

Moving Toward an Adult Literacy System In Rhode Island

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SECTION I: SETTING THE STAGE

INTRODUCTION

Driven by a deep concern for a system that doesn't seem to measure up to its full potential, Rhode Island adult educators have been meeting in retreats, institutes, and focus groups for many years. Over the last five years, three¹ public reports have been commissioned to investigate more formally the status of adult basic education in Rhode Island. An additional report published in 2002 looks at adult education across New England, including Rhode Island in their investigation.² While the composition of and charge to each investigative group was different, the challenges identified and recommendations articulated for improvement of the adult basic education system clustered around familiar issues.

Taken together, the reports focused on the following components of an effective system that could be improved or seem to be lacking in Rhode Island (see box below).

These issues are not unique to Rhode Island, but are all too familiar across the system of adult basic education in the United States. The approach of this paper is not to reiterate the challenges in our state's adult basic education system nor to offer further recommendations on what needs to be in place to address the deficits. This work has been done. This document attempts to offer models and experiences from other states and groups that are dealing with these issues in effective ways. While every state is unique in their population needs, funding sources, and system structures, it is our hope that exploring and documenting different solutions to establishing the effective system components listed below will be a useful guide for strategic planners wishing to move forward in improving the adult basic education system in Rhode Island.

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION—DEFINITIONS

The recent report *Rising to the Literacy Challenge: Building Adult Education Systems in New England* (sponsored by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation) reported that there is a

COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

- ❖ Stable, consistent and adequate funding
- ❖ An articulated state-wide policy
- ❖ A coordinated system of funding streams, system management, and service delivery
- ❖ Consistent standards of performance for providers and outcome measures for students
- ❖ Comprehensive professional development and professionalization of the field
- ❖ Articulation along the continuum of adult education including ABE, ESOL, ASE, transition to post secondary education and training
- ❖ Integrated support services
- ❖ Links and collaboration with work sites
- ❖ Equal access for 'special populations' (e.g. LD, corrections, beginning literacy)

"lack of consensus within the New England ABE community about the mission and purpose of adult basic education."

This is not a new charge to be leveled at adult basic education. In 1995, the General Accounting Office issued a report, *Adult Education: Measuring Program Results has been Challenging*, which pointed out a variety of issues in establishing a reliable accountability system in adult basic education and described one of the difficulties of evaluating program results as the lack of clearly defined objectives.

The field has struggled with defining literacy and the purpose of adult education throughout its history, with mixed results. Two commonly used definitions of literacy come from federal legislation: the National Literacy Act of 1991 and the current Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) enacted as Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 1998.

These definitions are provided below.

An individual's ability to read, write and speak English, and compute and solve problems at the levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals and develop one's knowledge and potential. (1991)

The term 'literacy' means an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute, and solve problems, at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society. (1998)

Both definitions recognize the variety of adult roles (e.g. family member, citizen, worker) that are critically impacted by low literacy. However, the current federal definition does not include mention of student goals that appeared in the earlier legislation. While states are currently free to record and measure progress toward student goals, these measures are not reported through the National Reporting System (NRS). Some adult educators fear that adult education programs may become less learner-focused if individual goals are not included when determining outcomes. What is counted is often what counts.

The definition found in the 1991 Act is also found in the National Literacy Summit 2000 document, a comprehensive attempt to bring the diverse philosophies across the adult

literacy field into one vision. This definition recognizes the range of educational goals that motivate adult basic education students to enter the system's rich variety of programs.

The variations in stated purposes of adult basic education, what goals and objectives the system should strive to achieve, result in different policies, and approaches to program and instructional practices. Are adult basic education teachers and tutors above all else reading instructors? Should adult educators be most concerned with improving the 'quality of life' of adult students? Is the system responsible for addressing societal problems such as poverty, crime, or over reliance on welfare? These and other crucial questions will be revisited throughout this paper. The author will not try to answer them here, but raise them as important philosophical issues to be explored. In developing a statewide policy, consensus must first be reached on the purposes, goals, and outcomes of the state adult education system.

CALCULATING NEED

In order to identify gaps in the system, it's important to know what the need for services looks like. Unfortunately, this is a question with no clear answer. There are four approaches to determining need that are commonly used, alone and in tandem.

1. Results from the National Adult Literacy Study, (NALS, 1993)³
2. National census information on adults without a high school degree, (US Census 2000)
3. Size of immigrant population (US Census 2000)
4. Waiting lists maintained by providers (anecdotal information)

Even though none of these methods are as accurate as we might like, a review of their results gives some indication of the numbers of adults who might seek adult basic education services.

The NALS: This national study commissioned by Congress assessed a random sample of nearly 25,000 adults across the country on various literacy skills and reported results on a 5 point scale, 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest literacy level. The survey was conducted in 1992. Results of this study published in 1993 were used to create synthetic estimates for states that did not participate directly in the study.⁴ Rhode Island did not participate and thus the information available on percent of adults in RI across the 5 literacy levels has been estimated from demographic information. Estimated

results for the New England states are given in Table 1 along with pertinent data from the 2000 US census.

Generalizations from the synthetic estimates indicate that southern states are more likely to have higher percentages (19-28%) of their population in the lowest NALS literacy level than states in the northeast (12-16%) or mid-west (13-15%). States with large immigrant populations such as California, Florida, New York, and Texas record the highest percentage of adults in the lowest literacy level (24-25%). But how does RI measure up? The estimated percent of adult Rhode Islanders in the lowest literacy level is 19% (roughly 155,000 individuals in 1992), the highest percent of the population at this level among the New England states and similar to that in some southern states.

It has been suggested that the interface between Level 2 and 3 approximates the literacy skills needed to pass the GED exam. Therefore, need for adult basic education services is often reported in terms of the percent of the population combined in NALS Levels 1 and 2. For Rhode Island, the estimate of those in Levels 1 and 2 is 45% or approximately 370,000 adults over 16. However, the study has been criticized for arbitrarily high cutoff points at each level.

Additionally, NALS also reported that only 20% of individuals testing at Levels 1 and 2 reported that their reading skills were not adequate to function successfully, 80% felt they read well enough. Therefore, a second category of need has been suggested, termed 'demand for services' by the Nellie Mae report, and calculated as 20% of the total individuals testing at Levels 1 and 2. For RI, this figure was 74,000 individuals at the time of the NALS. (Note: total RI population recorded in 1990 census was 1,003,464 compared to 1,048,319 recorded in 2000 census.)

Adults without HS diplomas. The Federal government uses the number of adults without a high school diploma to determine the allotment of adult basic education monies to distribute to each state through WIA Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. This information is collected in the US census for adults 25 years and older. This approach leaves out the number of immigrants who come to the US with high school degrees from their native countries but require ESOL services to learn to read, write and speak in

English. There are no clear statistics on how large a population of immigrants fit this category. These statistics also do not recognize adults with high school degrees but with limited literacy skills. According to Census 2000, 78% of RI adults have graduated from high school, 22% have not. In RI, 22% of the adult population 25 and older is approximately 153,000.

Immigrant population: In 2000, US Department of Education began a set-aside titled English Language/Civics (EL/Civics) particularly for new immigrants wanting to learn English and become citizens. The original funding formula was based on the 'largest absolute need' and the 'largest recent growth in need' determined as growth in immigrant population from 1990 to 2000. From the 2000 US Census data, the current 'foreign born' population in Rhode Island is estimated as 11.4% of the total population or 119,500 individuals and about 41,500 foreign born individuals entered Rhode Island between 1990 and 2000.

Not all immigrants, of course, need adult basic education services. The 2000 Census also indicates that over 36,000 Rhode Island immigrants reported that they do not speak English well or do not speak English at all. While these figures are small in comparison to other states, they still represent a large number of potential students for the state's adult basic education system. Further, these numbers do not adequately capture the number of undocumented immigrants living and working in the state.

Waiting Lists: To highlight the lack of resources to meet the current demand for adult basic education classes, some states have instituted a system to track waiting lists for slots at programs which are currently full. While recording numbers of potential adult students waiting to enter programs has been an effective advocacy strategy and is an estimate of current unmet demand, it is logistically difficult to institute and is not an accurate indicator of potential need for services or future demand. Rhode Island does not have a systematic process for tracking waiting list numbers, but anecdotal evidence shows many programs do turn students away due to lack of space.

