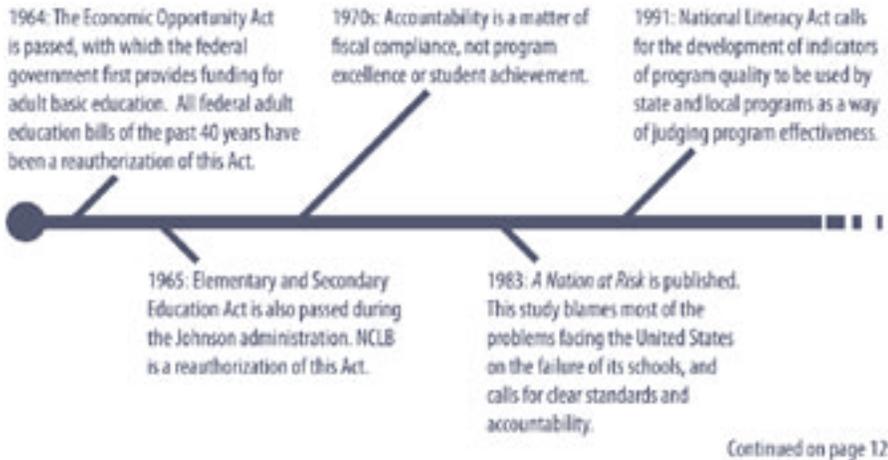


A History of Standards



Standards Are Here To Stay

by DR. MARK EMBLIDGE

In 1998, the federal Adult Education and Family Literacy Act required a comprehensive accountability system to assess the effectiveness of local adult education programs based on their performance. The expectation that adult education would be held accountable for measuring its effectiveness is consistent with the current public education reform for k-12, which started 10 years ago. That reform movement is rooted in the Reagan administration and the 1983 publication, *A Nation at Risk*, which boldly blamed most of the problems facing the United States on the failure of its schools. The writers of this report called for clear-cut education standards and accountability.

In the years that followed, leading business organizations and other national groups pushed for public education to emulate most countries around the world by adopting national content standards and tests to assess curriculum

mastery. In 1992, the National Council on Education Standards and Testing stated that if the U.S. was to raise the quality of educational achievement, the system of tests, which at that time merely measured comparative progress of students,

All federal adult education bills of the past 40 years have been the reauthorization of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, with which the federal government first provided funding for adult basic education.

had to be changed to stress content of knowledge first. Then, student progress would be measured against how much of that knowledge had been acquired.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) bill, signed into law on January 8, 2002,

Professional Development

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by President George W. Bush, took education standards and accountability to an even higher level. While far-reaching in many areas, probably the most publicized aspect of NCLB has been its outcome-oriented accountability for schools, based in large part on student test scores.

It should be noted that No Child Left Behind and the 1998 Adult Education and Family Literacy Act both have their roots in the rich history of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty." All federal adult education bills of the past 40 years have been the reauthorization of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, with which the federal government first provided funding for adult basic education. NCLB is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Both of these bills came about as a result of long-time pressures for educational improvement, specifically for poor and minority students. The passage of these two bills began an

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A Few Words on *Progress*

We have been hearing a lot about standards in adult education over the past ten years, and in the past two years Virginia's adult educators have been developing standards for GED and ESOL instruction, which will be presented to the field in June. In the meantime, several local adult education programs will pilot the standards to allow for any final modifications to the drafts that have been developed by teams of practitioners. This issue of *Progress* is designed to help adult educators in the public and private sectors to understand the genesis of educational standards, their types, and their uses. It further identifies issues surrounding implementation, including funding and teacher acceptance.

In the lead article on page one, Mark Emblidge, the current Vice President of Virginia's Board of Education, writes about standards in the context of policy at the state and federal levels and how expectations of documenting educational gains have changed over the past 20 years. ESOL teacher and coordinator, Margaret Kiernan, outlines the recent history of the standards movement in adult education on page 12.

For the feature article in this issue, *Progress*' editor, Randy Stamper, brings together four adult educators to engage in a dynamic conversation about standards. Each participant offers a different perspective: program manager, professional developer, state office specialist, and educational consultant. During the lively discussion, these experienced educators raise and answer many questions that underline the complexity of developing and implementing standards in adult education.

This issue's "Click" column provides information about the Adult Education Content Standards Warehouse, an online repository of standards information, as well as the use of Polilogue in standards development. Jake McMurray, an adult education teacher, shares his perspective on standards after having participated in writing both the GED and ESOL standards.

As the title of Mark Emblidge's article says, "standards are here to stay." Although adult education has a long way to go before it has standards fully implemented in all areas of instruction, we will be better prepared to begin implementation if we understand how and why we arrived here.

Sincerely,



Calendar

March 15-19

TESOL Convention
Tampa, FL
www.tesol.org

April 4-8

VALRC Online Courses
Register by March 23 at
[www.aelweb.vcu.edu/
training/online/](http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/training/online/)

27-29

COABE Conference
Houston, TX
www.coabe06.org

May 3-5

VAACE 2006
Virginia Beach, VA
www.vaace.org

18

Literacy Fair of Virginia
Keysville, VA
[www.literacyfairof
virginia.org](http://www.literacyfairofvirginia.org)

The Adult Education Content Standards Warehouse is an online repository of adult education content standards documents designed to support adult educators in their efforts to develop, align, and implement content standards in English language acquisition (ELA), mathematics, and reading; the core academic areas defined by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). The warehouse can be found at <http://www.adultedcontentstandards.org/> and is maintained by the American Institutes for Research (AIR).



Not only is the warehouse a repository of standards, but it also allows the user to search for and retrieve standards documents by state or organization, browse and compare specific content across various sets of standards, and create reports of the documents. All the information gathered through the warehouse has been designed to help states develop and align content standards and to plan for curriculum, instruction, and professional development to implement standards-based education. So far, ten states and Equipped for the Future (EFF) have submitted standards documents to be shared.

Before opening one of the state's content standards document, you can take a glance at a summary of its most outstanding features (e.g. organizational format and levels covered). The documents are available in both HTML and PDF formats. In order to search for spe-

cific skills and knowledge within an area, you can use the "explore" section.

Additionally, a *Process Guide for Establishing State Adult Education Content Standards* is available on this site. Produced by the folks at AIR, this guide is a wonderfully comprehensive resource for developing and implementing con-

tent standards. In essence, it is a how-to guide that outlines processes for moving toward standards-based education, serves as a resource of templates and forms, and provides a wide range of options, suggestions, and references for implementing the standards. ■

Collaborating Via Polilogue

Over the past year, adult education practitioners across Virginia have benefited from the Department of Education's contract with Knowledge in the Public Interest (KPI). KPI administers Polilogue, an online communication tool that is used by groups of individuals with similar interests to communicate across great distances. Polilogue's purpose is to:

- provide an electronic forum where members can communicate with one another;
- develop a body of knowledge/best practices to guide the groups;
- collect and organize the knowledge that might be useful for programs;
- disseminate information; and
- reduce the time and expense of developing and sharing knowledge.

Our community has been using this online collaboration effectively to gather geographically diverse groups, facilitate personal development, and as a library of documents and information.

