

## Written Testimony

Submitted to the  
Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives

Hearing on  
*Examining Local Solutions to Strengthen Federal Job Training Programs*

Submitted by  
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Chairman Kline and members of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, welcome to Nevada and thank you for the opportunity to talk with you about job training programs at the College of Southern Nevada. I am Rebecca Metty-Burns, Executive Director of the Division of Workforce & Economic Development at the College of Southern Nevada. The Division operates industry driven workforce programs to support the enhancement of skills and education for the Southern Nevada workforce.

Within our workforce programs we have had mixed results with our ability to access and utilize Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds. We continue to find it challenging and frequently frustrating to provide the training and education that the local workforce needs when confined to the limitations that come with WIA funds. At times we are choosing to opt out of requesting the funds when the requirements demand a cumbersome bureaucratic administration be put in place over a focus on quality delivery of education. Often funds are tied up in case management with the remaining training dollars being so few they cannot make a significant impact. The certificate and degree programs at the College are not even eligible for WIA funds as the timeframe exceeds what WIA will allow, even though a more in-depth educational approach may be the more appropriate pathway for job placement, a higher wage or long term success.

Within the division our workforce programs are self-funded. We must be able to cover the costs of the programs and division staff expenses or we do not operate. We can't rely on federal metrics to prove our validity; we must deliver programs local industry demands. We have moved forward to develop our own solutions to fund innovations needed in program design and delivery in order to impact our community.

Our first focus was to remove the silo from programs funded with WIA money and strategically extend their impact and link students with a more holistic approach to skills attainment. Our Adult Education program receives WIA Title II funding. We have started blending our workforce training expertise with our basic skills classes in order to more effectively serve our students.

A core skill for many careers in Las Vegas is of course customer service. *ESL for Luxury Las Vegas Customer Service* was developed in partnership with Aria Resort and Casino and the Four Seasons of Las Vegas. We utilized our own reserve funds, no WIA funds, to build curriculum so the materials could be used for many programs, not solely those funded by WIA. The hospitality companies offered full access

to our ESL instructors and we imbedded them in the hospitality operation while they were designing curriculum in order to use realistic guest interactions and understand customer service standards for our local workforce. We then piloted two classes with employees of the partner companies. Our goals were to improve student understanding of customer service standards and to increase their skill level with customer service vocabulary and conversation. The employers and employees were highly satisfied with the results. We also ran the traditional assessments we use to measure language competency with these industry focused classes. In a typical class we look for a 3 – 4 point test gain after 70 – 100 hours of instruction. These classes were shorter, 50 -60 hours. However, one group was right on target with a 3.5 point gain; another group gained a phenomenal 10.75 average increase on their post-assessment.

We ask you to consider adjusting WIA performance measures to allow flexibility in education and training measurements to reflect meeting competencies required of business and industry as successful program operation.

Over the past 5 years the Adult Education programs have had over 18,500 enrollments for classes for GED attainment, English as a Second Language and Civics. Many of our students enter in to programs with skill levels that will require extended instruction, so a student may enroll multiple times. We recently held a registration for the start up of several new GED classes. We assessed the skills of 114 GED Preparation students and found 49% are entering the program with a 3rd grade to 6<sup>th</sup> grade level equivalent in their language and math skills. Half of these students are currently working in our workforce. We know these students will need a great deal of time and a steady pace to build basic skills in order to obtain their GED Certificate. However, we also have the other half of the population that has the foundational skills to move more rapidly towards taking the GED exam.

We recognize we must provide more than a single method in instruction to impact these students. We need to fund and incorporate technology and increase interaction to improve results and provide workforce related skills at the same time as GED attainment. So we redesigned the curriculum and the approach. To answer the needs reflected in the extreme range of levels, the program focuses on increasing individual attention, appropriate pacing and blending of workforce skills. To introduce students back to the learning process and provide a supportive environment, the GED 100 Series for students with a third to sixth grade level equivalent was designed to steadily and progressively build their basic skills in a more traditional classroom environment.