TABLE 1

Selected Indicators from: 2000 Census Data & 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey Estimates

State	2000 Population	% Foreign Born (All)	% Speaking other than English in home (5+ years)	% Speaking English not well or not at all (18+ years)	% HS Grads (25 + years)	% Below Poverty Level (All)	% Estimate NALS Level I (16+ years)	% Estimate NALS Level II (16+ years)
RI	1,048,319	11.4	20.0	4.6	78.0	11.9	19	26
VT	608,827	3.8	5.9	.5	86.4	9.4	12	25
NH	1,235,786	4.4	8.3	1	87.4	6.5	12	24
ME	1,274,923	2.9	7.8	.7	85.4	10.9	15	27
MA	6,349,097	12.2	18.7	4.0	84.8	9.3	16	24
CT	3,405,565	10.9	18.3	3.6	84.0	7.9	16	25
US		11.1	17.9	4.6	80.4	12.4	21-23	25-28

TABLE 2

Various Strategies for Calculating Adult Education Need in Rhode Island

(Total RI Population: 1,048,319 in 2000 & 1,003,464 in 1990)

	NALS Level 1 (16+)	NALS Level 1 & 2 (16+)	20% of NALS Level 1 & 2 (16+)	Less than HS Diploma (25+)	Foreign Born (All)	Not speaking English well or at all. (18+)
% of that age population	19%	45%	9%	22%	11.4%	4.6%
Number of Individuals	155,000	370,000	74,000	153,000	119,500	36,400

[Note: These categories are not mutually exclusive, nor can the resulting number of individuals be compared across categories.]

SECTION II: RESEARCH & BEST PRACTICES

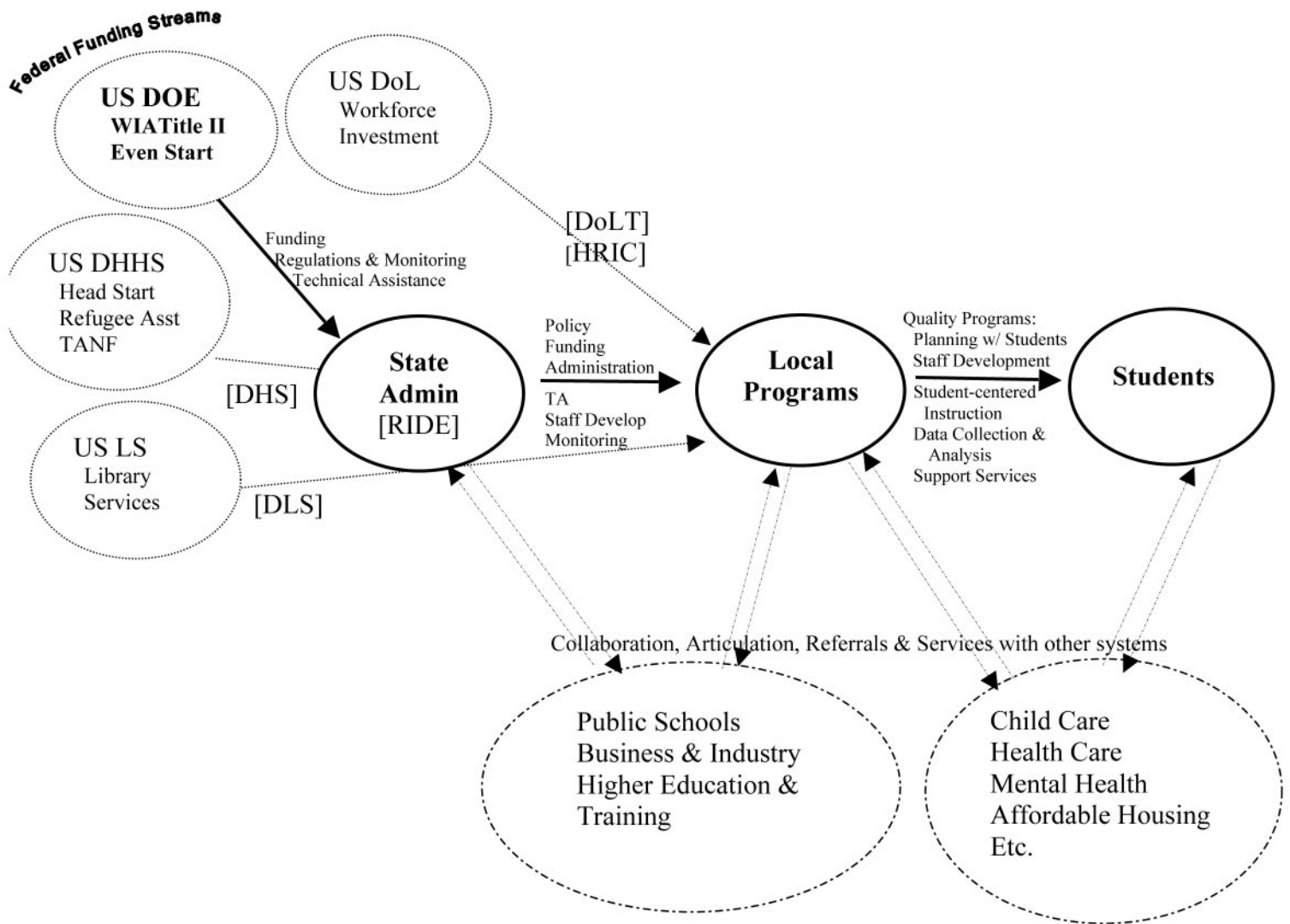
- A. The System: Components, Roles, Collaborations
- B. Accountability, Performance Measures and Program Improvement
- C. Program & Instructional Practices
- D. Professional Development

A. The System

INTRODUCTION


The adult basic education system is rather complicated when all possible inputs and outputs are taken into account. To help in the discussion of promising models, we've created a schematic of the potential contributors to an 'adult basic education system'. The state agencies in brackets in the diagram indicate the specific funding pathways in Rhode Island.

Perhaps the most critical component in shaping the characteristics of the system is the state. In *Leading from the Middle*, a 2002 report for the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL) on the role of states in adult basic education, Forrest Chisman is adamant that state governments are potentially the only agencies "capable of building the adult education and literacy system America needs."





The forward to the report states:

As vital as the national and local roles are, it has long been evident that steady progress in this field depends on a much stronger state role in providing services that are high in quality and extensive in outreach.

States have great discretion in how they go about building and managing a statewide system of adult education. As a result, a variety of models have been developed. However, there are basic questions that guide the development or refinement of any statewide system. These are posed under the icon: 

While it is difficult to say which system 'works best' given the wide range of variables in each locale, in the discussion below, we offer some examples of how different states have tackled

the complex questions around building a successful adult basic education system. You will find these examples marked throughout the paper with this icon: 

 Questions to be considered in designing an effective statewide system:

- *What is the consensus view of the purposes and goals of adult basic education, to be articulated in a statewide policy?*
- *Where should the state administration of adult basic education be located and what roles should it assume to most effectively address the goals of the system?*
- *What collaborations and partnerships will best serve the adult basic education system and accomplish the policy goals?*

STATE ROLES

A unique characteristic of adult basic education is the number of federal, state, and local resources that states can draw on to create an effective statewide system. This potential benefit can, however, lead to fragmentation, an often heard criticism leveled at adult education. Forrest Chisman (2002) builds an effective argument for states to take the lead in designing more effective, less fragmented systems of adult basic education. Chisman suggests that states have three potential choices or roles they may play in exercising their authority.

States may be **administrators** or managers, distributing funds and ensuring quality control and perhaps collaborating with other service delivery systems.

States may exercise their **governance** role and combine 'kindred' revenue streams from federal, state, and local sources under the same management to maximize resources.

States may be **policy leaders**, with a statewide vision, strategically planning policy goals and identifying and leveraging a variety of resources to achieve them.

In reality, few states have become policy leaders. In fact, more than a few states struggle with the tasks of administration. At minimum, Chisman notes it is essential for states as administrators to accomplish four basic tasks.

STATE ABE ADMINISTRATION ESSENTIAL TASKS*

- 1. Distribute funds equitably**
With inadequate funds a given, how do you decide who should be served?
- 2. Ensure quality control and accountability**
Do you sacrifice quality for quantity, spreading resources wide and thin, or commit to high quality programming for potentially fewer students?
- 3. Provide program improvement services**
How do you determine, monitor, support and enforce quality criteria for programs with limited resources across a wide variety of programs and funding streams?
- 4. Bring about articulation with other programs**
How do you break down long held barriers between agencies and programs both on the state and local level?