Polilogue is an extremely valuable way to communicate for people who are geographically distributed, have conflicting schedules, or, for whatever reason, don't often have time or occasion to gather around the water cooler to share best practices or ask colleagues for advice on issues. Membership is by invitation only, and any information that is posted appears with the contributor's name. The participants are referred to as a "community."

Polilogue has been indispensable in facilitating communication among members of the ESOL content standards group. Group leader, Nancy Faux, says that being able to communicate on Polilogue has saved the group hours of travel time and the associated costs. Instead of planning and paying for meeting rooms, lodging, travel expenses, etc., members have been able to communicate en masse while online and to post documents and then discuss them online.

Polilogue has also been essential to the implementation of Race to GED. "Jam sessions" have been used to share information between DOE staff, program managers, instructional specialists, and assessment specialists. These jams often featured guest moderators from the DOE, VALRC, and publishing companies. All of the information shared during these jams is collected and organized as "knowledge objects" that may then be accessed at any time convenient for the members of the community.

New program managers have benefited from jam sessions on topics that are helpful to their development, such as financial and program management, and they have been able to receive this training without leaving the office. Online collaboration is a different way of doing work, and it takes awhile to adjust to the process of "poliloguing." However, it is an efficient and convenient way to share information and resources. ■

A Message from the Office of Vocational and Adult Education: Federal Support for State-Level Content Standards

by RONNA SPACONE

Measuring students' learning and performance against content standards and aiming to improve the effectiveness of programs based on such standards are key goals of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). Standards that spell out what students should know and be able to do at specific points along an educational pathway set expectations for student learning and guide programs and teachers in creating a clear sequence of instruction leading to high school proficiency and readiness for college. Assessments that are aligned with these standards also are essential to improve program quality. When content standards provide a planned sequence of learning outcomes and targeted instruction, performance measurement through standardized assessment produces more data that are meaningful for program improvement.

For many state and local education leaders, content standards and program effectiveness have become a driving force of change within education. Currently, over half the states in the nation have implemented or are developing academic content standards to guide program improvement. States are moving forward with the development of standards because it provides a structured approach for education agencies to think about change and create a system that explicitly links standards, assessments, and instruction.

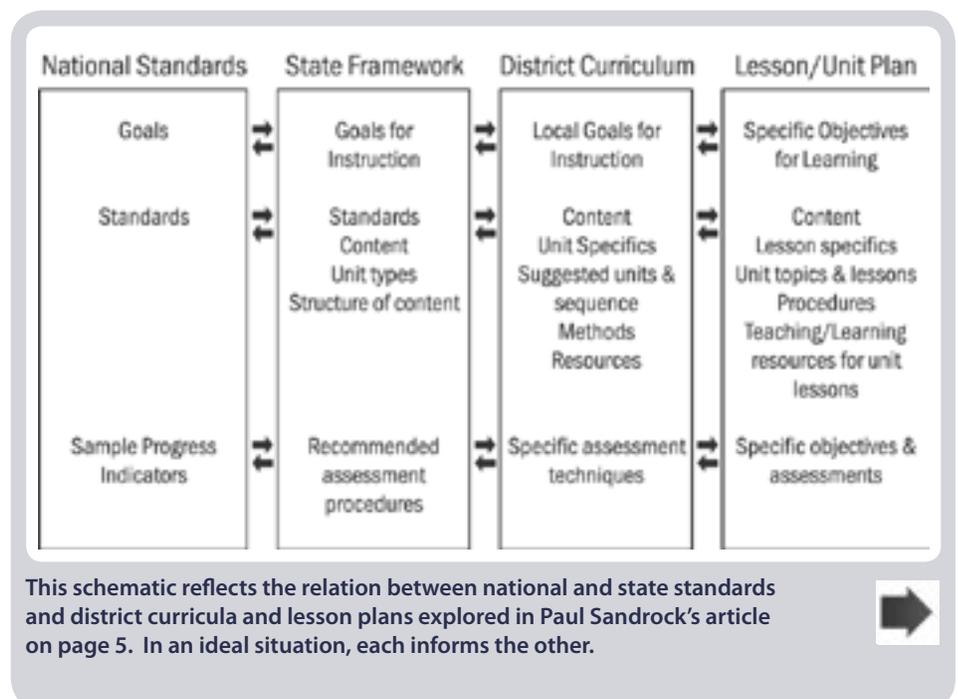
The U.S. Department of Education supports the development and implementation of rigorous state content standards. Although it is up to individual states to undertake the implementation of standards-based education and improvement, OVAE is committed to supporting states in the development or adaptation and implementation of content standards in the areas of reading, mathematics, and English language acquisition. Several national activities

have been funded to assist states in their efforts. They include:

- *A Process Guide for Establishing State Adult Education Content Standards* [<http://www.adultedcontentstandards.org/howto.asp>]. The guide outlines processes for moving toward fully integrated standards-based education that include planning, development, review, and implementation.
- The Adult Education Content Standards Warehouse [<http://www.adultedcontentstandards.org>]. The warehouse provides universal access to a wide range of state standards, as well as nationally developed standards, in the content areas of reading, mathematics, and English language acquisition.
- State collaborative working groups, or consortia, that addressed the development of academic content standards in 2004-2005. Consortia members, including the Commonwealth of Virginia, received technical assistance from field experts to address specific needs; they worked together and exchanged resources through national meetings and an online discussion forum.

Currently, OVAE is planning for future technical assistance to the states through a state needs assessment, a literature review of noteworthy practices, and a usability evaluation of the existing standards warehouse. This project, Support for State-Level Adult Education Content Standards, will help determine the best ways for OVAE to proceed to support states already committed to meeting the goals of standards-based education for adults. Like those listed above, this year's planning activities are an integral part of the U.S. Department of Education's continuing commitment to improve the quality of adult education programs through the development and implementation of state content standards. ■

Ronna Spacone is currently an Education Program Specialist in the Division of Adult Education and Literacy, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education. She is responsible for managing adult education and literacy national programs, including those related to standards-based education and adult basic education career and college transitions.



State Standards: by PAUL SANDROCK Connecting a National Vision to Local Implementation

What are standards?

Standards come in different types. Each type of standard serves a different purpose and has a different connection with instruction and learning. Key questions are answered by each type of standard.

What? Content Standards explain what students should know and be able to do. These general goals focus teaching and learning. In the past, we have generally focused on what students should know; standards, as they have developed from the national groups in the various disciplines, have added an important element of application, that is, what students should be able to do with their knowledge.

How? Performance Standards describe how students will show that they are achieving the content standards. Performance standards are written with active verbs to help students, teachers, and parents envision the ways that students will demonstrate what is described in the content standards. Content standards are general in nature; performance standards provide more specific, but still essential, sub-goals.

How well? Proficiency Standards provide the criteria and/or scale for judging the degree of progress on the performance standards. Proficiency standards answer the question of how good is good enough? These standards show a continuum of student performance from unacceptable to exemplary. Proficiency standards may be established as an overall continuum for an entire program (6-12, K-12, or K-16) or may be created for specific courses and even tasks.

