

It's Never Too Late to Learn: The Necessity of Serving Adult Students



**LEGISLATIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL MEETING**

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What is an Adult Learner?

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- Someone 25 years of age or older involved in postsecondary learning activities (Voorhees and Lingenfelter, 2003).
- Anyone "engaged in some form of instruction or educational activity to acquire the knowledge, information, and skills necessary to succeed in the workforce, learn basic skills, earn credentials, or otherwise enrich their lives" (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999).



What is an Adult Learner?

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- **According to NCES (2002), nontraditional students exhibit one or more of seven characteristics:**
 - have delayed enrollment into postsecondary education
 - attend part time
 - are financially independent of parents
 - work full time while enrolled
 - have dependents other than a spouse
 - are a single parent
 - lack a standard high school diploma

Many Types of Adult Learners

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Those who:

- **Have a degree but no job (displaced workers)**
- **Are closing to having a degree (ready adults)**
- **Those with some college, but who aren't close to having a degree**
- **Those who have never gone to college**
- **Those who have not graduated from high school**
- **Those for whom English is their second language**
- **Are returning military personnel and veterans (2 million!)**



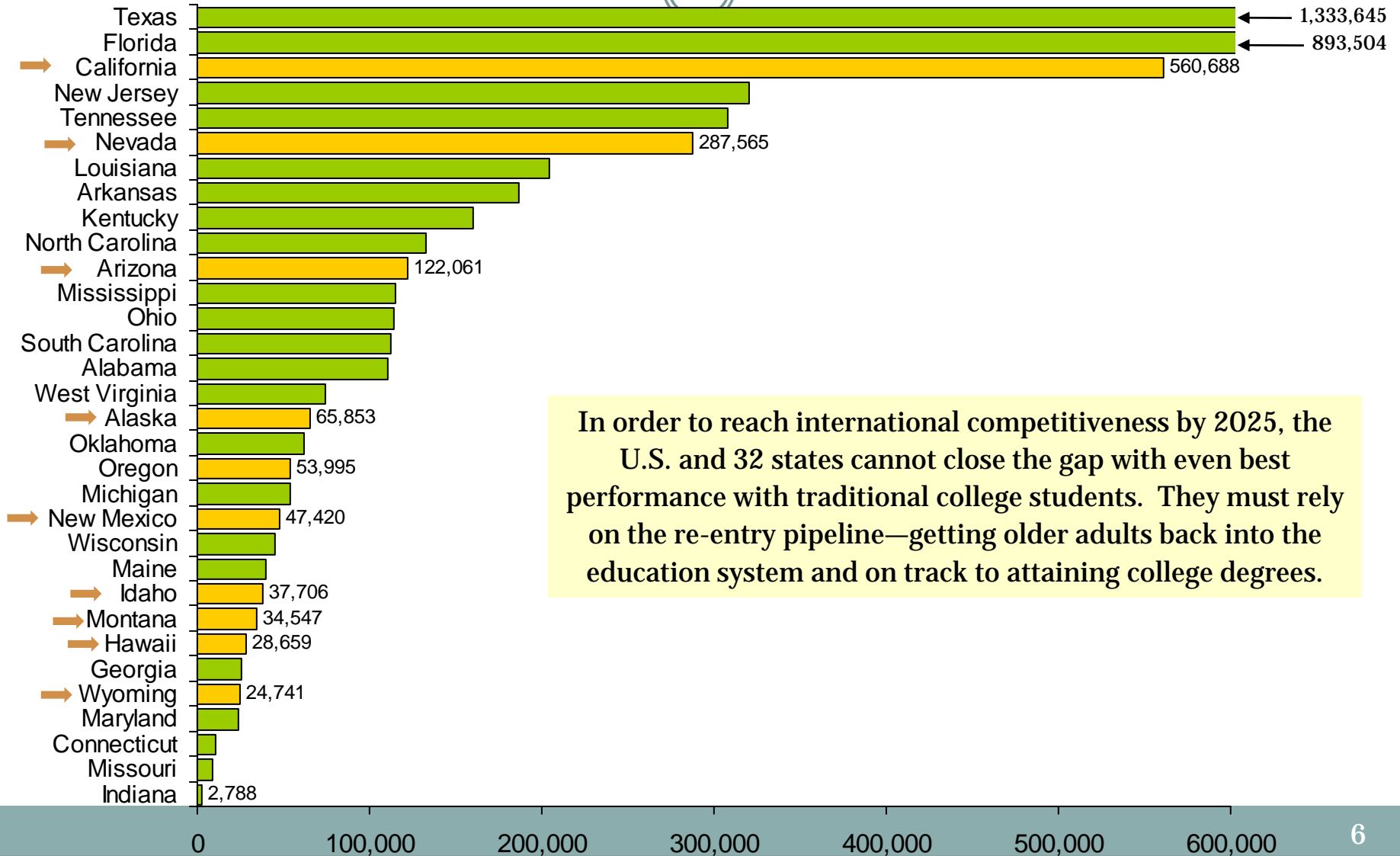
You MUST teach an old dog new tricks

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- **Adult learners are integral to remaining globally competitive**
 - 35 states cannot catch up to the educational attainment levels of the best performing countries by only serving traditional students
- **Adults make up a significant portion of the total postsecondary enrollments**
 - From 1970 to 2002, adult part-time enrollment at all institutions increased from 7% to 12%, and adult part-time enrollment at community colleges increased from 17 percent to 26 percent of all students.

Source: Council for Adult & Experiential Learning and National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, *Adult Learning in Focus*, 2008

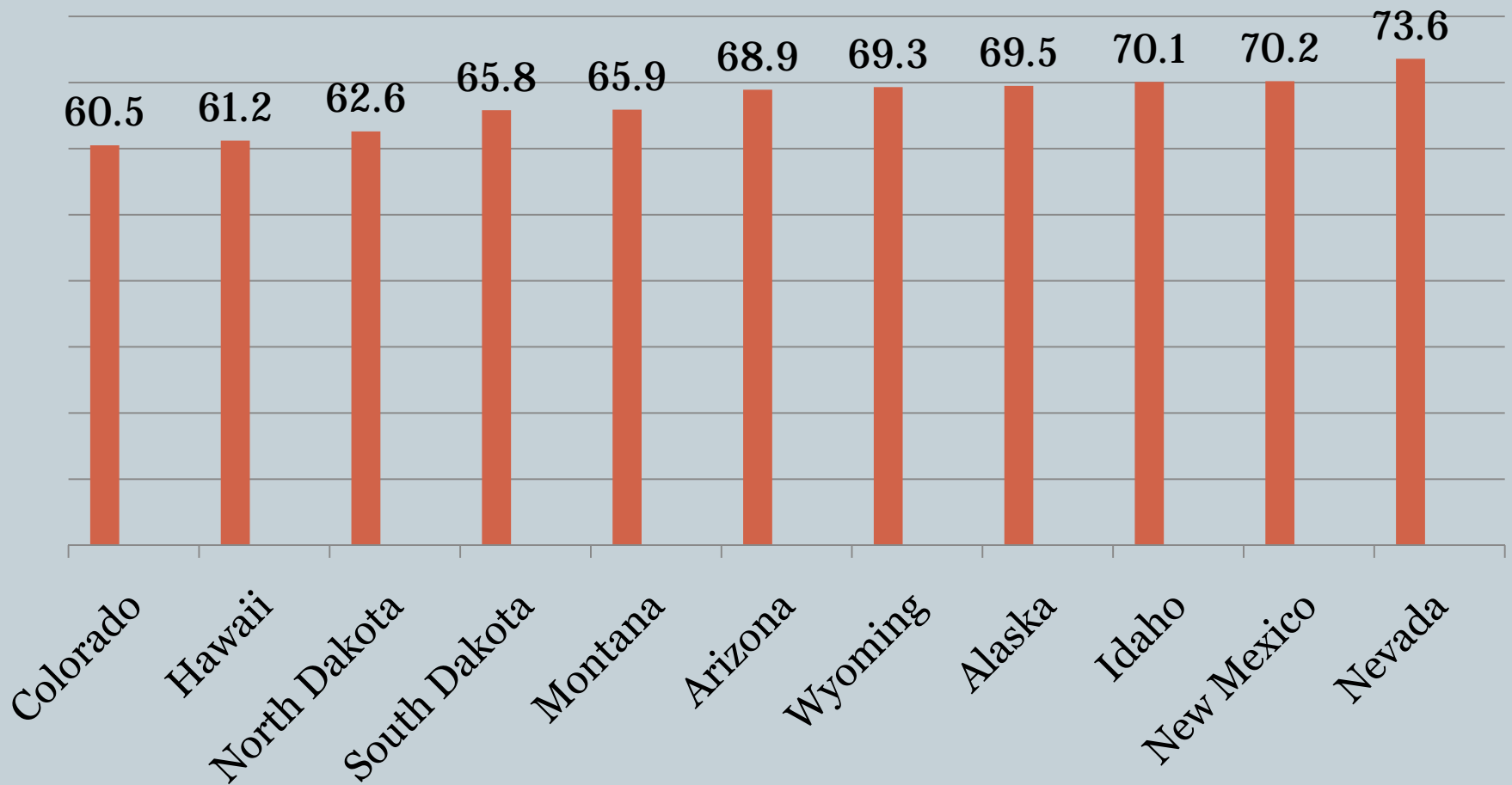
Even Best Performance with Traditional College-Age Students at Each Stage of the Educational Pipeline Will Leave Gaps in More than 30 States