*Adapted from: Leading from the Middle by Forrest Chisman, 2002

Unfortunately, there is little research about what types of administrative strategies are most effective in accomplishing these tasks. However, there are lessons learned and promising models. We will revisit accountability and program improvement in the next section. Location, collaboration and articulation are addressed below.

LOCATION

One of the ongoing discussions in determining what individual state systems of adult education look like is the decision about which state agency will be responsible for administering the federal AEFLA funds, the bulk of federal funding for adult education, as well as designated state funds. To the detriment of stable service provision systems, this decision is often made for political reasons rather than careful strategic planning. Being subjected to the political winds of change, both on the federal and state level, places state adult education systems in a very vulnerable position. For example, the Texas state ABE administration was recently abolished without input from the field.

The majority of states (over 75%) have located their adult education administrations within their state departments of education, the same agencies that have responsibility for K-12 education. All of the New England states have this configuration. In the early and mid 90s when the Adult Education Act was being bundled into the Workforce Investment Act, a handful of states chose to move adult education to departments of labor or workforce development boards, among them Kentucky and Tennessee. A growing number of states have moved their adult education administration to boards of higher education or specifically to the community college system. Such states include Kansas, Oregon and Washington. Many states create a separate division or bureau of adult basic education within the state agency in which it resides.

There are strong proponents of locating the administration of adult basic education in each of these three venues. Arguments often reflect the preferred vendors of adult education services in that particular state or the differing purposes of adult education reflected in the state policy. For example, in states

where adult education service delivery lies predominately with community colleges, the state agency that administers AEFLA often resides in the department of higher education.

The location of the administration of federal adult education funds impacts the types of alliances made, resources leveraged, additional expertise brought to the system, and sometimes the services provided. For example, though adult learning is in many ways different from children's learning, shared expertise throughout the department of education has the potential of impacting the quality of instruction for both adults and children. Elementary and secondary educational expertise in staff development, research into learning, and ways of integrating technology into instruction, all of which are well supported in K-12 but not in adult education, could be leveraged to support teachers in the adult education system.

While there are legitimate arguments for and against locating ABE administrations within each of these three state agencies, the decision depends heavily on the unique politics, culture, goals, and leadership within these agencies in any particular state. The location decision, therefore, must be part of a thoughtful planning process with representation from all stakeholders, including service providers, within that state. And no matter where the administration of the system is located, issues around funding, program quality and accountability, staff development and technical assistance, collaborations and articulation with other systems must be adequately addressed.

COLLABORATION AND ARTICULATION

As is true in any complex system, collaborations are essential for effective adult education systems. Collaborations are critical at both the state and local program levels.

As the diagram on page 5 shows, there are multiple funding streams that can potentially support adult education services. It is not uncommon for a different state agency to administer each different source of federal funding. To complicate the matter further, different federal programs that allocate funds

that may be used for adult education have different requirements and mandates. As a result, a local program that receives a variety of funds to provide adult education services, say TANF, AEFLA and Even Start for example, may have three different sets of outcome and accountability standards, a variety of reporting formats and grant requirements, and competing staff development needs. This fragmentation of administration also makes it difficult for policymakers and administrators to measure state progress in addressing overall adult literacy needs and to determine where there are gaps in services.

Another compelling reason for collaboration is the wide variety of systems and services that impact adult learners who often need a range of support services to enable them to attend classes and learn effectively. There is significant evidence that transportation, child care, basic needs such as food and housing, and physical and mental health issues must be attended to for learning to take place. Although a holistic approach, which considers all the needs of an individual and his/her family, has proven to be most effective, it is unrealistic to require individual agencies to directly provide all the services that each individual may need. Hence, collaboration between community service providers is essential.

A particular emphasis of collaboration efforts in education systems is to ensure articulation. According to one source, articulation can be thought of as "systematic coordination of course and/or program content within and between educational institutions to facilitate the continuous and efficient progress of students from grade to grade, school to school, and from school to the working world". The success of adult learners whose goals include moving on to better jobs or further training and education depend on articulation between adult basic education, the work place and post secondary education and training. Adult education programs need to be aware of the skills and supports learners need to make these transitions successfully.

States have been struggling with meaningful interagency collaboration for some time. In 1993, the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) issued two-year grants to five states to plan, develop and begin to implement interagency performance, reporting, and program improvement processes for their state adult basic education system. The hope of the NIFL PMRIS project was to help states develop collaborations that would solve fragmentation issues and facilitate results-oriented literacy systems. The project's final evaluation report provides useful lessons learned for states wanting to undertake interagency collaboration (Swadley & Ziolkowski, 1996). Though the recommendations for collaboration are familiar, they are worth repeating here.

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION—LESSONS LEARNED*

1. **Support from the very top** levels of government, including the governor, is necessary.
2. **Broad stakeholder involvement** from the beginning is essential. (*Keep legislators informed and include the private sector*)
3. **Develop a strategic plan** to guide development of the system.
4. **A plan for dealing with differences** of opinion should be developed up front.
5. **Provide needed facilitation** between the project, the state and local agencies.
6. **Local provider participation** from the very beginning is necessary.
7. **Allot adequate time and resources.** (*The project found that a realistic estimate to develop an interagency collaborative system was three to five years.*)
8. **Develop a common language.**
9. **Policy team members must be advocates** for federal and state legislative changes to promote shared responsibility among state departments.

*Adapted from: The National Institute for Literacy Performance Measurement, Reporting and Improvement System (PMRIS) Evaluation Final Report by Swadley & Ziolkowski, 1996.

EXAMPLES

In practice, collaborations seem to develop within specific parts of the system rather than across the entire system. For example, there are a growing number of models of collaborations between adult education, businesses, unions and workforce development departments. In Pennsylvania, PA WIN (Workforce Investment Network) is an outcome of the Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) Interagency Coordinating Committee. It is designed to provide a statewide, centralized support system for workplace education and includes staff development, articulated standards, and a directory of certified education programs. This network helps adult education providers develop services for businesses and incumbent workers and integrates those services with the Pennsylvania workforce development system.

The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), through the Building State Alliances Project, has assisted a number of states in building collaborations and initiatives in support of family literacy programs. For example, the state of Washington with support from the governor enacted legislation that mandated collaboration between adult education and early childhood programs to provide family literacy. The act encouraged links between social service providers by allowing programs to use funds to provide transportation, child care and other support services. The state also integrated welfare reduction funds from the Department of Social and Health Services to expand the family literacy initiative.

At the program level, the Massachusetts Department of Education/ Adult and Community Learning Services that houses the adult basic education state administration, developed community collaboration grants to encourage local adult education programs to form active collaborations with other community agencies providing a variety of services to the adult learner population. The state also provides staff and program development in the hard work of developing and maintaining these collaborations. Interesting partnerships and projects have resulted, for example a local community health center and an adult education center writing a health and literacy grant together.

To assist adult learners in transitioning to college, the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) has developed a model project in collaboration with a network of 25 local adult education programs and a variety of two and four-year colleges (including representation from Rhode Island). NELRC provides training, technical assistance, research, and resources to adult education programs which in turn develop collaborations with their local post-secondary institutions. The formal relationships are designed to ensure articulation between the transition programs and community colleges both with respect to education components as well as support services necessary to help alternative adult students succeed in post secondary education. For more information, visit the transition web site at: <http://www.collegetransition.org>.

B. Accountability, Performance Measures and Program Improvement

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of significant government support for adult basic education in the 1960s, calls for the system to demonstrate successful performance, to be accountable, have been growing louder, from policy makers, funders, and adult educators themselves. For a system that is chronically underfunded with part-time poorly paid staff and fragmented in its management and funding streams, developing and implementing a viable accountability structure is a tall order. One of the most useful guides for this difficult process comes from Juliet Merrifield's "Contested Ground: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education" (1998).

Merrifield advocates for a carefully considered collaborative process involving all stakeholders in developing accountability in adult basic education and emphasizes the importance of long-term, systematic investment in training, information, and technical assistance. Building on lessons learned in past experiences, Merrifield acknowledges the many barriers to developing performance accountability in adult basic education and carefully lays out a 'framework for action'. She begins her paper by outlining four principles "which would enable the field to perform effectively and to be held accountable for performance".

FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION TOWARD ACCOUNTABILITY*

1. Agree on the **definition of performance**, what will be measured (*This is not a technical question, but one of values, and can encompass multiple purposes.*)
2. Build **mutual accountability relationships** rather than one-way, top-down (*Bring in the full range of stakeholders including teachers and learners.*)
3. Develop **system and program capacity** both to perform and to be accountable
4. Create **new tools** to measure performance (*Develop standards and performance assessment tools to capture progress toward these standards in terms of learners' literacy practice.*)

*Adapted from: Contested Ground by Juliet Merrifield, 1998

Merrifield echoes many voices in the field when she emphasizes that there are two critical aspects to building program capacity to be accountable: capacity to perform well as a program and capacity of the system and of programs to be accountable. To perform well requires increased resources, focusing on quality not quantity, staff development, training and technical assistance, and the use of performance data for continuous improvement. To be able to be accountable requires accountability demands commensurate with available resources, better measuring tools, staff training and support, and rewards for improved performance. The discussion below is organized into these two main components of performance accountability - **program performance** and measuring **student achievement outcomes**.



Questions to be considered in planning a comprehensive accountability system include:

- *What is to be measured? What does success look like?*
- *How should success be measured? What tools and assessment processes are needed?*
- *What structures and supports need to be in place to achieve success?*

ACCOUNTABILITY: PROGRAM QUALITY

The first major push for the adult basic education system to demonstrate effectiveness focused on 'inputs', what components or processes should be present in programs to ensure they are providing quality services. If results or outcomes of the system aren't what we expect, instead of looking solely at what learners are doing wrong, we need to also look at the conditions and processes that lead to those results and determine what the program may need to do differently.

The National Literacy Act of 1991 required states to develop 'indicators of program quality' and use them to evaluate local programs. US DOE identified eight indicators of effective programs and set them out in a document that states could either adopt or use as a guideline in developing their own quality indicators. The eight focus topics of the US DOE model indicators included: student recruitment, student retention, improvement of literacy skills, program planning, curriculum and instruction, staff development, and support services.

Five years later as the National Literacy Act was being replaced by the Workforce Development Act, a report prepared for the US Department of Education concluded that all states had developed indicators (Condelli, 1996). However, in order to effectively use the indicators for program evaluation, states need to establish measures for each indicator and decide a level of acceptable performance or 'performance standard'. [For example: for the indicator of student retention, a measure might be hours of instruction a student receives and an acceptable level of performance might be 80% of students remain in the program for at least 50 hours.] About two-thirds of the states had established measures but less than half (23) had developed performance standards for program quality indicators at the time of the Condelli report.

Condelli interviewed states that had fully implemented measures and performance standards to record lessons learned. These states indicated that they were successful for several

reasons. They developed indicators, measures and standards through interagency working groups that included representatives from labor, social services, literacy (including practitioners) and workforce development. The draft measures and standards were sent to local programs for comment, and some states pilot tested them before implementation. The report emphasized that the most essential ingredient to successful implementation was 'broad inclusion of local programs in the development process'. Other important factors included: on-going communication with local programs, field testing, and extensive professional development and training on how to collect and use the information. The states felt it was important to raise program quality issues and give "state and local staff the opportunity to define and reach consensus on the characteristics of effective program operation."



EXAMPLES

States that implemented indicator measures and performance standards, and integrated them into program monitoring report that the process improved the overall quality of local programs and focused technical assistance on program improvement. Examples of state indicators, measures, and standards are available at the following web sites:

Kansas - http://www.kansasregents.org/adult_ed/about.html

Massachusetts - <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/rfp/rfpta.pdf> (page 15 of the Mass ABE Technical Assistance Manual)

ACCOUNTABILITY: STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OUTCOMES

Focus on the quality of programs (e.g. staffing, curriculum, planning) for accountability changed dramatically with the enactment of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 which now requires states to report aggregates of student outcome measures (e.g. learning gains, employment outcomes, entrance into higher education) for all programs funded through AEFLA.

In order to measure outcomes, it is crucial to have agreement on what is being measured, how it is being measured, and what success looks like. The long debate on the definition

and purposes of adult literacy referred to in the introduction takes center stage in accountability discussions. Does literacy refer to a pre-determined set of skills (e.g. phonics, fluency, comprehension) or the performance of real-life reading, writing and numeracy practices (e.g. reading directions on a cake mix, writing memos at work, computing the amount of paint needed for a job)? And who determines which tasks are essential for literate functioning? Or is the outcome of developing literacy an impact on particular social issues such as poverty and welfare (e.g. getting a job, leaving the welfare rolls)?

There are a variety of answers across the adult education system, based on philosophical differences in goals and purposes for the system. These value differences lead to dramatically different approaches to designing programs and instructional practices, and assessing outcomes. Two important examples of these differences come from the National Institute for Literacy Equipped for the Future (EFF) system reform and standards project and AEFLA, briefly described below in order to show how different stated purposes or goals can determine quite different outcomes and measures of accountability.

In 1994 the EFF project began by asking adult students why they attended adult basic education programs. Their answers were coalesced into four broad purposes or goals listed in Table 3. Over the last eight years, EFF has worked with teachers and learners to articulate what adults in our society need to know and be able to do to be successful in their adult roles. The project has developed a system of standards and

assessments based on students' goals, integrating the above articulated purposes into the roles adults take on in their lives - family members, community members and citizens, workers, and life long learners. (Detailed information may be found at: <http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/eff/eff.html>).

In contrast, the current federal legislation, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA, Title II of the Workforce Investment Act) indicates four more specific goals for adult education. (See Table 3) To operationalize these policy goals, the US DOE commissioned a private consulting firm through the National Reporting System (NRS) project to develop concrete measurable outcomes for the field. Based on the four goals stated in AEFLA, and with significant input from the state ABE directors, the NRS project determined six areas in which outcomes should be measured nationwide. As Table 4 shows, the results from the two national initiatives are quite different.

To further complicate the matter, the legislation behind other federal and state funding streams that could support adult basic education activities (e.g. Even Start, TANF) have their own purposes and goals (e.g. support children's education, reduce the welfare roles). The result is a variety of required outcome measures across pieces of the adult basic education system. This does not mean, however, that common ground can not be found. For example, learning gains might be fundamental to all programs under the adult basic education umbrella, and employment, family and community outcomes important to assess for those students whose goals encompass these other areas. In fact, the NRS is structured in much this way.

Table 3

Goals of Adult Basic Education

Adult Education & Family Literacy Act (AEFLA)

- Assist adults to become literate and,
- To obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self sufficiency;
- To become full partners in the education of their children; and
- Complete a secondary school diploma.

Equipped for the Future (EFF)

- To gain access to information and resources
- To express ideas and opinions
- To solve problems and make decisions
- To learn how to learn

Table 4

Focus Areas for Outcome Measures

National Reporting System/AEFLA

- Learning Gains (reading, writing, speaking, math)
- Credentials (e.g. GED/ADP)
- Further Education and Training
- Economic Impact (e.g. entered employment, retained employment)
- Family impact (optional)
- Community Impact (optional)

Equipped for the Future (EFF)

- Communication (reading, writing, speaking, listening)
- Decision making (use math to solve problems, make decisions, plan)
- Lifelong Learning (take responsibility for learning, research, reflect, evaluate, use technology)
- Interpersonal Skills (guide others, resolve conflict, advocate, cooperate with others)

(Note: EFF relates the four focus areas above to the contexts of family, community, and workplace.)

Currently, the AEFLA requires each state to report student performance outcomes measured against goals set in state plans. Reporting on the first four or core outcomes in Table 4 is mandatory under AEFLA. Learning gains applies to all students; the remaining three mandated measures apply only to students who enter the program with goals related to that particular measure. For example, if a student's goal is to improve his/her reading skills but not to obtain a GED at the time of their enrollment, they would not be included in the count to determine percent of students completing GED requirements.

Impacts on family and community became secondary outcomes under NRS. It is optional for states to collect and report on these measures. For example, Kentucky was one of the few states in the National Outcome Reporting System Pilot Program that chose to report on family impacts. It should also be pointed out that establishing measures that meet the NRS valid and reliable requirements are much more difficult around family and community impacts where it is not as easy to define indicators in concrete terms, and most assessments rely on self-report (e.g. how often a parent reads to his/her child). Hopefully, EFF performance assessments will provide a solution to this dilemma.

States also have flexibility in the assessment tools and

processes they use. The following discussion presents examples of how states and other organizations are addressing issues of what to assess and how to assess it, as part of a systematic accountability system. This section is organized according to the outcome categories present in the NRS, a) learning gains, b) employment outcomes, c) family outcomes, d) community outcomes.



