

WIOA Fact Sheet: Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed into law in 2014, codified the English Civics (EL-Civics) program as the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) program. EL-Civics was previously not formally part of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) system, although it was funded annually through WIA-related appropriations. As with EL-Civics, IELCE was designed to teach English for naturalization with a focus on understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and U.S. history and government. However, there is a concern that the rules published by the Department of Education could restrict IELCE for language instruction focused solely on workplace outcomes, contravening decades of practice and undermining the fragile and under-funded EL-Civics infrastructure.

Authorizing Language: INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION.— The term “integrated English literacy and civics education” means education services provided to English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, that enables such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States. Such services shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation, and **may** include workforce training.

Other sections of the legislation, however, could be read to conflict with IELCE’s authorization. For example:

- In the funding section (Sec. 243), immediately after the authorization, goals are identified, stating each program that receives funding under this section shall be designed to:
 - (1) Prepare adults who are English language learners for, and place such adults in, unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency; and
 - (2) Integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to carry out the activities of the program.
- In the accountability section (Sec. 116), all indicators, which apply to the Adult Family Literacy program under which IELCE is authorized, are related to education for workforce purposes, including:
 - (IV) The percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (subject to clause (iii)), during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program;
 - (V) The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential, or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment;

Proposed Regulations: The Department of Education’s proposed regulations defining the IELCE program are unnecessarily more restrictive than the authorizing language. Section 463.33 mirrors the statutory text, stating services “shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation, and **may** include workforce training.” However, Section 463.70 adds IELCE services **must** be delivered in combination with integrated education and training services.

While limited in recent years due to budget constraints, EL-Civics has been the primary source of funding for English language acquisition for citizenship and related purposes. Yet, of the 8.8 million lawful permanent residents eligible to naturalize, a 2012 Pew Hispanic study found 26% of Latino immigrants identified language as a barrier to citizenship and only 30% reported speaking English “very well,” or “pretty well.” At a time when the need is clear and growing, it would be unwise to discourage states from using IELCE funds to invest in language training for EL-Civics programs.

Recommendation: Understanding the ambiguity with the authorizing language, and the advanced state of the regulatory process, simply amending the draft regulations at this point to reflect the broader, more appropriate definition of IELCE may not be an option. If this is the case, the Department of Education should define IELCE in two complementary ways.

- (1) The original definition could be maintained such that services “shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation,” as an intermediary goal ultimately leading to workforce-related goals already defined in WIOA.
- (2) Related, through the Notice of Funding Availability, instructions to reviewers, and in funding-related guidance and technical assistance to grantees, the Department of Education should define the program goals such that one outcome could be eligibility for government employment restricted to U.S. citizens, such that language acquisition for citizenship could be explicitly listed as a preliminary requirement for which funds may be used.