



Reach Higher, AMERICA

OVERCOMING CRISIS IN THE U.S. WORKFORCE

QUOTES FROM THE FIELD

David Beré, President, Dollar General Corporation

"To maintain the United States' ability to compete globally, we must address the silent epidemic that plagues our nation. The inability of so many among our adult citizens and workforce to read, write, and speak English and to perform other vital basic workforce and life tasks at a proficient level threatens the social fabric of our nation and the vibrancy of our local and national economies. Dollar General applauds the National Commission on Adult Literacy and its efforts to raise awareness of the urgent adult education and workforce skills needs facing our nation. We hope the nation will give this important report very careful attention."

George Boggs, President & CEO, American Association of Community Colleges

"Policy makers in the United States are awakening to a growing concern about America's future. Our competitiveness is being challenged by people in other countries who have learned from us how important education is to economic vitality and quality of life. A plethora of reports from distinguished commissions argue that America must improve its educational systems, and that we must improve access to higher education and training. Reach Higher, America reinforces these arguments but also points out that most of America's future workforce is already in the workforce and will not be affected by school improvement. We must provide improved education at all levels, including adult education. I hope that the recommendations in this important report receive the attention they deserve. America's community colleges, with their open access and inclusive missions, stand ready to help."

Alfredo G. de los Santos Jr., Research Professor, Hispanic Research Center, Arizona State University; and Honorary Commissioner.

"This report is not only comprehensive and provocative, but it comes at an important point in the development and evolution of our country. The report will not only inform and shape public policy but should also have significant impact on practice."

Emily Stover DeRocco, President, The Manufacturing Institute and Senior Vice President, National Association of Manufacturers

"Addressing the challenges of adult literacy and education outlined in this report is key to ensuring that this nation has the educated and prepared workforce necessary to compete and succeed in the 21st century global economy. Our adult education and literacy programs are relics of another era; reform and investment are necessary to give every working age adult the opportunity to access high quality, middle class jobs in America."

Thomas J. Donohue, President and CEO, U.S. Chamber of Commerce; and Honorary Commissioner

"Basic literacy skills matter more than ever—to our economy, our international competitiveness, and the well being of our citizens. This is especially true in the workplace. The jobs of the 21st century will require more skilled and trained workers who can listen, communicate, and solve problems. The National Commission on Adult Literacy is helping meet this demand. The business community applauds the Commission's efforts to raise awareness of the education needs of working-age adults. We look forward to working with the Commission to ensure that American workers are prepared to succeed in today's fast-paced, worldwide economy."

David C. Harvey, President/CEO, ProLiteracy Worldwide

"This blue ribbon panel of industry, government, and education experts has given this country a wakeup call about our most critical economic crisis since the Depression. Congress, business and industry, and the public in general need to support and work with the adult basic education and literacy field so we can provide the quantity as well as quality of service needed to have a well-skilled workforce. Without the support called for in this report, the United States is in real danger of becoming a second rate world power."

Dennis Jones, President, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

"The vast majority of postsecondary education policy throughout the U.S. is targeted to a small segment of the population—i.e., the transition and completion rates of traditional students directly out of high school. Over three million high school seniors will graduate in 2008. Meanwhile, 88 million working-age adults in the U.S. have not completed high school, have completed just a high school diploma but have not entered college, or do not speak English well enough to contribute to a knowledge-based economy. Our nation's ability to compete economically depends a great deal on how well we train and retrain our existing workforce—the major focus of this important report."

R. Mark Lawrance, Sr., Vice President, Foundation and Operations, Indiana Chamber of Commerce

"The comprehensive Reach Higher, America report is a significant research project with bold recommendations to better prepare America's workforce for the 21st century. It builds on other landmark publications such as America's Perfect Storm and Tough Choices, Tough Times with specific actionable strategies to improve America's global competitiveness. As leaders in Indiana look to improve our workforce training systems to elevate the quality of our workforce, we have benefited from the work of the National Commission on Adult Literacy. With much of the funding for state workforce programs originating with federal programs, we hope that the recommendations from this report will be implemented by Congress. The Commission is to be congratulated for a profound report with such far-reaching recommendations to act upon."

Hon. Ruth Ann Minner, Governor of Delaware; and Honorary Commissioner

"Now more than ever, it is important that our adult education and workforce development programs prepare learners to meet the challenges of a global economy. In Reach Higher, America, the National Commission on Adult Literacy has issued an impressive call to action to resolve adult literacy issues that threaten to undermine our national and local economies and standard of living. "

Richard W. Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education 1993-2001; and Honorary Commissioner

"In my Fifth Annual State of American Education speech a decade ago, I pointed out that our nation has never been confronted with the task of teaching so much to so many while, at the same time, reaching for new high standards. I called this America's first challenge. I was speaking about our nation's elementary and secondary schools at the time. However, the same holds true today about the adult education and workforce skills challenge presented so compellingly by the National Commission on Adult Literacy, of which I'm an honorary member. I hope that the public and private sectors will heed the Commission's bold new report and take the strong action recommended. Reach Higher, America makes it clear that many millions of adults in America—a huge segment of our workforce, people beyond the reach of our schools—must have basic adult education and workforce skills services on a whole new scale if they are to be productive workers in our global economy and pursue the American dream as we know it."

John Sweeney, President, AFL-CIO

"A higher focus on adult education and workforce skills training is vital to building a stronger economy that works for all. The Commission's recommendations are right on target and we wholeheartedly support them."

Marc Tucker, President, National Center on Education and the Economy

"If you are concerned about the basic skills of the young people graduating from our high schools—and you should be—you should be even more alarmed about the basic skills of the adults already in our workforce. The resources we are devoting now to giving our adult workers the basic skills they need to maintain the American standard of living for the rest of us can only be termed pathetic. This report lays out a very sensible plan for reversing course."

Andy Van Kleunen, Executive Director, The Workforce Alliance (TWA)

"Most national policy pronouncements about the 'future American workforce' ignore the fact that most of our nation's future workers are adults already in today's workforce. For America to rejoin the international skills race, we need a 21st century skills strategy that encompasses all U.S. workers, not only the small number of new workforce entrants coming out of our nation's high schools and universities. In that regard, the National Commission on Adult Literacy has put out a call to action that every national policymaker, including those running for President, should heed. Millions of 'middle skilled jobs' requiring more than high school skills but less than a four-year degree could go unfilled in this country, in part, because—as the Commission documents—an even larger number of Americans lack the necessary basic literacy or language skills to train for these technical occupations. The Commission's call for a new national investment in an integrated Adult Education and Workforce Skills strategy offers one immediate way to help address this crisis, getting millions of working adults on a pathway to learn the basic skills and ultimately earn credentials to fill these jobs. On behalf of the business, labor, college, community, and government groups that comprise our national coalition, I heartily endorse the urgency and focus of the Commission's report."

Dan Wagner, Director, National Center on Adult Literacy/International Literacy Institute; Professor, University of Pennsylvania

"The facts in Reach Higher, America, are no longer in question. Improving adult literacy in the U.S. remains a top national priority that has continuously gone unmet over recent decades, and in an era when we can no longer afford complacency. The pressure of workforce competitiveness is growing ever steeper. This timely report lays out the problems, and a number of key solutions, such as the utility of new technologies to assist in adult and workforce training, the need for innovative and effective research-based methods, and increased and flexible modalities for funding. Now is the time to implement this strategy."