

Update on Adult Education Podcast
Episode 1: Update on Adult Education
with Barbara Gibson and Heidi Silver-Pacuilla
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Barbara Gibson: Welcome. This is Barbara Gibson. I'm the moderator of a new series of podcasts from the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center called Update on Adult Education. For our first podcast in the series, we have with us Heidi Silver-Pacuilla who is the coordinator for adult education in the department of adult education [Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education in the Virginia Department of Education]. Heidi, can you tell us a little bit about your background and what you've done before coming to Virginia?

Heidi Silver-Pacuilla: Sure! Thank you for having me on. I am almost at my one-year point at the Department of Education. Before I joined the Virginia Department of Education, I was at the U.S. Department of Education in the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, and I focused on professional development and technical assistance to practitioners around the country. I also had an opportunity to focus on technology and distance education questions and how we could work on the big questions about getting more learning to more people around the country. I was at the Department of Education for about six years, and before that I was at American Institutes for Research and had the opportunity there to work on technical assistance projects in adult education and also in special education technology. I came from a program in southern Arizona; it was a very large program, Pima Community College. I enjoyed it very much. I served as a disability specialist and learned a tremendous amount from the students and my colleagues there about running a program and embedding a program in an active community. So I'm very happy to be in this position and learning how to embed adult education in the communities in Virginia under this new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Barbara Gibson: Thank you, Heidi. I think you can see how fortunate we are in Virginia within adult education to have Heidi as our new leader. With her background and experience, I think adult education is in good hands, and it's a very exciting time to be in adult education and having someone of her caliber leading us. Today we're going to be focusing on the Virginia workforce system and the role of adult education in the workforce system. And Heidi has been very actively involved at the state level and also with many of you at the regional and local levels since she came into this role. And so she will be telling us about what's on the horizon and more things that we need to be thinking about to be ready for and how changes will be occurring in the future. The first question I have for you today, Heidi, is: what is adult education's role in the Virginia workforce system at a state level?

Heidi Silver-Pacuilla: Well, adult education is Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, so we are equal partners with the other titles. Title I is WIOA adult and dislocated workers, also youth (Title I Youth). Title III is the Virginia Economic Commission—known in the community as unemployment insurance, although they do much more than that. And Title IV is vocational rehabilitation. So, as an equal partner, it's our job to represent what we know and what we do. We do many things. One of them is prepare adults for what's next in their

life, whether it's further education, helping their children or the grandchildren with their homework, improving their English, or preparing for the next job. And as a workforce partner, we need to represent our educational expertise and understanding that education and learning is different for everyone and the amount of time that it takes a learner can be different. So we really need to talk to our partners to make sure that they understand learning and the pace of learning so that we can create realistic and effective career pathways for everyone.

Barbara Gibson: Heidi, that sounds very interesting, and I think it's a challenge for all of us in adult education to begin to understand how we fit in this new system. I understand that Virginia's workforce system is being branded in a new way, so what can you tell us about the launch of the new branding for Virginia's workforce system?

Heidi Silver-Pacuilla: There is a nice new brand that's rolling out over the summer of 2018 (it has a nice sharp-nosed cardinal as its logo): the Virginia Career Works. And the goal is that we will all belong to the same brand, although we will be able to retain our local flavor. As you know, many workforce boards and regions have worked hard to come up with a local brand that is now recognized in their community, so that won't completely go away, but we will all be under the same umbrella of Virginia Career Works. And I think that will help us be seen as the partner that we really are in the One-stops and in the local workforce areas. Adult ed regional program managers are sitting on the local workforce development boards, representing adult education's role, and staff is working in the One-stops across the Commonwealth. So, we are there, and we need to be seen as an integral part and share that brand.

It will roll out over time, so it's hard to say exactly how that little cardinal will start appearing in people's signature blocks and websites (maybe some coffee mugs and things on our desks, you know, sticky notes). But we hope that, by sharing that brand, we will unify the system as much as the name.

Barbara Gibson: That sounds very exciting because we haven't had a real system that was identifiable in Virginia, and I think it will also help us in adult education to, as you said, further define our role and promote our role in that system.

An underpinning of the workforce system is the combined state plan under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and this spring, it is being modified. As a matter of fact, it's recently gone out for public comment. What are the changes that you see in the combined plan that will impact adult education?

Heidi Silver-Pacuilla: Well, the timeline for the two-year modification which is required by law is quite tight, and there's a pretty quick turnaround for public comment and then getting the modifications into the federal offices. As you know we have a new governor, new staff, some new priorities, and new ideas, and they would really like to see this modification as being a kickoff to year-long effort to really look at everything that's in the combined state plan, hear from stakeholders around the state, and make sure that WIOA implementation is working in the various regions and for the various titles that are involved. So this modification that's happening in March, the requirement is that the new submission is in to the federal government by April 2

of 2018. That's pretty tight, but it's not the end, and watch for many opportunities over the next six months or so to provide further input into the combined state plan.

