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STEPPING UP TO ROI

[Stepping Up to ROI in Adult Education: A Survey of State Activity](#), by James Parker and Gail Spangenberg, is a new report just issued by CAAL. The return-on-investment survey was carried out from February to June 2013. The report is part of a project that will include an invitational Roundtable in November and a related companion paper in February 2014. The Annie Casey and Charles Stewart Mott Foundations are funding the work, with in-kind support provided by McGraw Hill Financial.

Stepping Up to ROI presents findings, based on input from state adult education directors or their designates, on what state adult education programs are doing on the ROI front, how and why they are doing it, and with what provable/quantifiable results.

The paper probes a number of areas and possible interconnections as a way to get a better current sense of the state of play in ROI. For example, it examines the extent to which programs measure

outcomes identified as important to employers and current/future employees, and the extent to which the states are prepared to implement expanded WIA ROI measures if/when the reformed Workforce Investment Act is passed. It looks at whether states offer college or work-readiness certificate programs and, if so, if there is a connection between those programs and the gathering of ROI evidence. It considers ABE governance, comprehensive state planning, and other variables to see if there are causative links to ROI activity. Forty-nine states and the District of Columbia responded to the survey, and many offered suggestions on how the U.S. Department of Education's National Reporting System (NRS) could be improved to better reflect measures of adult education and workforce skills achievement and encourage ROI practice.

The survey findings reveal a mixed ROI record across the country. ROI is described by the authors as "in a highly fluid state," but the findings nevertheless offer encouraging evidence of extensive and growing ROI activity, much more than CAAL expected to find. The report offers numerous suggestions and next-step actions that can be taken to further develop state ROI capacity.

Four reviewers provide comments in *Stepping Up to ROI* about its value to the states and others concerned with developing state ROI capacity. One notes that "perhaps the greatest value of this report is its honesty in pointing out the real challenges states face, especially in the areas of data collection, data sharing, and communication between programs. ROI isn't just an afterthought. Increasingly, funding for new [adult education] initiatives will require proof of past results. We must begin with the end in mind."



TASC & HiSET: New Routes to High School Equivalency

Our last issue featured an article on the proven benefits of investing in the GED diploma. Two other alternative tests have recently been making impressive inroads into this market and merit consideration as a route to high school equivalency. They are **CTB/McGraw-Hill's Test for Assessment of Secondary Completion** (TASC), and the **High School Equivalency Test** (HiSET) of Educational Testing Service and the Iowa Testing Programs.

TASC is billed as "a state-of-the-art and affordable high school equivalency assessment." HiSET is "an accessible, affordable alternative test for states, educators, test takers, and test center administrators." Both have been widely piloted and they will formally launch in an impressive number of states in January 2014. According to an official of McGraw-Hill "currently 34% of annual test takers are in states that have left the Pearson/GED test and adopted either HiSET or TASC." Seven states have already adopted one of both of the tests. Active RFPs are in development now

in nine other states and the Job Corps. RFPs are expected from 15 additional states later this year or in 2014. Moreover, four states have approved or plan to approve multiple testing, and another 19 need "statute/code changes to comply with procurement rules and regulations."

The [TASC](#) and [HiSET](#) websites provide detailed information about what the tests measure and for what purposes, how they are scored, the delivery formats, what they cost, and whom to contact for further information.



HUMAN INTEREST

▶ [I.READ.I.WRITE](#) is an ongoing project of Pakistani photojournalist Laura Boushnak about the importance of literacy and education to the lives of Arab women, and to the barriers they must overcome to gain access to even the lowest level of education. Among the many stories captured by Ms. Boushnak in a most eloquent even poetic way is that of Fayza, a young woman in Yemen who was married at age 8 and divorced at age 9. At 14, her father insisted she marry again, and by the time she was 18 she had three children and was divorced a third time. Somehow her sister talked her into going back to school (only 27 percent of girls in Yemen attend secondary school). In time, Fayza went on to college. When Ms. Boushnak met her, rather than focus on the problem(s) of early marriage, she chose to support Fayza by emphasizing instead the life-changing benefits of education. She helped her get a grant, and the young woman began studying college-level business this past year. For this and other stories about the resiliency of women in the Middle East who are reaching out for and achieving literacy and higher education, often at great odds, go to Ms. Boushnak's blog at the link given above.

▶ [The Musick Lifelong Learning Award](#) was established in July 2012 by Mark and Lynn Musick out of appreciation for the sacrifices and encouragements given by their parents to make further education possible in their lives. Each year it recognizes the achievements of two adult learners from the Regional Adult Education Program in Gate City, Virginia. (See [CAAL E-News Issue #29.](#)) The first two awards were given in August 2012. Aaron Absher and Dewey Church are the awardees for 2013. They were recently presented with a cash award and recognized in a special ceremony for earning their GED. Since getting his GED (writing was his special challenge), Absher has gained employment and has gone on to courses at Mountain Empire Community College. "This program has opened so many doors for me," he said, "but I'm just getting started and the sky is the limit." Church (who needed help with math and writing to qualify for the GED), became a GED graduate at age 50. "This means the world to me," said Church. "I've strived for this all of my life. I hope to be taking some college courses in the near future and continue my education." For more information, contact Rebecca Scott at rscott@race2ged.org.



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