When? Where? Who? Program Standards offer descriptions of important components of a school or district program, addressing the availability of foreign language instruction for all students, explaining how the instruction is offered each day and each year, and sharing the program configuration and location (e.g., will the program be a part of the regular elementary school day, or will it be offered after regular school hours?). Such standards

Editor's note: The following article was excerpted from a longer white paper prepared by Mr. Paul Sandrock for the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. Mr. Sandrock's original paper was focused on standards related to English language acquisition, but the points he makes are clearly applicable to other educational standards. *Progress* would like to thank both the author and ACTFL for extending permission to reprint.

provide district planners with the critical questions to ask about program design. Program standards also make expectations realistic by describing the conditions that will lead to the student achievement shown in the standards.

Relation of National to State to Local Standards (and Curriculum)

Now that national standards have been produced in several disciplines, states are developing standards to help local districts implement this vision. The role of state standards is to provide a higher level of specificity, the detail necessary to put the national standards into practice in local classrooms. Each element of national standards becomes a guide to the development of a comparable element of state standards and local standards and/or curriculum. In this way, the national standards have a direct impact on a teacher's daily lesson plans through his or her state and local standards. The content standards of a national document are adopted or adapted as state content standards or goals, to become a local district's curriculum goals. The degree of the connection to the national standards is, of course, the decision of each state's department of education. The national standards in the U.S. are voluntary, as state standards are in most states. Districts use the national and state standards as models or guides to their local curriculum development.

Frameworks, Curriculum, and Assessment

National standards documents allude to instructional and assessment practices but do not specify them. State standards usually follow this lead, implying but

not requiring a set method for teaching or testing. This allows the variations of "menus" as different districts and teachers work toward the same standards.

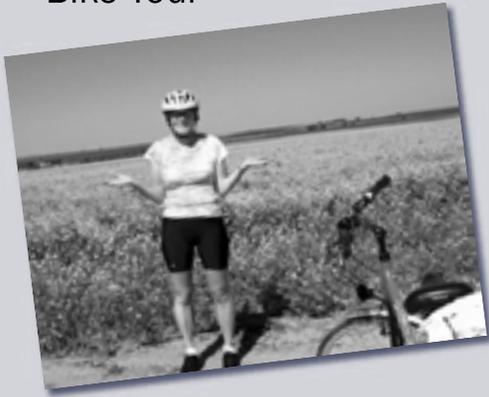
State curriculum frameworks take the state standards and provide more assistance for districts developing their own program documents. State frameworks may show how the state standards lead to curriculum for different types of programs, different beginning points, and even for different languages. The state framework also shows the link to assessment more clearly, providing examples or the specificity for local practice of assessment that fits the goals of the standards.

A key purpose of standards is to provide a tool for creating a better match between the official curriculum, what is taught, what is tested, and what is actually learned. Often, these four elements are not very closely linked; however, standards can provide the means to close the gap in the following ways:

- Standards give focus for developing curriculum, both for the state guide and for the specific local document.
- Standards focus a teacher's selection of what will be taught rather than just covering page after page and hoping that students are getting what they need.
- Standards help a teacher check that assessment does measure student progress toward the goals of the curriculum.
- Standards provide both a clear direction in the classroom and the evidence that students are learning what is expected, by design, not by accident. ■■

Paul Sandrock is a consultant for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Fringe Benefit: Conference Followed by Bike Tour



Biking through the wine country of Germany after the conference made up for the long, hot summer of work. My friend Alice and I signed up for a 7-day, 35-45 mile-per-day bike tour. Everyday after a full breakfast, we would set off from our B&B with our bikes and saddlebags full of maps and German directions to a different city. The difficult directions led to us meeting many helpful people; one “guardian angel” even biked with us from his town to our next destination, 40 odd miles away! We’d bike until about 5:00 in the afternoon, when we’d reach our next B&B. Our luggage would be waiting for us, as arranged through our touring company, Bike Tours Direct, and after a shower, we’d enjoy a nice meal and a bottle of the local wine. Thanks to the guardian angel that traveled with us across some very difficult terrain, Alice and I beat some more experienced, and German, bikers to the next B&B. By the time they arrived, sweaty and tired, Alice and I were already on the patio with a glass of wine. “What took you so long?” we asked. The seven days of biking and sampling local vineyards was a perfect and memorable caper to the conference. ❖

Literacy Institute at VCU goes International

by NANCY FAUX

At the end of a long, hot summer filled with much work, I was invited to attend a very special, inaugural conference held at the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands. At this conference, a new interdisciplinary, international forum was established to consider research findings and classroom issues pertaining to the second language acquisition and literacy development of adults with little or no native language schooling: Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA) for Adults.

Plans have been made to hold a four-day forum in Richmond in November of 2006. The forum will be hosted by the Literacy Institute at Virginia Commonwealth University.

LESLLA is an international forum of researchers who share an interest in the development of second language skills by adult immigrants who have had little or no schooling in their home countries. LESLLA’s goal is to share empirical research and information to help inform and guide further research on second language acquisition for the low-educated adult population. This research, in turn, will guide educational policy development in those countries where low-educated immigrants settle.

On August 25, 2005, Roeland van Hout of the Dutch National Research Council opened LESLLA’s inaugural workshop. The first day focused on research and featured presentations by

representatives from the Netherlands (Ineke van de Craats and Jeanne Kurvers), England (Martha Young-Scholten), Belgium (Astrid Geudens), and the United States (Alan Juffs). The second day of the workshop turned to classroom considerations. Larry Condelli from the American Institutes for Research reported on his extensive studies of literacy classroom practice and achievement. Qarin Franker (Göteborg, Sweden) and Ingrid Skeppstedt (National Centre for Swedish as a Second Language) discussed the Swedish context. I detailed my work on the training of literacy teachers, current practices, and the need for connecting research to practice. The day closed with a visit to a regional adult education center in Tilburg and talks about past and current Dutch immigration policy, literacy teacher training, and curriculum development for unschooled adult learners in Tilburg.

The final day of the conference was spent discussing common goals, our mission, and next steps. It was decided that we would meet again in the fall of 2006, but this time with a larger participation. After considering several possible sites for the next meeting, participants agreed on Virginia. Since then, plans have been made to hold a four-day forum in Richmond in November of 2006. The forum will be hosted by the Literacy Institute at Virginia Commonwealth University. Presentations by well-known international researchers, authors, linguists, and practitioners will be highlighted during the conference. ❖

Nancy Faux is the ESOL Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

How Did This Happen?

An Overview of Virginia Standards Development *by* JANE SWING

Many adult education practitioners from across Virginia have been actively involved since 2004 in the development and drafting of the GED and ESOL content standards. When Governor Warner proposed the initiative to dramatically increase the number of GED completers in Virginia, Dr. Yvonne Thayer, then director of Virginia's Office of Adult Education and Literacy, began work on the GED standards. Dr. Thayer organized a small planning committee to get the project started. Participants for the writing teams were selected through an application process, and in June 2004, a group of practitioners and content area experts gathered at the Hotel Roanoke for an intensive week of work. A group was assembled for each content area of the GED test. Each group had a team leader (a Virginia practitioner), a content area expert, three Virginia GED practitioners, and a representative from the planning committee or the Virginia Office of Adult Education and Literacy. A facilitator was employed to oversee the process, and participants worked long and hard to ensure that they produced a document that was comprehensive, relevant, and of benefit to teachers and learners in GED programs throughout the commonwealth.

