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| OCTAE Newsletter **January 19, 2017****Special Issue****2,920 Days Later: Acting Assistant Secretary Johan Uvin’s Reflections on 2009–2017**As our team leaves OCTAE, I wanted to reflect on eight years of working hard with you, our team members, and our numerous internal and external stakeholders to improve access, expand opportunity, increase quality, promote innovation, and improve student success. There are literally hundreds of achievements I could discuss. I won’t do that. I will highlight some selected accomplishments in three main areas that demonstrate how collectively we have positively changed the odds for youths and adults with our programs.In addressing *access and opportunity* several policies and strategic initiatives have made it possible for millions of Americans to obtain high-quality education and training opportunities that did not exist in 2009. Our joint work on career pathways is important to mention. The public sector was not fully engaged in this work back then, but today career pathway programs and systems are central to every state’s talent development strategy. The implementation of the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)* was significant, as well. As a result, new partnerships have been created to implement a unified strategy in states and local areas focused on improving access and outcomes of individuals with significant barriers to employment and advancement. The *Time for the U.S. to* *Reskill and Making Skills Everyone’s Business* reports galvanized dozens of communities across the country to address their skills issues. The Performance Partnership pilots are creating new ways of planning together and pooling resources at the state, local, and tribal government levels to positively change the outlook, futures, and opportunities for disconnected youths. Other important efforts that expanded opportunity considerably include our Advancing Equity in Career and Technical Education (CTE) project; our summit focused on marginalized girls in STEM fields and CTE; our guidance on gender equity in collaboration with the Office for Civil Rights; our joint UpSkill America work with the National Economic Council, the Vice President’s Office, the Aspen Institute, and hundreds of employers and labor unions; our innovations in reentry education for juvenile justice-involved adults and youths; our foster youth and youth-diversion technical assistance interventions with our federal colleagues at many leading agencies; our work on My Brother’s Keeper, focused specifically on entering the workforce and postsecondary access and success; and last but not least, the expansion of Pell grants and our continued push for the American Technical Training Fund and America’s College Promise to make college affordable, if not free, for responsible students. The net result is that tens of millions more youths and adults now have access to a high-quality education and experience successes previously absent from their lives.As a team, we realized very quickly that access and opportunity without quality are not meaningful and don’t lead to equity. We also heard from all of you that more flexibility and room for innovation were sorely needed.  One way we promoted *quality and innovation* was through experimental sites that give access to Pell grants and other aid under certain circumstances. The launch of the Second Chance Pell Program, in particular, was significant to the issue of access, as well as quality and innovation. Other important experimental sites included the Educational Quality Through Innovation Partnerships (EQUIP), loan counseling flexibility, short-term training, competency-based education, and dual enrollment experiments. We also pursued innovation in funding and financing through Pay for Success and launched OCTAE’s first initiative in this area focused on CTE. Procurement innovation was another area where we placed great emphasis. The introduction of prizes and challenges, including the REACH Higher Challenge, the CTE Makeover Challenge, and our current EdSim Challenge have changed the way we interact with and leverage the marketplace and fund innovation in education. *Student success and impact* is a third area where our team—with your partnership, leadership, and support—has dedicated lots of energy and time. The expansion of the Presidential Scholars Program to include CTE scholars was a great accomplishment that became possible due to President Obama’s commitment, as well as the leadership provided by the recently established Senate CTE caucus. Propelled by changes in*WIOA,* an important accomplishment was  the rise in integrated education and training programs across the country. Similarly, the partial restoration by Congress of ability-to-benefit provisions—now tied to career pathways—allowed community colleges and other postsecondary education and training programs to pursue rigorous pathways for students leading to employment in high-demand, high-wage sectors.Another significant success was our immigrant and refugee integration work. We tested a place-based strategy to integration in five networks across the country and are now replicating lessons learned and scaling that work to all 50 states through the new national activity Connecting English Learners with Career Pathways. Based on the National Skills and Credentialing Institute, last summer OCTAE facilitated and supported multiple communities interested in finding breakthrough solutions for foreign-trained immigrant and refugee professionals. We also convened a group of organizations to replicate pathways into STEM teaching for foreign-trained STEM professionals. The LINCS [Learner Center](http://links.govdelivery.com/track?type=click&enid=ZWFzPTEmbWFpbGluZ2lkPTIwMTcwMTE5LjY4OTQ5ODcxJm1lc3NhZ2VpZD1NREItUFJELUJVTC0yMDE3MDExOS42ODk0OTg3MSZkYXRhYmFzZWlkPTEwMDEmc2VyaWFsPTE3ODEwNTYzJmVtYWlsaWQ9ZGxvbmdAdGl1MTEub3JnJnVzZXJpZD1kbG9uZ0B0aXUxMS5vcmcmZmw9JmV4dHJhPU11bHRpdmFyaWF0ZUlkPSYmJg==&&&100&&&https://learner.lincs.ed.gov/?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=)significantly impacted adult learners by giving them access to high-quality open education resources for free in both English and Spanish. Finally, under Mark Mitsui’s leadership as deputy secretary for community colleges, OCTAE established communities of practice among minority-serving institutions focused on student success.When we step back, these accomplishments show that there is, indeed, much for which we should all be proud. Across the continuum of learning, and with your assistance, we increased early learning investments at the federal, state, and local levels. We reached the highest high school graduation rate ever, at 83 percent, and put college access and affordability at the center of the political discourse as a fairness issue. Overall, OCTAE transformed adult learning and CTE.As I reflect on my time in OCTAE, I am filled with feelings of gratitude. I am glad and grateful that former Assistant Secretary Dr. Brenda Dann-Messier asked me to join her in 2009.  I am grateful for the opportunity I had to lead OCTAE. I am grateful that I have gotten to know all of you. I am grateful for the opportunity we have had to advance OCTAE's mission together so that all students can access the high-quality programs they deserve. Finally, I am grateful for all that you have accomplished, individually and collectively. You have made a real difference in the lives of millions of fellow Americans, by birth and by choice.As we enter 2017, change lies ahead. I handed the baton to Kim R. Ford today, and the new administration will follow. While there are many uncertainties about who will be OCTAE's new political leader and what his or her priorities may be, I have great confidence in you and in OCTAE that you will continue to remain faithful to OCTAE's mission to move us closer to a perfect union. There may be new emphases and priorities, but there is a lot of good work to do to ensure our core programs are well-implemented. I can't think of a better team than OCTAE and all of you who have been our partners to do this work.Johan |
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