

# COMMENTS ON THE EXPANSION ADULT EDUCATION CHARTER SCHOOLS\*

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## Background

We are leaders of two charter schools that have a proven record of success serving distinct high-needs populations: adult learners, mostly immigrants, and older high school students at severe risk of not graduating. Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School in Washington, D.C. and GOAL Academy of Colorado serve mostly Latino student populations.

Carlos Rosario School has served over 60,000 adult immigrants in its 45-year history. We currently serve 2,000 students on two campuses. Our students come from 80 different countries and speak 30 different languages; 70% come from Latin America. Our students learn English, gain basic literacy skills, receive job training, earn GEDs, and become United States citizens. As a charter school we are held to high standards of accountability and we are consistently found to be exemplary in every area: governance, finance, operations, and academics. Our students achieve targets set forth by the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board in English, GED, workforce, job gains/retention, and other measures. They go on to postsecondary education and get better jobs. Positive outcomes of study at Carlos Rosario School are reported even before students exit the program. For example, in a recent survey of our current students, an average hourly wage increase from \$8.18 to \$9.80 was reported during their time in our school.



The District of Columbia is unique in the United States in that it establishes charter schools for adult education and training. Based on the success of Carlos Rosario School, we would like this model of adult education programming to be encouraged around the country.

Guided Online Academic Learning (GOAL) Academy is a multidistrict charter high school that implements a blended learning educational model to educate the over 3,000 Colorado secondary students, many of whom were not on track to graduate when they enrolled. The primary goal of our public charter high school is the comprehensive preparation of students so they can flourish in a postsecondary environment of their choosing, ultimately becoming productive members of society. GOAL Academy implements a self-paced, mastery-based educational model allowing all students to learn in a highly flexible,

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challenging environment. GOAL Academy is also a Colorado alternative education campus, which means each school year we must affirm that no fewer than 95% of students are experiencing one of 14 recognized risk indicators. Under Colorado Legislation HB09-1319, GOAL Academy is able to implement a robust concurrent enrollment program. In spring 2015, 265 students were simultaneously enrolled in our school and one of more than 20 Colorado two-year or four-year colleges and university schools, earning credits toward their diploma and degree or certification.

GOAL Academy has a majority-minority school population. In 2014–2015, 68% of students self-identified as Hispanic descent. Seventy-one percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. In June of 2015 GOAL Academy graduated 604 students, of the graduating class 136 students graduated with college credit and another 208 graduated with the ACT's National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC). The NCRC is a portable credential that demonstrates achievement of a demonstrable level of workplace employability skills in applied mathematics, locating information, and reading for information. In the future, ACT Career Credentials powered by ACT Work Keys is an expanding program that will offer certifications in other areas. Of our graduating class, 62% graduated with either college credit or an NCRC certificate along with their high school diploma. Of those 604 students 65% had plans to continue to some type of postsecondary option after graduation.

As more states adopt the innovative legislation Colorado has had in place for nearly a decade, there are more communities across the nation that need and want a school like GOAL Academy. We would like to see the expanded implementation of the GOAL Academy model in any community willing to give their at-risk youth a second chance.

As fellows of the National Institute for Latino School Leaders of the National Council of La Raza, we are pleased to submit comments on extending federal law to encourage establishment of charter schools that serve native and foreign-born adults in need of

basic education, English language instruction, civics education, and industry certifications.

## Rationale

Improving literacy and numeracy skills has positive outcomes for adult learners and for their children. When parents can earn a family-sustaining wage that comes from becoming literate, English-proficient, and industry-certified, families and communities are made stronger. This opportunity to earn a basic education impacts adults with children as well as those who will be parents in the future. Adult education is an investment in the workforce and an investment in children's futures. Adult education charter schools are a little-known, innovative model that should be encouraged as one way to meet the education and training needs of low literacy and limited English proficient adults. The District of Columbia code has allowed for charter schools for adult education since 1996. These schools, particularly the largest, Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School, are models for the nation. This approach should be encouraged throughout the United States because of their positive impact on low-skilled adults and their families.

- **Low literacy is associated with poor health.** The Survey of Adult Skills known as PIAAC notes the association of low literacy with poor health and other negative social and employment outcomes. The report recommends taking action to improve the skills of low-literacy individuals, particularly Black and Hispanic adults.<sup>1</sup>
- **Adult literacy programs boost children's academic achievement.** Researchers funded by the National Institutes of Health concluded that programs to boost the academic achievement of children from low-income neighborhoods might be more successful if they also provided adult literacy education to parents. The researchers based this conclusion on their finding that a mother's reading skill is the greatest determinant of her children's future academic success.<sup>2</sup>

- **Low literacy strongly impacts women.** According to new data released by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 781 million adults (15 years and older) cannot read or write worldwide—two-thirds of them (496 million) are women. Even though the size of the global illiterate population is shrinking, the female proportion has remained virtually steady at 63% to 64%.<sup>3</sup>
- **Access to basic education is not equitable.** The Migration Policy Institute notes that there is inequity in access of basic education programs for low-educated and LEP adults and recommends seeding innovative programs.<sup>4</sup>
- **Limited English proficiency impacts job market outcomes.** Domestically, limited English proficient (LEP) adults experience weak job market outcomes, often relegated low-wage work, earning approximately 25–40% less than their English proficient counterparts.<sup>5</sup> This disparity in pay has far-reaching economic and social impact. LEP adults are less likely to pursue citizenship, be fully banked, or pursue homeownership.
- **Low literacy impacts job market outcomes.** Native-born adults classified as having “functional literacy”—defined by basic reading, writing, and mathematical skills—have the same weak job market outcomes.