In the fall of 2004, review of the GED standards draft began, and the drafting of the ESOL standards was initiated. Five adult education GED teachers from across Virginia were asked to review the draft of the GED Content Standards. Each teacher completed a rating instrument, submitted written comments, and shared reflections during a telephone conversation. Susan Pimentel, a nationally recognized education analyst and standards consultant from New Hampshire, was contracted to conduct an "expert" review of the draft. This design provided feedback from both Virginia practitioners and an outside professional source.

It was agreed that development of the ESOL standards would follow the

same process that had guided the work on the GED standards, but adjustments would be made if needed. In the meantime, Virginia had been selected as one of fourteen states to participate in the Adult Education Content Standards Consortia, a project organized by the U.S. Department of Education and facilitated by the American Institutes for Research in Washington, D.C. The planning committee, therefore, was able to rely upon the knowledge gained from that project to refine and strengthen the ESOL development process. Applications were again submitted and reviewed to select the members of the writing teams. Communication among members of the ESOL group was greatly facilitated by use of the Polilogue (see "Click" on page 3). The team met at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Richmond in June 2005, and a draft of the Adult ESOL Content Standards was written.

At the beginning of the 2005-2006 fiscal year, the two project planning teams were merged together under the name of Content Standards Steering Committee (CSSC), and the process continued in a tandem effort, rather than as two separate projects. Deborah Westin, a graduate assistant at Virginia Commonwealth University, joined the committee to help with

the design and documentation of the review process. Currently the GED draft is being edited for consistency, grammar, format, etc., across the content areas. The ESOL draft has just been reviewed by six Virginia ESOL teachers at the six NRS levels and by a standards expert from outside Virginia. The ESOL standards are also being edited across the skill areas and within levels. The data and revisions will then be reviewed and processed by the CSSC. The Steering Committee is working to design a process to submit these documents to the field and gather feedback on them. Plans are being made for an institute to be held in late June 2006 for program managers and lead teachers with a focus on standards—what they are, how to use them, why use them, and what is needed to use them.

As should be evident by now, the CSSC is made up of experts across the field of adult education in Virginia. Below is a photo of the team; for a full list of the members and their roles, please visit the *Progress* archive on the Resource Center website. ■■

Jane Swing is Director of Adult and Continuing Education in the Educational Studies Department at Radford University.



Key Questions

Four Experts Share Perspectives on Content Standards

Cynthia Cooper



Cynthia Cooper is the director of adult and alternative education for Hampton City Schools. She is a relative newcomer to adult education, but has been active in public education for 16

years. As a K12 administrator, she has had ample opportunity to assess the highs and lows of the introduction of course content standards during Virginia's institution of its Standards of Learning Assessments program, which began in 1997.

On January 23, *Progress* brought together several experts on standards development and program administration to discuss the pros and cons of content standards development and implementation. The participants were provided several prompts to guide the discussion, but they were encouraged to let the conversation take its own shape. *Progress* editor, Randy Stamper, facilitated the conversation between Cynthia Cooper, Nancy Faux, Jane Schwerdtfeger, and Peggy Seufert. The following excerpts are taken from their 90-minute conversation.

Prompt: Virginia's adult education programs, whether ESOL or GED, have established instruction programs, curricula, and materials. Given funding trends, it is unlikely that these programs will have the budget to purchase new resources, develop new curricula, and re-train teachers.

RS: Cynthia, as a program manager, are you worried about that sort of thing?

CC: Well, yes, actually I am. In two ways really. The first is if the standards diverge widely from practice, then I'm worried in one way: why would they diverge so widely? If we all just stipulate that for the second part of the answer, it amounts to an unfunded mandate, if you were to say to me that I had to teach across the board in this organization entirely different things with entirely different materials, and I was going to have to bring this part-time staff along, that's going to need some dollars. And if those are going to be my new accountability measures, I think they're going to have to go with some funding. If we're going to be successful with this, you have to kind of back the effort with the dollars...for the professional development particularly.

PS: The issues are important and need to be addressed. The standards cannot lead to educational improvement and higher accountability outcomes without some other systemic adjustments. So, if there is no money for resources, devel-

oping new curricula, or retaining teachers, then you may be setting yourselves up to yet another fad, instead of making a commitment to systemic reform. I think of standards as an investment and a commitment to educational improvement, so we need to make the investment, which may mean trimming expenses from other areas.

NF: I agree strongly with you both. First off, I don't think, at least for the ESOL standards, they're going to diverge at all from what you're teaching, because the people that wrote them are practitioners in the field, those that are actually working with students right now. And then, the state has committed to provide a lot of professional development for the use of the standards, and at least for ESOL, the standards will be used along with current curriculum, so you probably wouldn't have to change your curriculum very much. It would just let you know what skills the learners would need to know for each level.

JS: I agree. We're planning on a lot of professional development around our new standards and around the benchmarks and proficiency levels for those standards. What we're grappling with here is that level of specificity that hasn't been there before, and so I think it's going to be a learning process for all teachers. I also agree that programs are probably not going to need to change their curriculum, but what's going to take the time for them is looking at the standards

and the benchmarks and weaving them into their curriculum. You know we allow programs to develop their own curriculum and their own level descriptors for their classes, and so in Massachusetts all programs could have widely divergent ways of looking at what a level 2 student could do or what an intermediate ESOL student could do for example.

Prompt: One thing that we've learned in a review of literature is a concern about learners being able to attain required levels. Can you speak to this concern? What type of flexibility should be or has been built in, or allowed for?

CC: I wanted to ask Jane whether they, in the process of developing the benchmarks for the different levels whether they did those in accord with the different educational function levels that the NRS is asking of us?

JS: Yes, we did base it on that, because we just thought it would be too hard for our field otherwise. But, we also gathered a lot of separate programs' level descriptors so we could see what programs were thinking about when they were working in their own classes for what skills are appropriate for different levels of students.

CC: But there's nothing in your standards that would preclude a program who wanted to delineate even further,

Nancy Faux



Nancy Faux is the ESOL Specialist for the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center. In this capacity, Nancy oversees all ESOL-related training delivered by the Resource Center.

Additionally, Nancy serves as the liaison between Virginia's Content Standards Steering Committee and U.S. Department of Education's Adult Education Content Standards Project.

Peggy Seufert

Peggy Seufert was the English Language Acquisition Standards Liaison for the Adult Education Content Standards Consortia Project. This project allowed states to work collaboratively around the development, alignment, and implementation of state content standards in English language acquisition (ELA), mathematics, and reading. All Project activities were organized by the staff at the American Institutes for Research and funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Ms. Seufert was instrumental in publishing *A Process Guide for Establishing State Adult Education Content Standards*, a product resulting directly from the work done in the Consortia Project.

Jane Schwerdtfeger

Jane Schwerdtfeger is the Curriculum and Assessment Development Specialist at the Massachusetts Department of Education, Adult and Community Learning Services. She is responsible for developing and implementing curriculum and assessment policies as part of our ABE accountability system to improve adult education services for learners. As communication and policy liaison to state-funded programs, she provides training and technical assistance on effective curriculum and assessment practices to ABE/ESOL practitioners. She has 21 years of curriculum development, teacher training, and teaching experience.

saying you have ESOL levels 1, 2, & 3, a program that really wanted to kind of break level 1 down into 3 sublevels, there would be nothing in your program that would prevent that?

