided. It disrespects the expertise of educators and the needs of Pennsylvania's millions of undereducated adults. Let's stop it right now, before any more precious time and energy is wasted on a bad idea.

Further development and building coordination of workforce education services between the Departments of Education and Labor & Industry, and the Department of Public Welfare, for that matter — that's a fine idea. But keep education where it belongs: in the Department of Education.