
A Stronger Workforce for America Act of 2026 ACCT Bill Summary

On April 6, 2026 House Education and Workforce Committee (HEWC) Chairman Tim Walberg (R-WI) introduced the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reauthorization bill, *A Stronger Workforce for America Act (ASWAA) of 2026*.

Background

WIOA governs our federal workforce training infrastructure and is the primary federal workforce development law. The 2014 reauthorization sought increased coordination among federal workforce development and related programs. Workforce development programs provide a combination of education and training services to prepare individuals for work and to help them improve their prospects in the labor market. They may include activities such as job search assistance, career counseling, occupational skill training, classroom training, or on-the-job training. The federal government provides workforce development activities through WIOA's programs and other programs designed to increase the employment and earnings of workers. Community colleges play a vital role in this ecosystem, primarily as occupational skills training providers and classroom trainers, and increasingly helping with other supportive services such as career counseling and basic needs services.

In the 118th Congress, HEWC Chair Virginia Foxx (R-NC) and Ranking Member Bobby Scott (D-VA) introduced H.R. 6655, *A Stronger Workforce for America Act (ASWAA)*. The House passed the bill on April 9, 2024, in the House of Representatives with an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 378-26.

The Senate referred the bill to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP). HELP and CEW staffers negotiated to develop a reauthorization bill featuring compromises between both chambers' priorities. Ultimately, despite having bipartisan support from both HELP and HEWC, ASWAA was dropped from an unrelated must-pass spending bill in December 2024, in favor of a simpler government funding bill with no changes to workforce development law.

While much of the text between the 2024 and 2026 versions are similar, there are key differences between these two versions:

1. The ASWAA of 2024 was a bipartisan bill, whereas the 2026 bill is a Republican-only product.
2. In the 2026 bill, Adult Education and Literacy programs would be transferred from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor.

3. The 2026 bill has a new Make America Skilled Again pilot program. Under this block-grant program, states would be allowed to allocate these funds to workforce development projects for youth, adult, and dislocated workers either at the state or local level, rather than the current law's separate funding streams for each targeted population.
4. Under the 2026 bill's proposed performance accountability provisions, "measurable skills gained" would be evaluated after twelve months of program entry instead of six, as was seen in ASWAA 2024.

The summary below highlights several elements found in the latest version of the bill that would impact community colleges.

Skill-based Hiring Initiatives

As part of the Unified State Plan, the bill includes a section that asks states to report on changes in labor market conditions to the workforce system in their states. In addition, states would need to include a description of any activities to "expand economic opportunity for individuals and reduce barriers to labor market entry" by, among other things, "developing in cooperation with employers, education and training providers, and other stakeholders" statewide initiatives that promote skill-based hiring and examine licensure policies which remove or streamline requirements and interstate agreements to improve reciprocity.

Performance Accountability Indicators

Amends the performance indicators to focus on retention in the workforce after the fourth quarter after program completion (assuming job placement after the second quarter after program completion), "measurable skills gained" after twelve months of program entry, and effectiveness in serving employers by calculating percentage of program participants that exited the program having completed on-the-job training, incumbent worker training, or apprenticeships.

One-Stop Delivery System

Allows career and technical education (CTE) schools, institutions of higher education, and public libraries to serve as one-stop operators. Expands the ability of one-stop operators to provide services virtually if participants can have access to a physical location in which they can access virtual services. This can be done in partnership with a network of affiliated locations, such as community college campuses.

Eligible Training Providers

This bill makes it possible for a state's governor to identify and grant high-performing, eligible training providers the "Workforce Innovation Leader" (WIL) designation. This designation allows the eligible training provider to display the WIL seal in their marketing materials. An eligible training provider's WIL designation is subject to annual review in education, employment, earnings, and value-added earnings outcomes that meet or exceed the required levels for WIL designation.

Adult and Dislocated Worker Activities

Requires the states to coordinate with industry and education stakeholders to identify or develop competency-based assessments that measure knowledge, skills, and abilities for the purposes of awarding recognized postsecondary credentials or credit, developing individual employment plans, or skills-based resumes or profiles.