JS: Right, we've tried to make our system as flexible as possible. But the benchmarks do give a lot of specificity too, in terms of the skills we think are necessary at each NRS level.

Prompt: In theory, standards should lead to greater accountability, but in practice they tend to stifle teachers' creativity.

JS: Well, I think there will always be a certain number of teachers who feel constricted and constrained. And I can sympathize on one level; we do make them jump through a lot of hoops in some ways. So I can sympathize. But I really do think that having good standards and good benchmarks then allows teachers to put their creativity into developing really interesting lesson plans, integrating student goals, or evaluating the students.

RS: Peggy, how do you respond to remarks like that?

PS: Well, that depends on the standards, I think. Content standards are often created at national or state level to guide the local districts in developing curriculum, or what to teach. Teachers use the curriculum to prepare lesson plans and materials, or how to teach. So,

I don't think their development stifles creativity. And, if the standards were developed with sufficient stakeholder input, they should include the knowledge and skills that are essential. The National Research Council found that standards did provide flexibility in content and what to teach, but there was often insufficient professional development to help the local districts develop good curricula and to help teachers make the transition to standards-based lessons.

NF: I just feel that it's actually to the contrary about stifling creativity, because

"They were upset at the outset, but they soon realized what everyone else has said: I don't care how you teach it, this is just what you teach."

good structure with goals actually frees teachers, so that they don't have to worry about what it is that they need to include in their lesson plans. It allows them to grow and become very creative.

RS: Cynthia?

CC: We're past that. Just like with the k-12 SOLs, they [teachers] complained originally. But our move here, really in the past five years, has been to be more driven by accountability measures. That dictates what you teach. They were

upset at the outset, but they soon realized what everyone else has said: I don't care how you teach it, this is just what you teach. And so, it's really a non-issue here. I go into classrooms. They're fun. They're back and forth. They're quick-paced. They're everything they always were. I just don't think it's an issue.

Prompt: Jane, having instituted standards in Massachusetts, can you share with us how programs have been held accountable for instituting standards? What sort of resistance or obstacles have you experienced, and would you change your approach if you were to do it again?

JS: We haven't had too much resistance yet since we only put them into practice at the beginning of December. But we did a lot of feedback sessions and regional meetings throughout the fall. I spent lots of time on the road, meeting with teachers and showing them our benchmarks and standards and asking for feedback before they were finalized in December. And pretty much, most people did not seem to have a lot of resistance. They were relieved, and they felt like they [content standards] would actually make their lives easier.

RS: Jane, did you pull teachers in during the development of the standards?

JS: Oh yes, lots of them. Teachers with a lot of experience. I think that

was really important, to make sure that the standards were really based on what was happening in the field, so that they are going to be usable and realistic. And certainly, some programs might see our level 2 benchmarks within a standard, and they might think that they're way too high compared to what they've been doing. But I'm hoping that the process of discussing them will help the field begin to engage with them.

RS: Can you describe your monitoring process?

JS: It is based on ten indicators of program quality that were developed a number of years ago, but it hasn't been easy. We've been trying to overhaul our monitoring process for probably the last two years. And it's just been a long, tough process to try and figure out what we want to see and how we want to get the information. We have a 5-year grant cycle for our programs and so we will be monitoring these programs over the 5 years and we generally do site visits once during the 5 years. So, depending on when the program's monitoring happens, they're going to have a different level of engagement with these new standards and benchmarks. So we're staging what we're looking for from programs based on that as well. Question is how do we do that in a way that makes sense and also doesn't drive programs crazy and then drive us crazy in trying to compile the information?

NF: Did you think about monitoring twice, like a pre- and a post?

JS: We'd love to. The staff in our office is in contact with the programs all the time, they just don't necessarily go out to the program and observe. Usually the monitoring involves a week of our staff attending classes, and talking with students, and meeting with the counselors. It would be great to do a pre-, post visit, but usually there's an action plan that's drawn up based on the monitoring findings. Then, the program can work through some of those suggestions from our office.

CC: Has anyone in the movement to create standards developed a relationship with k-12 professionals in their state in

order to learn from the mistakes of the k-12 movement, because certainly there were some, particularly in the early years.

NF: Well, that's a very good observation and suggestion. We've already had some talks with the state DOE. When they found out we were thinking about writing content standards for ESOL, they called us in, and wanted us to make sure that we did some alignment. They were concerned about what we were doing. So, I think there is already some dialogue there that we could go back and ask them, well how did they do the monitoring. Or, what good things they did or things they'd like to do differently.

“Provide incentives for teachers to implement them, and provide meaningful professional development. You have to give them [teachers] some time to shift and adjust before mandating and holding them accountable.”

Prompt: Peggy and/or Cynthia, many teachers and adult educators have been in the field for decades. How best to ensure buy-in among the practitioners who have seen educational fads come and go?

CC: I think, this again learned from the k-12 battle, is that, once we explain the rationale, and it's an easy sell here because the accountability measures have been in place, and now we're in this state looking at heading into a competitive bid process for grant funding, and it will be based on performance, and the performance is measured by these assessments. The only thing the content standards will be doing is helping us meet those. And I don't think it falls in with the fads. The

kind of fads that we've had often have been in instructional delivery, you know, you should be doing whole language vs. phonetics, you should be doing this and that, and they do come and go. But this is really unrelated to that.

PS: One thing you have to do is get them involved in the development, review, and field testing. Keep information open and straightforward through the development process. Provide incentives for teachers to implement them, and provide meaningful professional development. You have to give them some time to shift and adjust before mandating and holding them accountable.

JS: If I can jump in, I think it kind of goes back to what Nancy said. If your standards are developed by practitioners who have been in the field a long time, who have a lot of experience in teaching, then that is going to be reflected in the standards and in the work. And I think any experienced teacher is going to be able to, generally speaking, appreciate that and recognize that it's going to help them and not be just another fad.

Prompt: The standards in development are obviously being written for program managers and teachers. However, if these standards are going to guide what students are responsible for learning, should there be a less technical set available for their use?

NF: I thought this might be a good idea. We had considered doing that. We could do it at a state level, translating those standards into a different kind of language. What have you thought about in Massachusetts?

JS: I think it's really important. If we're all heading towards the goal of learner-centered education, then the more we can involve the learners in the process the better. Having clear standards and clear benchmarks will help them see the steps to getting there, and hopefully help the learner see the short-term goals that are involved in making a long-term goal.

CC: I agree with what you've said,

Jane. I do not know that we should necessarily create a document, though. Perhaps students should simply ask teachers to translate. And to my mind, if the teacher can't translate it, or if they can't figure it out as a learning group, teacher and learners together, then we've made the language too convoluted.

Prompt: Adult education is supposed to be tailored to the adult. By instituting standards, are we not just imposing the sort of structure on an adult education classroom that didn't work for our clients in the k-12 system? Moreover, a lot of the materials in the standards aren't on the GED, why teach them?