EXAMPLES

Learning Gains: What to Assess?

What should adult learners know and be able to do as a result of participation in adult basic education? AEFLA has developed functioning level descriptions to try and capture what literate functioning looks like at a variety of skill levels in reading, writing and math. An assessment that shows a student has moved up a skill level or a student who successfully complete his/her GED are both acceptable proof of learning gains for NRS reporting.

Some states, following the K-12 education standards movement, have developed learning standards to address this question. The EFF project has also developed standards which are based on the activities and contexts in which adults use literacy. The clear advantage of standards that explicitly state the goals of instruction is they are useful tools in aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment. However, the

decade long efforts in K-12 standards movement demonstrate how difficult it is to achieve broad consensus on the content of those standards. The US DOE has indicated that they will require states to develop standards in the reauthorization of AELFA.

Most states developing adult education standards have focused on the three traditional content areas: English Language Arts, ESOL, and Mathematics. Some have adapted K-12 content standards, but others have developed standards specifically for adult learners using what we know from adult learning theory and research. Massachusetts has undergone a five year collaborative process of developing adult oriented standards and focusing staff development on helping teachers use them to develop curriculum. In addition to the core standards, Massachusetts has also developed standards for Social Studies, Science, and Health. They are available at <http://www.doe.mass.org/acls/frameworks/>. Pennsylvania has integrated workplace essential skills into their literacy standards, modeled on the EFF framework. They are available at <http://www.ed.psu.edu/foundationskills>. Maryland has recently published Content Standards for Adult ESL/ESOL which include cultural, technology, and workplace skills as well as the more traditional speaking, listening, reading and writing skills.

There are many adult educators who fear academic standards modeled on K-12 content are too rigid and inappropriate for adult learners, many of whom were not served well through traditional public schools. The Equipped for the Future project may be a viable alternative to more traditional academic standards. States such as Ohio and Maine have adopted standards from EFF, and provide critical on-going professional development to support teachers and programs in integrating the principles of EFF into curriculum development, instruction and assessment. The standards are available at <http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/eff/eff.html>.

The US DOE has recently awarded a grant to a private consulting firm to develop national content standards in

ELA, ESOL and math and to provide support to states in adopting and using standards for curriculum development and assessment. The project is expected to begin in late fall 2003.

Learning Gains: How to Assess?

Once decisions are made on 'What' to measure, questions around the 'How' are just as thorny. What kind of assessment adequately captures progress in literacy functioning?

Unfortunately, there are few assessment tools to choose from that meet the NRS requirements of valid and reliable that have been developed for adult learners. Fewer still accurately capture adult skills at low levels or improvement in daily literacy practices, reflect what is being taught in the classroom, or align with the newly emerging content standards.

Additionally, pre/post-testing of all students can be costly, labor intensive for programs, and require specialized training of staff. Many question whether under-funded local programs have the capacity to meet NRS accountability requirements without an infusion of federal or state dollars.

Facing these difficult barriers, many states have adopted one or more of the available standardized tests, despite their many failings (e.g. TABE, ABLE, AMES, DAR, CASAS, BEST, ESOLA). Massachusetts undertook a survey in the spring of 2001 to determine how each state was meeting the NRS requirement of determining educational gains. Twenty-two states used a combination of several standardized test, 16 states used only the TABE to assess ABE learners and the BEST for ESOL learners, and 6 states reported they used the CASAS exclusively.

Several states are working on innovative solutions to the learner assessment problems. Massachusetts convened a broad group of representatives from corrections education, workforce development, community-based organizations, community colleges and school districts to work with the state department in developing a comprehensive system of performance accountability. One of the group's tasks was to analyze the spectrum of standardized adult education tests on

the market to determine their fit with the Massachusetts ABE learning standards; alignment between test questions and the learning standards was found to be poor for all tests (50% alignment at best). The state administration then took the bold step of deciding to develop its own test of reading and math achievement for adults. This project is underway in collaboration with the University of Massachusetts but will take some years before the tool is ready for use statewide.

Ohio has undertaken a project to develop a standardized portfolio assessment process for adult learners across the state, the Ohio Uniform Portfolio System (UPS). A collaboration between the Ohio state office, researchers, and practitioners created reading, writing, math, and ESOL checklists based on the NRS educational functioning level descriptors. Each student portfolio contains student records of attendance, student goals, an individual learning plan, one or more of the competency checklists depending on the student's goals and student work. Teachers and students have flexibility in how students may choose to demonstrate competencies. Further information is available at the Ohio Performance Accountability System web site:
<http://literacy.ketn.edu/opas/portfoliomodel.html>.

Standardized tests that measure general gains in reading ability are rarely used in workplace-based literacy programs. These programs are often too short for reading improvement to be captured through standardized tests and their curriculum is often focused on specific work related reading and math skills rather than general literacy. Some programs have developed in-house assessments of the specific competencies taught or use employee rating scales completed by supervisors. But many programs do little more than evaluate participants' satisfaction with the course. The National Center on Adult Literacy reported on the difficulty of assessing outcomes at work site programs in a study on workplace education programs. As an alternative, the study's researchers developed assessment tasks using materials and situations from the work site that required literacy skills. Participants were asked to read the work-related materials and then were

scored on their responses to a variety of questions about the material. While an interesting approach, this assessment instrument was specific to the research site and therefore difficult to validate (to meet NRS requirements) across a variety of workplace environments.

The EFF project, with the infusion of significant federal dollars, has been developing a performance-based assessment around the EFF standards that includes literacy skills such as reading with comprehension, as well as skills necessary to be successful workers, family and community members. The project is currently field testing aspects of the assessment. Hopefully the results will help overcome some of the significant drawbacks to the currently available standardized tests of adult literacy.

Employment Outcomes: What to Assess?

There are two distinct approaches in determining outcomes specifically related to employment. The first is measuring the gain in competencies and skills generally assumed to be required for employment, promotion to a better job, or increased productivity. The second is a head count of those who have gained employment or improved their employment status. The SCANS skills are an example of the former, employment outcomes listed in the NRS are an example of the latter.

Though over a decade old, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) report still seems to mirror what employees say are required for the workplace. In addition to basic literacy skills, SCANS includes a variety of thinking, interpersonal and systems skills such as the ability to think creatively and solve complex problems, to work amicably and productively with others, to acquire and use information, to master complex systems and manage resources, and to work with a variety of technologies. The EFF project reflects these same skills within their standards for the role of worker.

In contrast, the federal government has generally concen-

trated less on the skills necessary for the job, and more on getting the job. To assist state workforce development initiatives in determining indicators and measures of employment outcomes, the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training supported a national Workforce Development Performance Measures Initiative several years ago. This project involved federal, state and local representatives from departments of labor, education and human services as well as business and community-based organizations. The result is nine core measures that workforce development agencies can choose among. They include basic and occupational skill attainment as evidenced by degrees or certifications, as well as the more traditional work oriented indicators - entered employment, increase in earnings, and retained employment. The last three measures are those included in the NRS under employment outcomes. The definitions of these indicators and measures as well as recommendations for data sources can be found on the DOL web site at <http://wdsc.doleta.gov/transition/measure/longmenu.htm>.

Employment Outcomes: How to Assess?

In workforce development programs such as welfare-to-work, checklists of employment skills such as those listed in the SCANS Report, might be used to assess students' work readiness competencies. Connecticut has developed a statewide Employment Competency Checklist, for example. Some programs have experimented with work portfolios that include writing samples, resumes and demonstration of worker competencies, but no state that we know of has taken on standardizing work portfolios across their system to meet NRS requirements of validity and reliability.

Capturing work related outcome data - getting a job, getting a better job, or increasing salary - is a bit more problematic. These outcomes often do not materialize until after a student has left the literacy program. In fact, the NRS asks programs to do follow-up on student outcomes up to 9 months after a student has left the program. In the NRS pilot project, the barriers to doing follow-up surveys with adult students became very clear. Despite putting in many hours making

phone calls (over 2,000 phone calls to complete a combined total of 400 student interviews), local programs in the study only reached on average 23% of students who had recently left their programs.

More and more states are experimenting with collecting employment data on their students through data matching. This method depends on state departments of employment, human services and education combining their electronic data, matching records on social security numbers, and sharing results. There are drawbacks to this method of collecting information. Many adult education programs do not wish to collect social security numbers from students, wanting to maintain their confidentiality, especially for those learners who may be undocumented immigrants. Nevertheless, because of the cost in resources and staff time in conducting follow-up surveys, more states are turning to data matching.