Establishes the Critical Industry Skills Fund and an Industry or Sector Partnership and Career Pathways Development Fund using the governor's reserve fund, and any additional funds reserved by the governor for this purpose. These funds will provide partial reimbursements to employers, sector partnerships, and other intermediaries that have approved applications to upskill workers in the priority industries selected by the state, with a non-federal cost-sharing requirement based on the size of the participating employers. Reimbursements will occur only when workers complete their program and are employed and retained in that industry.

Requires that no less than 50 percent of the funds allocated to a local area be used to provide eligible individuals with skills development through an Individual Training Account (ITA) or a contract with an employer or provider.

New Strengthening Community Colleges Competitive Grant Program

Authorizes the Strengthening Community Colleges Workforce Development Grant (SCCWDG) program to improve and expand high-quality workforce development programs at community colleges. This authorization is modeled after the highly successful Strengthening Community College Training Grants (SCCTG), which is now in its sixth funding cycle. The program focuses on establishing industry partnerships and prioritizing serving individuals with barriers to employment or incumbent workers in need of foundational skills. Authorizes \$65 million annually for SCCWDG from fiscal years (FY) 2027 through 2032, the same level Congress provided in the FY26 final appropriations law.

Job Training Grants

Repurposes the H-1B visa fee revenue provided to the Secretary of Labor and allots the funding through states and down to local areas based on a formula that allocates one-third of the funding based on the relative number of unemployed individuals, one-third of the funding based on the relative number of disadvantaged adults, and one-third based on the relative number of individuals in the civilian labor force.

These funds would be used to provide Individual Training Accounts (ITA) with a minimum of \$5,000 for each ITA. Once the funds provided under this section are exhausted, the local area must use the funds reserved under WIOA section 134 (Adult and Dislocated Worker Activities) for any dislocated worker determined eligible for an ITA and may limit the maximum amount available to less than \$5,000 if the dislocated worker is not a low-income individual.

Workforce Data Quality Initiative Grant

To assist states in making data-driven decisions, this bill would establish the Workforce Data Quality Initiative Grant. This grant aims to create workforce longitudinal data systems and associated resources. Specifically, grantees are to expand the adoption and use of linked, open, and interoperable data on credentials to help students and workers make informed decisions on

credential navigation. Furthermore, the Workforce Data Quality Initiative Grant requires grantees to participate in and contribute to a multi-state data collaborative.

Reentry Employment Opportunities Program

Would establish a competitive grant that allows eligible entities, such as community-based organizations and institutions of higher education, to implement projects that prevent recidivism among justice-involved adults and youth and increase their training, skills, and workforce opportunities.

Adult Education and Literacy

This bill would include literacy as a foundational skill as a part of adult education, which can be earned in conjunction with other activities and services such as financial literacy instruction, postsecondary preparation, and/or workforce training. The bill would move Adult Education and Literacy from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor.

Make America Skilled Again Pilot Grant Program

Under the Make America Skilled Again Pilot Grant Program, the state itself or on behalf of a local area or consortium of local areas could apply for a block grant for projects designed to carry out “innovative reforms to achieve better outcomes for jobseekers, workers, employers.” These activities can include the development and strengthening of industry or sector partnerships and training programs found in these partnerships.

The Secretary of Labor may approve no more than ten and eight pilot projects for states and local areas and consortia of local areas to carry out, respectively. These projects are five years in length, with the possibility for a four-year extension should the project demonstrate that it “achieves a performance improvement of not less than an average of a 5 percent increase across all of the indicators of performance.”

Priority would be given to state applicants with a population of less than 5 million and more than fifteen workforce boards. State applicants also get preference if they have achieved the State-adjusted levels of performance for youth, adult, and dislocated workers programs. Local areas or a consortium of local areas’ application would gain priority if it has met the local levels of performance for youth, adult, and dislocated workers programs.

Recipients of this block grant would receive funding for their youth, adult, and dislocated workers programs through this grant rather than other funding streams found in this bill.