**New Jersey Department of Labor**

**Adult Literacy Programs**

**Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II**

***Narrative Report Program Year 2019-2020***

***(July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020)***



**December 2020**

**New Jersey Narrative Report 2019-2020**

**Introduction**

New Jersey Department of Labor (DOL) utilized Program Year (PY) 2019 to further build capacity with all adult literacy grantees through professional development, common objectives, and targeted technical assistance. In March of 2020 a worldwide pandemic spread into New Jersey. At the request of the Governor’s office, effective on or about March 15, 2020 most school systems in K-12 and at the community and state college level were closed. Non- essential businesses were also closed. These closures were unplanned and much of the state, including NJDOL staff, were unprepared. The remainder of time from March 2020 through June 2020 proved to be challenging, yet I am proud of the way New Jerseyans remained “Jersey Strong.” Title II providers were hit especially hard. Most of the education was occurring in a traditional face to face format, with a few areas offering remote or hybrid courses until March of 2020. Our Title II providers worked tirelessly to ensure that students could continue their education in a new learning format. This narrative speaks to that hard work in light of a global pandemic.

**State Leadership Funds** (AEFLA Section 223)

Consistent with WIOA Section 223, the NJDOL has prioritized the following state leadership activities:

* NJDOL Title II Adult Literacy continues to utilize a common Assessment Policy, and under the direction of the NJDOL Assistant Commissioner of Workforce Development requires all involved in the NJ Workforce Development System to utilize CASAS Math and Reading Goals for Adult Basic Education (ABE) testing. Training was provided specifically to NJ Title II providers from Linda Taylor and the staff at CASAS during the program year. These required webinars focused on areas of concern and/or questions shared by staff with Title II regional coordinators during the monitoring process.
* Title II providers are required to have staff trained on administering the CASAS tests. NJ Regional Coordinators work to ensure these training standards are met throughout the year.
* Delivery of professional development has been accomplished by way of Leadership funding which includes attendance at literacy regional conferences, program specific local training, and professional development for online training. NJDOL adult literacy staff attended Zoom and Google training in order to assist instructors under Title II purview throughout the state.

NJDOL provided direct technical assistance to grantees during the course of PY 2019 with a heavy emphasis on online technical assistance provided from March 2020 until the end of the fiscal year. With that, NJDOL continues to utilize LiteracyPro Systems’ LACES (Literacy, Adult and Community Education System) software as the Management Information System (MIS). LACES is compliant with the National Reporting System (NRS) requirements. PY 19 training was provided to all WIOA Title II staff through virtual meetings and webinars due to COVID 19 closures and travel bans. NJDOL adult literacy program staff analyze the LACES data on a monthly basis and look for trends and other areas that could be perceived as weaknesses. They communicate areas of concern/issues to be corrected to state regional coordinator staff who are often in the field working directly with Title II providers in addition to contacting and working directly with the programs to remedy these areas. Individual consortium trainings were customized by LiteracyPro staff and provided via remote meetings throughout the state. These trainings focused on further areas of concern in regards to data collection, entry, and management, and specifically directed technical assistance was provided to each consortium in order to help produce strong data.

* The monitoring and evaluation of the quality and improvement of adult education activities as per 223(1)(d) continued in PY 2019. Regional coordinators work in tandem with central NJDOL literacy staff to complete desk audits of all Title II lead agency programs and partner agencies. Areas of focus for PY 2019 included program monitoring (both in-person and remotely), data analysis to determine programs struggling to meet levels of service and student retention policies.
* NJDOL adult literacy staff continue to analyze, review, and monitor the following: grantee budgets, contracts and modifications; expenditure reports, allowable costs, and payment vouchers; NRS data input and output in LACES including but not limited to NRS Tables and customized desk audit reports and; professional development needs. Policy manuals/procedures, and guidance communication documents are created and updated to ensure compliance with WIOA and AEFLA requirements and State and Local program and fiscal regulations. NJDOL Central office administration staff and regional coordinators work hand-in-hand and regularly communicate the progress of said grantees.
* All Title II grantees receive a detailed report card noting their consortia’s progress. Report cards were disseminated at the quarterly Roundtable Directors’ meeting in October 2020. These reports provide an overall provider “grade” as well as a ranking of each Title II consortia program statewide against negotiated performance metrics.
* In compliance with the results of OCTAE’s November 2018 virtual monitoring of the last NJDOL competition, risk assessments on all PY 19 grantees were completed prior to the awarding of contracts. The risk assessments provided NJDOL adult literacy staff with an informed overview of areas that require further technical assistance and monitoring. The risk assessment scores became the basis for the development of a new NJDOL adult literacy comprehensive monitoring tool which was utilized during the program year.