CC: We explain very clearly to our learners when they come in where they are on the educational functioning level scale, and we set short-term goals. We say this is your TABE score right now, and we're going to need you to be at this TABE score by the end of this quarter, then we can move you into the next level class, and our ultimate goal is to get you in our GED refresher or our GED Fast Track class. And we have had some learners say, "I'm not learning this," or they'll go ahead and sign up for the GED test, get slaughtered, and come back and say, I didn't learn any of the stuff that was on that test in this class. Then, we have that conversation again.

PS: Not all students will finish learning with a GED test. It is just an assessment that captures a subset of skills and knowledge. There is much more to learning and pursuing higher education, better jobs, and a higher quality of life than what is tested on the GED. So, why not include more skills that stakeholders have identified as necessary? Finally, teachers and learners can select the standards that are relevant to each individual but they can't select the items on the GED.

JS: I think it's good for teachers to be able to explain as well as possible why something is covered and how it relates to what students are going to be learning on the test. That's where we've really

tried to make our standards as broad as possible, so that what the teacher teaches will be applicable in a lot of different authentic situations as well as be tied to their [the students'] goals.

CC: And I think good instructors are doing that right now, so that's not a hard thing for people in the classroom.

JS: Yes, I agree. I think teachers get that question so often, "Why do we have to do this," that if you can't come up with a good reason, you're really on the spot.

NF: I think it's so much easier in ESOL, because the standards reflect skills on what a learner should be able to do; the assessments are that way too, they're performance assessments really.

"If we're all heading towards the goal of learner-centered education, then the more we can involve the learners in the process the better. Having clear standards and clear benchmarks will help them see the steps to getting there."

JS: It's less about the specific content, than about using and applying skills, I agree.

NF: Jane, for the ESOL standards, do you have them separated by skills, by reading, writing?

JS: Yes, yes.

NF: So, would you stay within a certain skill if they don't master certain benchmarks, or if a learner had very good listening or speaking, but wasn't able to read or write very well would they be moving through benchmarks in different levels?

JS: Well, one learner might have good speaking and listening skills and be higher in the level that they start in there, but then their goal might be to work on

their reading and writing, so they might be in a lower proficiency there. So they might be working on different benchmarks. But it could be more specific than that. Say they're working on their writing skills, but not all of the writing skills in that level might be necessary for the learner to master. Some might be less important in terms of the learner's goals. Some benchmarks will be more important than others for them to focus on. That's the sort of framework we're trying to work with, and I'm hoping that it works. But, you know, in theory it sounds good, but if it doesn't work in practice, it isn't going to happen.

CC: As a program manager, I'd like to comment on that. Certainly, k-12 found that what gets monitored gets done. Meaning what gets tested gets done.

JS: What gets counted, counts.

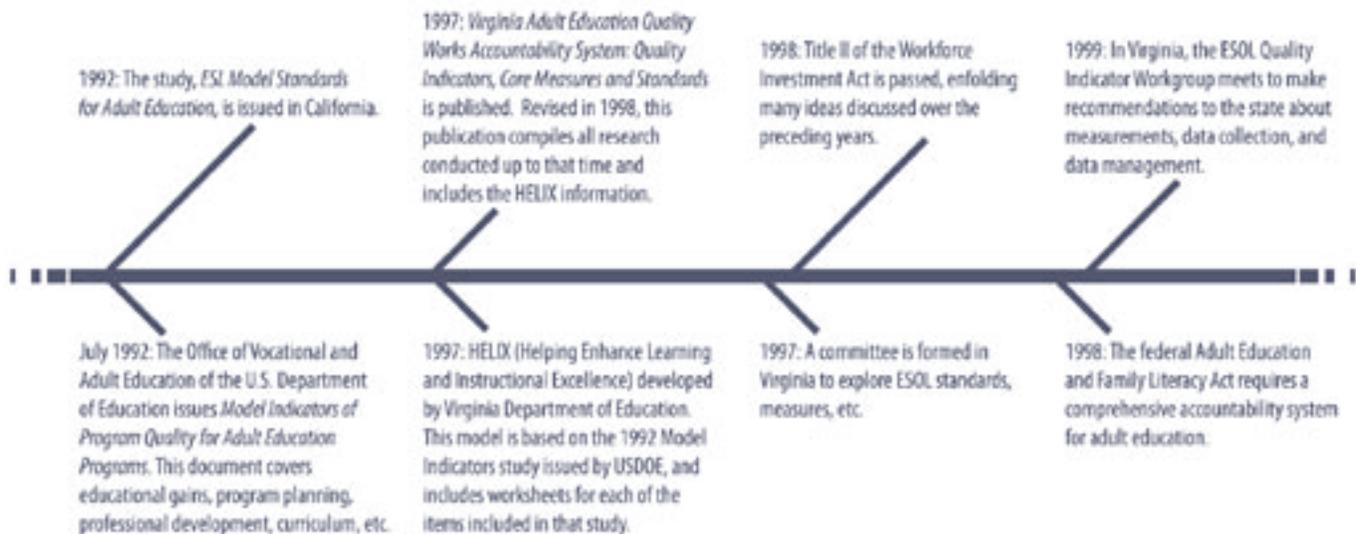
CC: Right, and so I would think any benchmark assessments that you would use to monitor progress really have to align with the accountability measures.

JS: That's a good point. So make it very clear to teachers and learners which ones are going to show up.

CC: These are the must-haves.

JS: Right.

CC: And, then, I think ESOL is a different animal than GED and ABE, I truly do. I would think any other content standards that we put in for the other two, we're going to need to look carefully at articulating a rationale. If it's not in the accountability measures, and teachers are working hard, and programs are working hard just to make the minimum standards, then I think that if we expect them to include any other content standards besides those that are on the accountability assessments, we would need to articulate the reason. That might well be: business and industry says that 73% of all of their entry-level positions that will be open next year are going to require X skills. This is not covered on the TABE, but we are Workforce Investment Act funded, so we'll be doing an internal measure of this to make sure our clients hit the streets with what they need to be successful. ∴



Standards Are Here To Stay

continued from front

unprecedented commitment on the part of the federal government to ensure that all Americans have an equal opportunity to a quality education.

For several decades after the passing of these important pieces of legislation, the only thing policy makers wanted to know was how the money was being spent. With the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, however, the focus shifted from simple fiscal compliance to program excellence and raising student achievement. Today's policy makers are used to seeing hard data that indicates the success or failure of programs. They know for example, that today 92% of Virginia's public schools are accredited based on SOL tests and last year 80% met adequate yearly progress under NCLB. They also know public schools are targeting the necessary resources to those students and schools that are not passing. In large part because of this, the Virginia General Assembly increased public education spending by a whopping \$1.6 billion two years ago.

The Virginia Literacy Foundation believes collecting and interpreting quality data is so important for community-based literacy organizations that it has created a new initiative called the Quality Adult Literacy Data project (QuAL-D). Through

this project, the Foundation, in partnership with the Resource Center, will create and install a new data system specifically designed for literacy organizations to collect relevant data, interpret this data in order to improve their services, and give the Foundation and the Resource Center the data they need to customize relevant technical assistance for individual literacy organizations.