In order to reach international competitiveness by 2025, the U.S. and 32 states cannot close the gap with even best performance with traditional college students. They must rely on the re-entry pipeline—getting older adults back into the education system and on track to attaining college degrees.

Percentage of Working-Age Adults with No College Degree

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Source: Council for Adult & Experiential Learning and National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, *Adult Learning in Focus*, 2008



Non-traditional No More



- **Two-year project funded by Lumina Foundation for Education**
- **To stimulate and guide policy and practice changes that will make it easier for “ready adults” – those who are just shy of having enough credits to obtain a degree but haven’t yet returned to college – to earn their diplomas**
- **Working with Arkansas, Colorado, Nevada, New Jersey, and South Dakota**
- **Data, Financing/Financial Aid, Academic Affairs, Students Services, Communication**



What We We've Learned About Adult Learners

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- You can't treat them like traditional students.
- They don't want to waste any time.
- They are often place-bound.
- They work so they can't go to class at traditional times.
- They often need child care.
- They need a place to park.
- Paying tuition in one-lump sum at the beginning of the semester is a barrier.
- They're anxious about math.

State-level Policy Issues for Consideration

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- **Conduct a state policy and practice audit.**
- **Consider policies that improve state data capabilities.**
 - In many states, identifying adult learners (particularly those with some college and no degree) is challenging at best
- **Incentivize institutions to better serve adult learners.**
 - Targeted remediation
 - Transparent statewide articulation and transfer processes
 - Credit for prior learning (e.g., corporate and military)
 - Alternative modes of delivery (e.g., online learning)

State-level Policy Issues for Consideration

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- **Conduct institutional assessments of levels of adult-friendliness.**
 - CAEL's Adult Learning Focused Institution
- **Adjust financial aid policies to allow for part-time students and adult learners.**
- **Launch well-researched statewide marketing and communications efforts that are targeted to adult learners.**
- **Ensure that your state-level policies that affect adults are aligned with federal policy.**

Discussion

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- What is your state doing with respect to serving adult learners?
- Do you know who these students are and their characteristics?
- Are adult learners part of your current policy discussions?
- How are your institutions doing? Are the “friendly” toward adults? Do you really know?
- Is financial aid in your state available to adults?
- Has your state engaged in any statewide marketing efforts targeted toward adults?



For More Information

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