What is in the modification is [a] thorough update of our section. As you know, when the plan went in initially, in 2016, it reflected the fact that we would run a competition and that it, the competition, would be compliant with the law. And there was a lot of future tense and a lot of citation of the law. Well, that competition happened in 2017; that's behind us, and so our section really reflects the providers that were funded, the priorities that were set forth in that competition, and how the Department of Education and the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC) are working together to support the priorities that rule through that competition. So there's quite an update in our section. It should not come as a surprise because we've all lived through it now over the past year. But I did want to emphasize that there are more opportunities for input into the larger implementation effort coming over the next several months.

Barbara Gibson: As people think about opportunities for input, what are the areas or initiatives that you think will grow in importance over the next two years under that plan?

Heidi Silver-Pacuilla: One thing that I think is very interesting—I will answer your question, but I'll just put in a little plug—the front matter of the plan was updated with 2017 economic data that is presented in regional focus. So you can look through the plan and see the top, in-demand, and then the emerging-in-the-next-five-year occupations for your region. And I think it's very important that we continue to understand how different the regions are in Virginia. So that's one thing that I think people should be aware of, that they can look at that now (it's in the two-year modification), but that, going forward, keep an eye on regionalization. I think it's a strong suit that the plan recognizes how very different the regions are.

[A] couple [of] initiatives that are discussed in the plan: one is sector strategies and career pathways that prepare people for occupational clusters. And those may roll out regionally as well, but I think there is some effort to understand that we're not preparing people just for the very next job. That we want to prepare people for a career in an occupational cluster. It's a little hard to predict what job titles will be in the next few years. Things are changing pretty quickly in many industries, and we need to prepare people to be flexible workers, flexible learners. Once they get in a career path that works for them, they may change jobs even within that career path many times. So I think focusing on occupational clusters and sector strategies where you're serving multiple businesses in a region that are working together in an industry, I think that's a trend that will continue and we need to understand how to support that. That we're not just preparing people for the job that starts on Monday, but for a career in an occupation. But I think there is some, I'm almost contradicting myself, but there's some push that, as new industries come into a region, they want to know that there's a workforce that's ready for them. And I want to make sure that the whole workforce system understands that adult education can help prepare individuals who already live in that community to work in those new jobs, especially [through] models like integrated education and training. Those short-term training programs could help prepare a workforce for a particular new industry that comes into a region, and so those new industries won't be looking outside of us (outside of their community) for workers, but skilling

up the people that are there. So that's one thing that I think that we should be watching for: sector strategies and career pathways.

Another initiative that's discussed in the plan is a sort of a front door, a technology-based front door, for the system so that every job seeker and learner that comes to the system would be considered a customer and enter through the same front door, so that we could have a much clearer, more streamlined referral process. So we can pass learners/customers between the various partners in a more seamless way and track the outcomes. So it would not replace our data collection system, our reporting system, but it would be a referral system that would link all of our customers together as individuals coming into the workforce development system in Virginia.

Barbara Gibson: It sounds as if as we're working toward more consistency at the state level. We're looking at more variation at the regional level, but what I'm hearing as the consistent theme through this is leadership and understanding in adult education that we have a role—that we're partners, but we also need to be leaders within our own area. And I think that's going to present some unique challenges that maybe we haven't really thought of before in our field. Are you seeing this playing out that way, or am I just reading more into it?

Heidi Silver-Pacuilla: Well, I think it is a new role for us, and leadership training and honing our leadership skills is something that none of us can ever say is done, right? As long as we're working we need to keep honing those skills. And so I think having these conversations about how to be an effective workforce development board member and how to show leadership in our communities is a very good conversation to continue to have over the next several years. Because, in many cases, we are a new voice at the table and so being a new voice comes with opportunities, but it also comes with some drawbacks. And we just need to be prepared to jump in there and represent our learners and what we can do.

Barbara Gibson: And this, it seems to me, is at all levels. It's obviously what *you're* involved in every day that you, when you're working—but it's for our regional program managers, our regional specialists, and our teachers. And we don't often think of teachers as being leaders in in that way, but it seems very clear to me when we start talking about having new ways of thinking about the work that we do that it really does start in the classroom with helping our students to understand what careers are and how they need to prepare themselves.

Heidi Silver-Pacuilla: Absolutely, and especially when you think about integrated education and training, and teachers are working with training instructors in a new way. Both of those individuals are going to have to represent their half of the equation with leadership and with flexibility. So it's a good challenge for all of us.

Barbara Gibson: In the future, we will be focusing on what is going on in some of the regions with adult education and how they're collaborating and developing new and better partnerships with other agencies and organizations in their regions and carrying out the goals of WIOA. We're also going to be providing information from those agencies to help all of us to have a better idea of what we need to do to prepare ourselves to do the work of adult education within this new environment. So I hope you'll stay tuned and come, you know, come prepared to listen to future

podcasts. We will have new and different presenters and people being interviewed and new topics, and we look forward to an exciting series over this coming spring.

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