Family Impact: What to Assess?

The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) has developed performance measures specifically for family literacy programs through several funded projects involving states throughout the country. The results are published in *Outcomes and Measures for Family Literacy Programs*. The outcomes are derived from the goals of family literacy programs. In addition to improving the literacy of both parent and child, family programs are focused on helping parents to support their children's developing literacy and education. Therefore, outcomes reflect what we know helps children be successful in school—parents who interact with the child's school, fill their homes with reading material, read to their children regularly, and help with homework. In studies of the effectiveness of Even Start programs, the actual academic gains of the children are measured but this is unrealistic for most family literacy programs not funded through Even Start.

Several states including Kentucky and Massachusetts have also attempted to articulate family impact in their state accountability systems. Massachusetts includes three areas of

evidence for family outcome: participation in activities at your child's school, read or write with your child, and help your child with homework.

Family Impact: How to Assess?

Most programs rely on parent self-report to assess family literacy outcomes. The NCFL Outcomes and Measures publication includes suggestions for alternative assessment techniques such as asking parents to keep reading logs when they read to their children. States that include these indicators have tried to standardize assessment measures by including criteria for how often a parent reads to his/her children or helps with homework.

Community Impact

Less attention has been given to articulated indicators and measures of community impact. Most states that include such indicators focus on two outcomes that can be measured, registering to vote and gaining citizenship. Voter registration cards and citizenship papers can be used as outcome indicators that satisfy the NRS reliability requirements.

The EFF project also encompasses skills and competencies for citizens and community members that are much broader in scope. These might include gather, analyze and use information, advocate for yourself or your family, or exercise rights and responsibilities of citizenship. These are all activities that require literacy skills and are critical for participation in our democracy. Many adult educators feel that helping adults make progress toward these literacy practices is a critical goal of adult basic education. Yet these achievements generally go unnoticed in the NRS reporting system. Hopefully the performance based assessment system that EFF is developing will provide effective ways to capture community impacts.

PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

The term 'program improvement' causes concern for many educators because criteria or standards of quality are often dictated top-down without consideration of student and program goals, resources are not always available for programs to meet standards or adequately document results, and not

meeting standards can result in a punitive rather than supportive response from the state or federal administration. Yet providing focused professional development, mentoring and technical assistance can be an effective way to improve program services.

In some states, program quality indicators that have been established through a collaborative process with the field are used as standards for judging quality. The National Literacy Act left up to the states how they used the indicators of program quality to evaluate program effectiveness and only thirteen states incorporated their indicator measures and performance standards into program monitoring and tied results to funding decisions. Monitoring in these states include a variety of combinations of the following elements: program self-assessment forms; site visits of 20-30% of programs each year by state staff and/or peer review teams using a structured rating instrument; and yearly program reports. Programs which do not meet standards might be put on probation, asked to develop and implement improvement plans, given technical assistance, and defunded if they fail to improve. In some states, programs that show improvement or exceed performance standards receive some form of incentive.

Holding programs accountable requires not only standards for performance, but also a standardized method of collecting data to demonstrate performance. With the advent of NRS, many states are moving to statewide electronic data management systems. The report on the pilot test for the NRS found that implementing this process can be expensive and requires a considerable investment in training and technical assistance at the local level.

Evaluation data is collected in many ways and for many reasons; reporting to federal or state funders is but one purpose for assessment. Teachers need assessments of students' strengths and weaknesses to plan instruction and on-going evaluation of learning to make adjustments to instruction or approach. Students look for evidence of their progress, and programs need assessment data to help determine if they are meeting their goals and the needs of their students. We have

learned from the business world that the process of asking questions about problem areas, collecting and analyzing data, and using the results to adjust programming to improve outcomes is an ongoing practice of a learning, improving organization.

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) has field tested and published a guide for local adult education programs to approach program improvement through a systematic inquiry process. The six-session guide includes activities for identifying and clarifying program goals, examining current documentation processes, addressing the challenges of performance accountability and outcomes documentation at the program level.

EXAMPLES

In 1994, Pennsylvania began a comprehensive process of systematically improving the quality of basic education and literacy services throughout the state. Project EQuAL's (Educational Quality in Adult Literacy) objectives were to a) set performance standards for programs, b) institute a system of continuous program improvement, and c) develop a coordinated infrastructure of policy, program development, training and technical assistance support, critical to the provision of quality adult education services. The Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) led the initiative with significant input from local adult educators.

Understanding that change takes time, the project took the first three years to:

- revise the state's process for monitoring local programs using indicators of program quality,
- draft performance standards through two rounds of pilot programs collecting assessment data,
- develop a problem-solving process for programs to use for program improvement, and
- design and pilot professional development and technical assistance to help programs to meet performance standards and engage in program improvement.

It wasn't until year four of the project that the first 64 sites were trained and providers were required to address the state's

performance standards.

The program improvement process that was developed is very much like that presented in the NCSALL guide. Local program staff are trained in a problem-solving process to identify problems or questions about their program, collect and analyze data about these problems, draw conclusion about possible causes, and design and implement solutions. The evaluation report of the project's first five years (Alamprese, 1999) states that participants reported they are better able to address the needs of their students. Participants indicated that improvement resulted from changes in recruitment and retention activities, the collection of assessment data, organization of record-keeping systems to facilitate the use of data, and the delivery of instruction.

C. Program & Instructional Practices

INTRODUCTION

The program and instructional strategies advocated as effective for adult learners also varies according to the particular philosophy of adult education held. As in K-12 and post-secondary education, there is a long history of dialog and disagreement around what are the most effective educational practices in adult basic education. Unfortunately, there is not a history of adequate research funding in ABE to help practitioners answer best practices questions. However, experience and some evidence-based research provides suggested approaches.

PROGRAM PRACTICES

Adult learners are for the most part not mandated to enroll in classes and often must overcome significant barriers to attend, including a lack of self-confidence in their ability to learn. Child care, transportation, work, and family health are many reasons for the high dropout rates in adult education programs. A review of the research on what helps adults to persist in basic education programs reveals strategies that programs can adopt to help adults remain in classes until they reach their goals.

1. Help students **set goals** for attending the program
2. Help students **build self-efficacy/self-confidence** about reaching their goals
3. Help students **understand the positive and negative factors** that affect their persistence and develop plans to manage these factors
4. Help students **make progress toward their goals** by providing quality programming and processes for students to measure their progress.

*Adapted from: *Persistence among Adult Basic Education Students in Pre-GED Classes* by John Comings, Andrea Parrella, & Lisa Soricone, 1999.

Integrating these strategies into a program might include a goal setting approach at intake, an orientation that explores factors affecting each student's persistence and matches individual students with needed social services, and a gradual introduction to the classroom where the environment is comfortable and safe. These practices suggest that rolling enrollment (students enroll at any time) is not as effective a strategy as managed enrollment (scheduled intake points).

What seems obvious but may not be addressed in cash-strapped programs is that classes must be accessible, programs need to provide enough instructional hours for progress to be made, and classes that are too large can be a barrier to learning. (Well trained staff is addressed in Section 4 below.)

EXAMPLES

Massachusetts has instituted a unique approach to help ensure programs are incorporating effective strategies. The Massachusetts ABE Rate System establishes acceptable ranges for such components as class size and contact hours at different literacy levels and allocates program funding accordingly. The Rate System was developed with input from the field and also includes suggested pay scales, counseling hours provided per student, and minimum hours for professional development. While the Rate System can be cumbersome, the state is committed to funding the program components that it requires and has built the Rate System into the adult basic education RFP process. The state also provide a detailed

Technical Assistance Manual to explain the rationale for and intricacies of the Rate System. The manual is available online at the Massachusetts DOE web site: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/>.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

As in K-12, the federal Department of Education is currently emphasizing evidence-based research to support instructional practices in adult basic education. Included in the term 'evidence-based' are both rigorous research studies as well as practitioners' empirical knowledge. Recently, US DOE funded a series of research projects to determine best practices in teaching adults reading, writing and math. Preliminary findings with regard to specific levels of classes are discussed below.

Beginning ABE: Judy Alamprese (1998) investigated best practices in beginning adult basic education classrooms and John Kruidenier (2002) reviewed research into teaching reading to beginning and intermediate level English speaking adults. Both found that beginning adult readers are helped by explicit multi-sensory phonics instruction that includes engaging adult-oriented material, practice in oral reading for fluency, activities to build vocabulary within meaningful connected text, and explicit instruction in comprehension strategies. Teachers should use multiple modes of instruction including small group and cooperative learning, and provide ongoing feedback to learners. Alamprese also noted that beginning level classes should be kept small and provide additional tutor support, and that intensity of instruction is important.