### The Impact of Adult Charter Schools in Washington, DC

- **Adult charter schools have a record of success and are ready for further expansion.** Charter schools were established in the District of Columbia in 1996 through the District of Columbia School Reform Act. The law allows for “adult, community, continuing, and vocational education programs.” The charter school movement in the District of Columbia began in 1996 with the intention of providing a model for the nation in quality education through chartered public schools. When it converted to a charter school in 1998, the Carlos Rosario School

became the first adult education charter in the nation. Since then, eight other adult charter schools have been approved by the Public Charter School Board of the District of Columbia, and funded through local monies by the DC City Council. This vote of confidence in adult charters is noteworthy and other localities should be encouraged to consider this model for providing services to adult learners.

- **Adult charter schools are an innovative model that serve adult students better than traditional models.** Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School is highlighted by the Brookings Institute as an innovative model for adult education and recommends consideration of charter schools as a way to fund adult education, stating, “a potential source of public funding for adult education often overlooked is charter schools, which typically serve a K–12 population. Charter schools operate independently of public school systems but receive public funding on a per-pupil basis, allowing students to attend tuition-free. The relative stability of charter funding allows adult education providers to build their programmatic and staff capacity to serve more students with high-quality offerings in a way that is difficult to achieve with more uncertain or fluctuating revenue sources, such as grants and contracts.” The report also recommends that “states should consider revising their charter school statutes to allow funds to be used for adult education.”<sup>6</sup>

### Recommendations

Our recommendations are grounded in the understanding that investments in human capital yield high returns. Decades of empirical studies demonstrate that income, employment, health, and other dimensions of individual and community well-being are improved when adults have increased literacy and numeracy levels. It is also important to stress that the following recommendations reflect recognition of a distinction between education and skill, and the need to provide adult learners—

universally defined as 15 years and older—with effective pathways to both. To do so will require high degrees of innovation, collaboration, and strong monitoring and accountability measures. Just as traditional Pre-K–12 models have evolved to meet societal needs and expectations, so too must adult education models if they are going to meet the needs of the millions of native- and foreign-born adults who lack the basic skills required to fully participate in the 21st century economy and American civic life.

- Modify the U.S. Department of Education’s Charter Schools Program (CSP) to allow for the creation of new high-quality public charter schools that allow for students age 21 and over to enroll through the replication of the District of Columbia’s School Reform Act (1996), which includes adult basic education schools.
- Build on CSPs current efforts to reward high-quality charter schools that form exemplary collaborations to include explicit language encouraging close alignment with workforce investment boards for the optimal implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which expands the age of eligible youth from 21 to 24 and broadens the focus of adult education, literacy, and English

language services to include transition to postsecondary education and employment.

- Make the necessary statutory and regulatory changes that will allow young adults—age 21 to 24—without secondary education or the attendant skills to enroll in public secondary schools. This will allow them to be protected by the same high accountability standards as more traditionally aged secondary students.
- Encourage states to consider adult education charters by specifically naming them in WIOA regulations as a program type that is eligible to apply for a grant or contract to provide adult education and literacy activities.

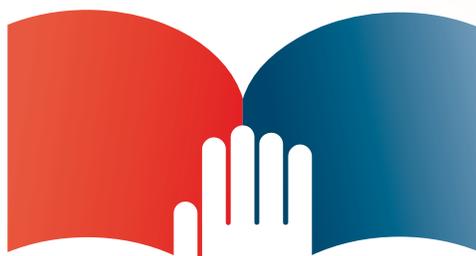
We strongly urge you to give these ESEA and WIOA recommendations your highest consideration to make an important impact on adult literacy and workforce readiness. We would welcome the opportunity to work with Congress to ensure that adult education charter schools become a model of education that communities can support. Please contact Dr. Ryan Monroe at [rmonroe@carlosrosario.org](mailto:rmonroe@carlosrosario.org) or call (20) 797-4700, or Cheryl Anderson at [ec.anderson@goalac.org](mailto:ec.anderson@goalac.org) or call (719) 253-2481 if you would like further information or to set up a meeting or a visit to Carlos Rosario School.

## Endnotes

- 1 OECD, *Time for the U.S. to Reskill? What the Survey of Adult Skills Says* (Paris: OECD, 2013), [http://skills.oecd.org/Survey\\_of\\_Adult\\_Skills\\_US.pdf](http://skills.oecd.org/Survey_of_Adult_Skills_US.pdf) (accessed May 11, 2015).
- 2 National Institutes of Health, “Improving mothers’ literacy skills may be best way to boost children’s achievement,” news release, October 25, 2010.
- 3 UNESCO, “International Literacy Data 2014,” <http://www.uis.unesco.org/literacy/Pages/literacy-data-release-2014.aspx> (accessed August 6, 2015).
- 4 Margie McHugh, *Adult Education Needs of U.S. Immigrants and Refugees and Recommendations to Improve the Federal Government’s Response in Meeting Them* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2014).
- 5 Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, *The Limited English Proficient Population in the United States* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2015).
- 6 Jill H. Wilson, *Investing in English Skills: The Limited English Proficient Workforce in U.S. Metropolitan Areas* (Washington, DC: Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, 2014).







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