In the current era of educational accountability, the future of any program, no matter how good its intentions or how rich a history it has, is doomed without reliable, easy-to-understand data that measures what the program is being funded to do. Adult education and literacy have no chance of surviving, let alone growing, without the ability to collect, analyze, and interpret reliable data, and to explain in simple terms what is accomplished with the resources given them. Anyone who thinks "this too shall pass" is not living in the real world. Standards and accountability are here to stay. ■■

Mark Emblidge is the Executive Director of the Virginia Literacy Foundation and Director of The Literacy Institute at Virginia Commonwealth University.

A Brief History of

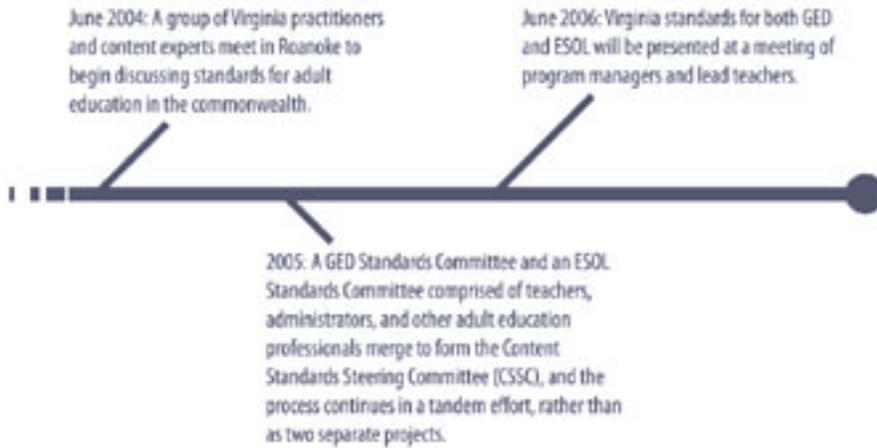
by MARGARET KIERNAN

Though standards may seem to be a new fad in adult education, they have actually been under development in one way or another for the past fifteen years. The current work being done to finalize a set of both GED and ESOL standards for Virginia programs is the culmination of a long process that began with the National Literacy Act of 1991.

The National Literacy Act of 1991 (NLA) renewed the federal commitment to adult education. Foremost among the act's priorities was the improvement of programs to ensure the consistent high quality of educational services supported with federal funds. To this end, the NLA called for the development of indicators of program quality that could be used by states and local programs as models by which to judge the effectiveness of their services. In July 1992 the Office of Vocational and Adult Education of the U.S. Department of Education put forth *Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs*. Areas covered in this document included educational gains, program planning, professional development, curriculum and instruction, support services, student recruit-

A History of Standards

It's been a long time coming, but accountability in adult education has arrived. As the timeline shows, content and program standards for the field have been developing over the last fifteen years as a result of the National Literacy Act of 1991. Virginia's ESOL and GED standards will be presented to the field in June.



Standards in Adult Education

ment, and student retention.

The Virginia Department of Education's Office of Adult Education and Literacy has always placed great emphasis on quality. Since the early 1990s, this office has urged Virginia's local adult education programs to increase their quality of service through better data collection and analysis, as well as documenting "what works" for the adult learners in Virginia. Standards of program quality were identified. These standards tracked student progress based on TABE scores for ABE or through Student Performance Levels (SPL) achievement in ESOL. In the late 1990s, the Office of Adult Education and Literacy began to expect specific and documented student achievements in ABE levels and linked these achievements to the funding of programs. During this period there was great discussion regarding the type of assessment that would be most appropriate for the learners and credible to the fiscal stakeholders. Standardized assessments, portfolio assessments, and performance-based assessments were studied for their applicability to student achievement and for ease in reporting.

In 1997, HELIX (Helping Enhance Learning and Instructional Excellence) was developed in Virginia.

This model consisted of instructional performance worksheets for each of the items included in the U.S. Department of Education's *Model Indicators* in 1992. These worksheets included performance indicators and standards, performance data for the fiscal year, and an area for programs to include their own improvement strategies. In 1997, *Virginia Adult Education Quality Works Accountability System: Quality Indicators, Core Measures and Standards* was published. Revised in 1998, this publication compiled all of the research conducted up to that time together with the work of the HELIX project. The document closely resembles the present National Reporting System, and it reveals that Virginia has been in the forefront of program quality since the 1990s.

The Quality Works Accountability System included indicators for ESOL programs for the first time. Since the Mainstream English Language Training (MELT) program was piloted in what is now the REEP program in Arlington, the ESOL field has always had a model on which to build a quality program. A study of the *ESL Model Standards for Adult Education* was produced in California in 1992, and in 1997 a committee was formed in Virginia to propose ESOL

performance standards for educational gains. This group extended the effort into a proposed standards, measures, and strategies document that was submitted to the state as a guideline for an analysis of program quality in the field of ESOL. From this, the state set performance indicators for educational gains for adult ESOL programs. In 1999, ESOL Quality Indicator Workgroup meetings in Virginia studied and made recommendations that resulted in the state deciding what gains to measure, how to collect and submit that data, and how to improve the data management system.

Equipped for the Future was rolled out in 1997 and programs were urged to use these concepts for further program improvement. When Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 was enacted, many of the ideas discussed in years past were enfolded into this law.

It is evident that Virginia has been at the forefront of program quality for many years. ■■

Margaret Kiernan is the ESL Coordinating Teacher at Virginia Beach Adult Learning Center.

Welcome to new Resource Center employees



Pictured from left to right: Catherine Norrell, Deborah Westin, Richard Sebastian, Kris Walters, Adrienne Fordham-Howard, and Danielle Pagano. Not pictured is Caroline Thurston.

Over the past few months, we've been growing. Meet some of our new employees.

Adrienne Fordham-Howard joined the Resource Center in November 2005 as the Administrative Assistant for both the eFSET-VA project and the Resource Center. Joining her as the eFSET-VA online enrollment coordinator was Richard Sebastian. Caroline Thurston interned with the Resource Center during the fall of 2005 and became a part-time assistant editor in January 2006. Catherine Norrell and Deborah Westin are graduate research assistants for the Resource Center. And rounding out the bunch, Danielle Pagano and Kris Walters help out with many of the assorted projects the Resource Center is working on as part-time student assistants.

eFSET-VA Up and Running; Offers Online Education for Food Stamp Recipients

In October of 2005, the Virginia Department of Social Services awarded the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center a contract to provide e-learning to qualified food stamp recipients as part of the Food Stamp Employment and Training program (FSET). The new e-learning program is called eFSET-VA.

While e-learning isn't new, the eFSET-VA program is unique in many ways. The eFSET-VA program offers learners access to online assessments, adult education mentors, and a variety of powerful web-based educational and workplace learning modules. Learners begin the program by completing the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) assessment. Until recently, this was offered only as a paper and pencil or computer-based test. With the release of TABE Online, the assessment can now be taken anywhere there is an available computer with an Internet connection.

Once initial assessments are complete, each learner is paired with an online mentor; a Virginia adult educator with experience teaching adults online. Mentors select an educational program

for their learners from a variety of online learning modules, which include GED Connection, Workplace Essential Skills, GED Pathway, and KeyTrain. All of the online programs are self-paced and can be accessed by learners from their home computers or from any public computer with an Internet connection.

eFSET-VA has agreements with over 200 computer labs across the state of Virginia to provide access to eFSET-VA learners. These locations include public libraries, adult education centers, DSS offices, and Virginia Employment Commission One Stop Centers.