Both researchers also report that diagnostic assessment of student strengths and weaknesses in the components of reading or doing math is an important first step to designing effective instruction and that any one measure of reading achievement (e.g. TABE, ABLE, CASAS) may not be sufficient. For example, an assessment profile for reading might include an evaluation of phonics and phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. An assessment in

math might include number and operation sense, and estimating in addition to the traditional computation skills.

A key to adult learning is the relevance of the material to the needs and interests of the students. Therefore, even at beginning levels where specific approaches to phonics (e.g. Wilson, Lindamood-Bell, Slingerland) might be used, it is important to balance repetition and drill with connected, high-interest text using contexts from the students everyday lives. It is just as important to balance practice in multiplication tables with opportunities to explore math problems of every day life. This approach requires effective teachers to be flexible in the learning materials they provide and aware of the interests and goals of their students. Because of the diverse experiences, interests, goals and needs of adult students, integrating adult-oriented, contextually relevant material into literacy and numeracy programs precludes the use of one-size-fits-all prepared curricula.

English as a Second Language (ESL) Literacy: Heide Wrigley (2002) investigated 'what works' for adult ESL literacy students, defined as adults having fewer than six years of schooling and low native language literacy. This group of students has many difficult barriers to language and literacy learning. What Wrigley identified in her research as effective strategies for ESL literacy students are quite similar to those articulated for beginning ABE students and include:

- build phonemic awareness and pattern recognition, systematic understanding of symbols and sounds
- help students develop a store of sight words
- foster fluency through oral and coral reading
- engage students in functional reading tasks that focus on comprehension
- build background knowledge
- "Bring in the Outside" (household items, flyers, labels, bills, notes from school)
- provide opportunities to apply language and literacy skills in the neighborhood.

Learning Disabled: The National Institute for Literacy produced a series of five guidebooks that lay out best program

and instructional practices when working with adult students who may have learning disabilities. The series is called *Bridges to Practice: A Research-based Guide for Literacy Practitioners Serving Adults with Learning Disabilities*. Because these are readily available (and have been distributed in Rhode Island along with staff development in their use) the content of this series will not be discussed here. There is much similarity in the strategies recommended for beginning ABE students, many of whom do have learning disabilities. However, diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses is critical in designing instruction of learning disabled students.

Many states, including Rhode Island, have recognized that a high proportion of students in the adult basic education system probably have some type of learning disability and are addressing this issue in a variety of ways. A comprehensive approach that includes extensive staff development, technical assistance, collaboration and cross training with state disability programs, workforce development and welfare reform, and innovative ways to address the issue of diagnosis for adult learners who can not afford LD evaluation is most effective.

Focused Programs: Family literacy, workplace and corrections programs all have unique aspects and strategies for effective program design and professional organizations that help discern and disseminate best practices have formed around each focus area. (For example: National Association of Workforce Development Professionals, Correctional Education Association, National Center for Family Literacy) While there is little research to demonstrate which strategies best support adult learning in these education venues, there is a body of literature that provides opinions on best practices. In general, the strategies that have been found effective in adult basic education also apply to workplace and family literacy programs: use multiple modes of instruction, base learning in contexts that are applicable to the needs and interests of the adult students, establish collaborations with community services, provide professional development and support to staff, and balance the needs and goals of learners, teachers, and administrators.

Additionally, but often overlooked, is the support that teachers need to enable them to be effective instructors. Research shows that in addition to professional development, it is critical for staff to meet regularly for problem solving, curriculum development, and joint planning. Teachers are important stakeholders to include in program decision making.

D. Professional Development

INTRODUCTION

Most adult basic education practitioners enter the field without formal training in adult education. Some instructional staff may have experience or certification in K-12, but we know that teaching adults has its own unique characteristics apart from teaching children. It is critical, then, that states thoughtfully plan and implement a staff development infrastructure to support training in best practices. We are learning from research in K-12 education that teacher quality may have the strongest impact on the many variables influencing learner outcomes.

Unfortunately, the federal support of staff development initiatives lost ground when in 1998 the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) replaced the National Literacy Act (NLA) of 1991. The NLA mandated that a minimum of 15% of federal funds to states be spent on professional development activities. The act determined that staff development was a 'primary' indicator of program quality and should be considered in evaluating programs. The NLA also created the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and directed states to establish State Literacy Resource Centers (SLRCs). In contrast, WIA sets a maximum of 12.5% of federal ABE money to be used for a variety of activities, including staff development as well as technical assistance, program evaluation, and other state leadership activities. WIA does not include support for SLRCs but there remains federal funding for NIFL. As a result of these changes, funding has become a significant challenge to state professional development systems.



Questions to be considered in planning a professional development system:

- *What does the system look like? What are the necessary components?*
- *Who delivers the professional development?*
- *What methods and strategies for providing professional development are effective?*

SYSTEM COMPONENTS

In preparing a State Policy Update on "Professional Development for Adult Education Instructors", NIFL lists the components of a comprehensive professional development system that were culled from the literature. These components include:

- Wide range of professional development activities, services and approaches at convenient times and places;
- A balance among the needs of teachers and students, program initiatives, and state and federal reforms;
- Support from intergovernmental infrastructure;
- Topics based on systematic and ongoing needs assessment;
- With ongoing evaluation of professional development activities.

The authors of the NIFL report also emphasize the importance of providing incentives for staff to participate in professional development, and the need to involve all stakeholders in setting the professional development agenda.



EXAMPLES

Belzer, Drennon, and Smith provide a detailed review of five state staff development systems in "Building Professional Development Systems in Adult Basic Education: Lessons from the Field" found in Volume 2 of the NCSALL *Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*. The article highlights the varied professional development systems in Idaho, Massachusetts, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. From their in-depth review of these states, the authors conclude there are five key features of ABE professional development systems.

Scope: The system accommodates and serves the full range of practitioners from program managers to volunteer tutors - regardless of role, level of experience and training; provides activities of varying degrees of intensity and duration; and offers a wide range of formats and topics.

Cooperative Leadership: There is a high level of cooperation between state-level leadership and practitioners in the field with state-level staff taking the lead in managing the system and setting policy. The states reviewed are slowly moving from local autonomy where professional development funds are funneled to individual programs to use as they see fit to more centralized leadership. This change is seen as motivated by the need to monitor the quantity and quality of offerings and the need to link professional development with practice and program improvement. Yet each state actively includes practitioners in planning, design and facilitation of professional development activities.

Coherence: There is a logical relationship and alignment between individual and program development needs as well as state (e.g. management and policy issues) and national reforms (e.g. WIA requirements, EFF); and is based on needs assessment and feedback. Most states have committees or task forces that include representation from the state administration, statewide staff developers, and practitioners in order to negotiate the professional development agenda. States emphasize the need for local buy-in for state-wide initiatives and the need for staff development and technical assistance to integrate these initiatives across the state.

Accessibility: Training is available at varied times and locations including through distance learning.

Additionally, the states reviewed are mandating professional development requirements such as the amount of time practitioners must devote to professional development activities and the type of activities specific staff must participate in. Massachusetts for example requires all new practitioners to participant in pre-service training. Virginia and Ohio require

both individuals and programs to complete professional development plans yearly. Analysis of these plans help drive staff development planning and technical assistance.

The incentives that states use to encourage staff development vary as well. Massachusetts funds up to fifty hours of paid release time for full-time practitioners and a minimum of fifteen hours for part-time staff to participate in staff development activities yearly. Idaho awards certificates for 'advanced instructor' and 'master teacher' for those completing a specific number of training modules.

All five states have developed management information systems to provide programs with data useful for program improvement and focused professional development. Through the systematic collection and analysis of data, professional development efforts can be matched with program weaknesses. In Idaho, the state ABE director and staff development coordinator visit each program yearly to help programs use collected information and annual reports for planning program improvement efforts. Pennsylvania has trained practitioners in a process of program improvement that involves program self-evaluation, data collection and analysis, and a plan for professional development based on the results of the inquiry.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STAFF

The NIFL surveyed state adult education offices in 2001 to collect information on state systems of professional development. All but two states responded. The data revealed that states collaborate with a variety of staff development providers including colleges and universities, professional development organizations, literacy councils and consultants to provide professional development. Many states have established centralized, statewide staffing structures (such as SLRCs) to coordinate and manage professional development efforts. Despite the lack of federal funds for professional development, many states have found other ways to support these staff.