Students at the next skill level enter our GED Studio which is a hybrid approach as students attend instructor lead classes as well as do course work on an online GED program. By providing the additional online resource, students will be able to accelerate through the program as well as develop their computer skills.

The final step is our GED XL, an accelerated course that will incorporate an instructor, online GED program as well as individualized tutoring. The GED XL course will also offer the opportunity for students to work on their next steps upon receipt of their GED Certificate. Students will take the WorkKeys assessment, a nationally recognized workforce skills assessment. This also provides students the ability to obtain a National Career Readiness Certificate. Students then meet one-on-one with a coach to discuss career interests and options. We introduce them to an online tool that helps them build a resume; search jobs and provides information on local wages and forecasted job openings.

As you are making decisions on how to direct available funds please place Adult Education on the priority list. We are overwhelmed with the need to improve basic skills for a large part of our

workforce; over 17% of the Clark County workforce does not have a high school diploma. These new approaches need initial funding to develop curriculum and purchase technology, however, they serve students better, accelerate learning and provide employers with a higher skill employee.

We are excited about these programs and we are committed to the students that work so hard to improve their lives with educational attainment. We will continue to research, design and implement workforce programs that will take them from basic skills achievement through opportunities to start careers with technical skills training. It is with the technical skills training that it seems to be most difficult to work with WIA funds, even though that training is where job opportunities are connected.

We decided to target our program development around the job gaps in the workforce rather than chasing funding trends. For example, while funding was available for “green jobs” training, there were no job openings in the local area. However, there were jobs for dialysis patient care technicians but no dialysis training programs in Nevada outside of internal company programs. The Patient Care Technician training program was designed so students receive instruction in the Workforce Division and through a partnership with a local dialysis clinic the students also receive 220 hours of clinical experience. Students who successfully complete this program are prepared for the national Patient Care Technician exam and to work in a dialysis clinic. The program was started with the donation of refurbished equipment and reserve funds were utilized for curriculum and for new equipment.

We’ve been able to first pilot and then run two additional classes, however we are limited to 10-12 students at a time due to lack of space for more students and dialysis equipment. Since the training started 24 students have completed the program. Twenty-three of the 24 students were unemployed. Currently nineteen (79%) are now employed as Patient Care Technicians in dialysis clinics in Nevada and surrounding states. Students must pass a national certification exam and to date, 83 % of students taking the exam have successfully passed the exam on their first attempt. The classes are filled on a first-come, first-serve basis. In preparation for our current class an orientation had 40 potential students attending and yet we are only able to enroll 12. The demand for these students continues to grow as local dialysis clinics have discontinued their own training programs and look to students from our training program to fill available positions.

Where could WIA funding help? This course could be offered more often or we could increase the number of students if we had additional space and equipment. Creating a healthcare lab would actually impact many of our healthcare programs allowing increased enrollments and more hands-on training.

Many of these students are interested in continuing their education to more advanced healthcare roles, something we need locally and nationally. We encourage you to add WIA funding for advanced certifications and degree attainment through the community colleges.

The opportunity to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act is a call for action. Allocating investment in the community colleges allows greater reach to more of the workforce and the ability to train the workforce with technology needed to compete globally. Funding decisions need to be tied to education programs that demonstrate industry required knowledge, skills and abilities to provide the best opportunity for job attainment or job retention. Community college workforce programs are well

positioned to deliver a holistic approach. Hold us accountable but have the accountability make sense to the needs of the community and have measurements and outcomes that reflect true progress based on the competencies needed by industry. Most of all include higher education as a significant stakeholder in the decisions on program investment and innovations for workforce development.

Again I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify during this vital discussion regarding investing in our workforce. The College of Southern Nevada truly appreciates the work and time you are dedicating to helping us improve our workforce and our community.