



## ***Winter 2007***

*The ASTD Policy Brief is a quarterly report on Congressional activity and other public policy news that impacts the workplace learning and performance (WLP) profession.*

### **The 109<sup>th</sup> Congress – Year in Review**

From the perspective of the workplace learning and performance (WLP) profession, Congress achieved some important goals in 2006, including passage of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act. This bill reauthorized the popular \$1.3 billion program that provides state grants for vocational training.

In September, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist introduced the bipartisan National Competitiveness Investment Act (NCIA), a bill designed to increase funding for scientific research and education. While the Senate ultimately did not vote on the bill, it did reflect Congressional concerns regarding U.S. competitiveness in the global economy, and may foreshadow legislative efforts in the coming year.

Unfortunately, while both the Senate and the House passed legislation reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act, the nation's workforce training system, the two chambers were unable to reconcile differences between their respective bills and provide a final bill for the President to sign. This represents a lost opportunity to strengthen the workforce system so that individuals can be sufficiently trained to fill high-skilled as well as high-need jobs.

The 110<sup>th</sup> Congress began its first session on January 4, 2007, with the Democratic Party controlling both chambers. Whether the new majority will be able to advance legislation which impacts the learning profession remains to be seen. ASTD's Policy Department will work with the new Congress to draft and enact legislation that supports a highly skilled workforce.

### **Skills Gap Reports**

If recent events are any indication, look for the "skills gap" to be a hot topic in 2007.

On November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006, ASTD hosted a breakfast briefing at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., marking the release of the white paper, "Bridging the Skills Gap: How the Skills Shortage Threatens Growth and Competitiveness...and What to do About It." This new white paper, developed in cooperation with ASTD's Public Policy Council, focuses on how organizations can assess and manage skills gaps. Congressional staffers, thought leaders, and organization representatives attended the event, which featured a townhall-style discussion on how Congress and the business community can work together to lessen the impact of skills shortages.

The goal of "Bridging the Skills Gap" is twofold. First, it includes an action plan to provide business leaders and learning professionals a process for assessing and managing skills gaps. Second, it provides recommendations to government for simplifying government training programs, promoting partnerships, and coordinating tax incentives, with the ultimate goal of helping organizations utilize public sector training programs to develop skilled talent. To view a copy of "Bridging the Skills Gap", please visit <http://www.astd.org/skillsgap>.

The National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) has issued a new report entitled, "Tough Choices or Tough Times." A sequel to the seminal 1990 report, "America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!" NCEE's new report recommends significant changes to the nation's education system. In addition, the Commission offers several proposals that relate to current workforce development, including "personal competitiveness accounts," to which the government, employers, and employees could make tax-free contributions, and the creation of regional competitiveness authorities. To view an executive summary of "Tough Choices or Tough Times," please visit: [http://www.skillscommission.org/pdf/exec\\_sum/ToughChoices\\_EXECSUM.pdf](http://www.skillscommission.org/pdf/exec_sum/ToughChoices_EXECSUM.pdf).

Another important report is "Are They Really Ready to Work?," which details findings from a survey jointly conducted by The Conference Board, the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Working Families, and the Society for Human Resource Management. The report recommends that businesses work with the academic community to ensure that educators understand the needs of tomorrow's workforce, and encourages businesses to consider the types of training necessary to provide new employees with the skills required to succeed in the workplace. To view a copy of "Are They Really Ready to Work?" please visit: [http://www.conference-board.org/pdf\\_free/BED-06-Workforce.pdf](http://www.conference-board.org/pdf_free/BED-06-Workforce.pdf).

### **Employee Learning Week**

ASTD recently completed its second annual Employee Learning Week, December 4-8, 2006. With the theme of "Workforce Development is Everyone's Business<sup>®</sup>", Employee Learning Week is a public awareness campaign designed to communicate the importance of learning and its critical connection to organizational results. Workplace learning and performance professionals organized activities around the globe to highlight how important skilled and capable employees are to organizations' growth and success. A number of ASTD chapters reached out to their elected officials and, as a result, public officials from several states and over twenty cities and counties introduced proclamations recognizing Employee Learning Week. The public awareness initiative began in 2004 with Employee Learning Day, and expanded in 2005 to Employee Learning Week.

### **ASTD Releases New Data in its 2006 State of the Industry Report**

Efforts to develop the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of each employee to maximize organizational impact are accelerating, according to ASTD's just-released *2006 State of the Industry Report*. Companies are using business measurement tools to gauge the efficiency and effectiveness of their learning functions, and they are aligning learning with performance goals.

ASTD estimates that U.S. organizations spend \$109.25 billion on employee learning and development annually. With such a sizable investment dedicated to employee learning, how are organizations gaining efficiencies by using technology to deliver learning and measuring the return for their expenditures? To answer these questions, the ASTD 2006 *State of the Industry* Report looks to exemplary organizations from the ASTD Benchmarking Forum and BEST Award winners.

The report includes training data tracked through metrics such as expenditure per employee, percentage of the organization's payroll, learning hours per employee, and the cost per learning hour.

A free executive summary of the report is available at [http://www.astd.org/astd/research/research\\_reports](http://www.astd.org/astd/research/research_reports). The full report may be purchased for \$149.00 at [www.store.astd.org](http://www.store.astd.org) using product code #190501.