System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES) in Massachusetts consists of five regional offices, each staffed with a director, assistant director, curriculum and assessment specialist, resource person, technology specialist, and support staff. Additionally, the Central Resource Center (CRC) consisting of eight staff members and housed at World Education in Boston provides technical assistance and coordination statewide in areas such as assessment, certification, and technology. The CRC also staffs a hotline that refers potential students and volunteers to local literacy programs and maintains an electronic database of providers throughout the state.

Center for Adult Learning and Literacy (CALL) in Maine supports six staff members, a director, administrative assistant, and four literacy specialists, and is associated with the College of Education and Human development at the University of Maine, Orono. The professional development staff works closely with an Advisory Council consisting of field representatives from sixteen regions throughout Maine.

METHODS AND STRATEGIES

While there has been very little research on effective staff development in adult education, there is a growing body of research on what works in professional development for K-12 teachers. From that literature we know that staff development is most effective in changing teacher knowledge, behavior, and practice if it is ongoing and well supported; provides opportunities to learn, experiment, practice and reflect in the context of their classrooms; balances the needs of individual practitioners with those of their programs; provides plenty of opportunities for practitioners to meet and interact with each other and participate actively in the planning, implementation and evaluation of their own professional development.

In contrast, it is quite common to provide staff development in adult education through short (one or two hour) workshops and presentations at conferences where the topic has been determined by the presenter. There is traditionally no follow-up to these presentations, no time to reflect on new

knowledge, nor incentives to experiment with new instructional strategies in the classroom. However, the 2001 NIFL survey did find that over half of the states responding offer professional development formats that actively involve participants in more intensive and sustained development activities such as coaching/mentoring and practitioner research/teacher inquire.

While we know what effective staff development entails, the realities of part-time and volunteer staff, insufficient funds, and competing agendas in adult education present significant barriers to providing effective staff development. Despite these barriers, years of experience providing state-wide staff development to adult educators indicates that it is critical to provide a variety of coordinated, ongoing activities to meet the varied needs and schedules of a wide range of practitioners (Belzer, et.al, 2001).

 EXAMPLES

The Center for Adult Learning and Literacy (CALL) in Maine offers a wide range of single workshops, multi-session workshops providing both basic and in-depth experiences on a topic, train-the-trainer sessions to encourage building regional leadership, seminars, independent study and university courses for credit, and a focused summer institute. Professional development staff also provide technical assistance and site visits, maintain a lending library and web page, publish a quarterly newsletter, and provide staff support for the Maine Adult Education Management Information System.

STANDARDS & COMPETENCIES

In a field where a majority of teachers learn their trade through trial by fire in the classroom and volunteer tutors are the only service providers in some geographic areas, you might expect heated controversy around teacher qualifications. What signifies a 'quality' teacher in adult basic education and how does one tell, are hotly debated subjects. The following are some ways that states have chosen to address these issues.

Just as there has been a movement in K-12 and adult education to set standards for student learning that drive curriculum and assessment, part of the current education reform movement has also attempted to develop standards for teachers and administrators. What are good teachers/administrators able to do and what are the knowledge and skills they need to support learning effectively? If we could answer that question, planning staff development and hiring and evaluating staff could be more thoughtful and we should see improvement in learning outcomes, according to those who support standards.

The NIFL staff development survey reported that by 2001, 15 states had developed standards for teachers and were using instructor competencies in various ways. Fewer states have tackled standards for administrators. The US Department of Education has also funded American Institute for Research (AIR), a think tank in Washington, DC, to develop instructor, administrator, and professional development coordinator competencies. The results of their work can be found at <http://www.pro-net2000.org>. In deciding to develop practitioner competencies, it is critical to consider how the competencies will be chosen, who will be involved and how they will be used.

EXAMPLES

Ohio has adopted six standards and thirty-one competencies that closely mirror those developed by Pro-Net2000.

Practitioners have the option of using the competencies and accompanying self-assessment questionnaire to help them plan their own professional development. Both individual staff members and programs are required to complete professional development plans each year. Additionally, everyone working 7 hours or more is required to attend two professional development activities annually.

Massachusetts developed teacher standards through a collaborative process involving the state DOE, the state system of staff development (SABES), and practitioners working in the field. The twenty-nine standards were developed in conjunc-

tion with the Massachusetts licensure project and are an integral part of obtaining an adult education license. They are available at <http://www.SABES.org/license/>. In addition to a Competency Profile of an Adult Basic Skills Instructor, Kentucky has developed a set of workplace instructor competencies as well as program administrator competencies.

CERTIFICATION

Setting standards or competencies for quality teaching is a first step toward a far more complicated process, teacher certification. Whether to institute teacher and administrator certification in adult basic education has been long debated in the field. Those in favor argue that it would encourage uniform standards of quality, increase learner outcomes, improve working conditions of teachers, increase the fields credibility, and attract more funding. Those opposed to imposing certification believe it would exclude many good teachers who do not have equal access to education, stifle innovation and creativity, and increase bureaucratic control by those who do not understand the field. They also wonder if certification has led to increased student achievement in the K-12 system. Unfortunately, there is little research to substantiate either argument. And, considering the part-time, poorly paid teaching staff, some in the field feel it is unrealistic to impose rigorous certification requirements.

Despite reservations, the certification movement seems to be moving forward, partially fueled by the accountability requirements of WIA. About half of the states require some form of certification to teach adult basic education. Most of those require K-12 certification alone. Three mandate course work specific to adult education in addition to K-12 teaching license. Several states require certification for only those teaching in local education agencies (LEAs), creating the potential for parallel systems with unequal pay and different entry requirements. Only a handful of states have attempted to develop certification unique to adult education, among them are Massachusetts, Kansas, and Texas.

Massachusetts has undertaken a complex process to develop a licensure process unique to adult educators that is flexible, honors experience gained in the field, yet is rigorous enough to satisfy the state teacher certification board. Facilitated by collaboration between a staff member of SABES and a staff member of DOE, the process has worked hard to balance top-down mandates with bottom-up consensus building. The foundation of the licensure process is the teaching standards but includes alternative ways for practitioners to demonstrate that they have achieved these standards. Candidates can opt for more traditional course work, individualized study, portfolios or teaching demonstrations. A unique feature is the sixteen courses that have been commissioned by the state to support the standards. These courses, developed and taught by highly qualified practitioners in the field, include a mix of research and theory, practice and practicum. The courses, including reading, writing, and math at various levels, principles of adult education, learning disabilities, technology in the classroom, curriculum and methods, and adult development, are offered free of charge to practitioners by the regional SABES centers.

The Massachusetts adult education teacher license is currently voluntary. It remains to be seen how many teachers will take on the work of preparing for licensure with few incentives such as full-time work, benefits, and pay increases.

Kansas has opted for a credential process rather than a license from the Kansas Board of Education. The process was instigated over ten years ago by the Kansas Adult Education Association. KAEA is now the organization that offers and monitors credentials. The process centers around professional development activities including course work, participation in KAEA conferences and other professional presentations, and self-study. Each candidate prepares a portfolio that is submitted to the KAEA Professional Standards Committee for review. Program directors are highly involved in their staffs' credential process as program funding is linked to the integra-

tion of professional development activities and program improvement plans. Credentialing is also listed as one measure of the Indicators of Quality Adult Education Programs, which are tied to program funding.

Through a variety of mandates and incentives, the KAEA and the Kansas Board of Regents have encouraged credentialing. In a 2000 report on certification in adult education, NIFL reported that "out of 36 state funded entities (in 105 locations) in Kansas, only three do not have 100 percent of their instructors and administrators credentialed" (Parke, 2000).

End Notes

¹ Overcoming Barriers to Progress, The Mayor's Task Force on Adult Literacy, April 1998; Governor Almond's Blue Ribbon Commission to Study Adult Literacy Report, Dec. 1999; Workforce Development in Rhode Island, unpublished draft, by Edward Moscovitch, Cape Ann Economics, Aug. 2001.

² Rising to the Literacy Challenge: Building Adult Education Systems in New England, by Mary Liebowitz, Amy Robins, & Jerry Rubin, Jobs for the Future, April 2002.

³ The second national survey is underway and results will be available in 2005.

⁴ The State of Literacy in America: Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels. National Institute for Literacy. 1998

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