The ultimate goal of the eFSET-VA program is to provide learners with the education and employment skills necessary to allow them to secure full-time jobs and end their dependence on food stamps. Participation in the eFSET-VA program can not only lead to gains in educational and workplace skills, but also to such valuable credentials as a GED or a Career Readiness Certificate.

In November, Richard Sebastian and Adrienne Fordham-Howard were hired to assist with the eFSET-VA program. As the full-time Online Enrollment Coordi-

nator, Richard serves as the initial contact for new learners, interviewing and registering each learner by phone, scheduling their TABE assessments, and assigning them mentors. He also oversees the technical aspects of the program. Richard has previously taught for Henrico County Adult Education and is currently completing a doctoral degree in Instructional Technology from UVA. Adrienne Fordham-Howard is a part-time administrative assistant for the eFSET-VA program, helping to register students, managing the student database, and supporting the eFSET-VA staff. Before coming to VAL-RC, Adrienne worked as the Communications Coordinator for the Central Virginia HIV Care Consortium at VCU.

In addition to providing FSET clients access to existing learning systems to meet their educational and workplace goals, the eFSET-VA program is also partnering with Virginia Tech and the NASA Center for Distance Learning to create online learning modules for eFSET-VA learners with low-level reading and math skills. These modules are currently under development and should be ready to be piloted in the fall of 2006. ■



Farewell to Barbara Hearn

After over 10 years of service at the Resource Center, Barbara Hearn retired in December of last year to take a full-time position as grandmother to her growing family. A mother of three and grandmother of five, Barbara was also a mother in the office. She looked after her fellow coworkers, having fun with us and sharing her wonderful cooking. Her humor and patience were a constant blessing around the office.

"I always appreciated her positive attitude. She rolled with the punches, figured out how to get things done, and kept on," said Barbara Gibson.

Donna Grieco, whose son is married to Barbara's daughter, said, "Barbara and I worked together, and I felt she learned and accomplished so much since the day she arrived. Barbara came to the Resource Center having never turned on a computer and certainly not expecting all of her work to center around the ever-growing database or the never-ending workshop evaluations. She was a great coworker and friend to me. I will miss working with her, but I won't miss seeing her – we share a wonderful granddaughter, Mckenna."

Everyone at the Resource Center would like to wish Barbara a fond farewell. ❖

The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century

Written by THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN, Reviewed by DEBORAH WESTIN

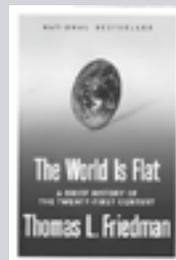
In the fifteenth century, Columbus set sail to discover the riches of India: precious metals, spices, jewels, and silk. In the twenty-first century, Thomas L. Friedman, author of *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, embarked on a journey similar to Columbus'. Friedman traveled to Bangalore, India, to discover the riches of today: brain power, knowledge workers, and call centers. He wanted to understand why Indians had become such an important pool for the outsourcing of service and information technology work from America and other industrialized countries. Friedman

individuals and companies to connect, wirelessly, to anyone, anywhere in the world, at any time – these changes have, effectively, flattened our world.

The next four sections describe the United States, developing countries, and companies' responses to globalization. In the section on the United States and globalization, Friedman discusses ways India and China are racing us to the top of the economic mountain. In order for Americans to function in a flat world, we must be "untouchables" or "people whose jobs cannot be outsourced" (p. 238). Friedman goes on to describe these kinds of jobs and people.

In the third section, entitled *The Virgin of Guadalupe*, Friedman analyzes developing countries and the flat world. The main focus of this chapter concerns policies that developing countries need to adopt in order to create the right environment for their companies and entrepreneurs to thrive in a flat world. Through a metaphor of regions of the world as neighborhoods, Friedman asserts that each one has its strengths and weaknesses, and all are in need of scrutiny concerning the infrastructure, regulatory institutions, education, and culture.

Finally, the book ends with a piece on imagination. One of the key statements Friedman makes in the last chapter, entitled 11/9 versus 9/11, concerns the two ways we flatten the world. We use our imaginations either to bring everyone up to the same level, or down to the same level. One way is constructive, the other destructive. Friedman states that we can set the example by being the best global citizens that we can be. Now that I've read this book, I definitely have a heightened awareness concerning what I can do to live in a flat world and to assist others as well. ❖



**The World is Flat:
A Brief History
of the Twenty-
First Century**
Thomas L. Friedman

was prompted to write this book because today more people all over the planet can collaborate and compete on equal footing, in real time, on all kinds of work, than at any other time in the history of the world. Essentially, *The World is Flat* demystifies globalization. When I first began reading this book, I really had no idea what Friedman meant by a flat world. Not only did his use of examples and analogies open my eyes to the issues of globalization, but it opened my heart as well. It really made me think about the future and my responsibilities for setting an example for living and functioning in a flat world.

Friedman divides the book into six sections. In the first, "How the World Became Flat," he describes ten "flatteners," as a "convergence" of political events, innovations, and companies that are having dramatic effects on the way the world works. From the Berlin Wall coming down in 1989, to what Friedman calls the "Steroids" – the ability of

Deborah A. Westin is a Research Assistant at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

PROGRESS

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Participation Improves Practice: A Teacher's Perspective on Standards

by JAKE McMURRAY

I started my career as an educator five years ago, principally as an English instructor, but also as a high school chemistry teacher. Currently I am an ESOL teacher with both the Scott County Adult Education program and the Scott County Public School System.

Over the past two years, I have had the unique opportunity to serve on Virginia's Adult Education Standards Writing Panel for both the GED and ESOL standards. In both cases we used the Virginia SOLs, along with other states' adult education standards, as models. Doing so sped up the process. These experiences were of great benefit to me as a teacher.

I was selected as a member of the GED science standards panel in 2004. The panel focused primarily on the concepts that would enable an adult education learner to pass the science portion of the GED exam, but we also considered knowledge that a learner must have and skills that a learner must master to enter post-second-

ary education. As you might imagine, the concepts needed to pass the GED had priority over college preparedness, but that does not mean that college preparedness was not important in our work.

Last year I began participating as a member of the listening panel as part of the adult education ESOL standards development. This panel focused on the different levels of listening skills that an English learner must master to become an effective English communicator. Through my experience on this panel, I gained insights into the importance of listening in language learning that I had not previously considered. Listening is the building block of spoken language and the primary means of receiving instruction and information in our world. I am a much better ESOL instructor because of my work with the standards panel. I now employ techniques to develop my students' listening skills so as to improve their listening comprehension,

which, in turn, develops spoken vocabulary and grammar skills. Better listening skills also facilitate learning in the content areas because so much content is presented in a spoken format.

As a teacher, working on these standards was a valuable learning experience. Researching and developing standards gives teachers special insight into how to better present the concepts and achieve the objectives of Virginia's adult education programs. It is much easier to understand why certain concepts are included as a standard and others left out when you are forced to prioritize them. It would be a worthwhile project to have standards-writing workshops that allow teachers to develop their own standards and compare them to the existing standards. ■

Jake McMurray is an ESOL teacher with both the Scott County Adult Education program and the Scott County Public School System.