**New Jersey Performance Data Analysis**

New Jersey’s adult education PY 2019 performance was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The obstacles in everyone’s paths were overwhelming and unprecedented. Participants needed to care for and assist their children that were now learning remotely at home. Often, they also had to care for sick family members. Many lost their jobs, needed to apply for unemployment and faced challenges just to put food on the table. The pandemic caused a significant number of deaths and illness in our communities.

Agency staff had to support learners with maximum responsiveness and flexibility. Distance learning and remote instruction became the norm yet there was limited time to sort through the abundance of resources and instructional tools that became available so rapidly. Although a few instructors left or retired because they did not want to teach remotely, most spent their time and energy determining the best methods of reaching, retaining, and instructing those students already involved in the registration process and/or attending classes.

Agencies quickly developed instructional options for participants via computers, tablets, cell phones, and worksheet packets. Videoconferencing tools such as Google Meet, Zoom, etc. became the new way to provide engaging and interactive instruction. The number of distance learners in New Jersey increased from 8 students in PY 2018 with a total of 661 attendance hours to 1,765 students in PY 2019 with a total of 164,380 hours. Despite the increase in distance learning hours, the total attendance hours for all participants decreased by 444,747.

Despite the incredible dedication of New Jersey’s adult education community and the creativity, innovation, and effort that was put forth through the remainder of the last quarter, COVID-19 disrupted adult education services and significantly affected performance in regard to the NRS tables. In PY 2019, our programs only met 1 of the 12 measurable skill gain/educational gain core indicators of performance. From PY 2018 to PY 2019 our programs demonstrated decreases in all of the Educational Functioning Levels (EFLs). The decreases were much greater for ABE/ASE students than for ESL students and from last year to this year ranged from 20% to 34% in ABE/ASE levels and 6% to 12% in ESL levels. The decreases were the result of agencies’ inability to post test their students. In PY 2018 New Jersey’s adult education agencies post tested 70% of their students eligible for a posttest. In PY 2019 they were only able to posttest 54% of their students. This demonstrates a decrease of 16%.

By the time remote assessment administration was approved and the steps needed to begin were conceptualized the end of the final quarter of the program year was very near resulting in a small number of posttests being able to be administered. Some of the issues limiting NRS approved assessments were:

* When remote testing was finally approved participants were not available;
* Participants did not have the appropriate hardware, software or reliable internet;
* Participants did not feel comfortable with remote guideline parameters in their home;
* Participants did not have a suitable or a quiet place to test;
* Equipment was being shared with other household members; and
* Testing a small number of students was labor and time intensive.

One example of lack of technology requirements needed for remote testing is a local agency surveyed all participants in one ABE class. Of the 14 participants in the class only one had a computer that met the requirements to test at home. Even the few agencies that were able to offer some in-person testing before the end of the last quarter often didn’t find success. Participants were fearful of coming into the schools and others had returned to work and were unwilling to take time off to post test. This inability for the agencies to posttest students with NRS approved assessments resulted directly in the decline in performance mentioned above. In addition, agencies reported that ABE/ASE students were discouraged by High School Equivalency (HSE) test centers closing with no definitive re-open dates in place and often lost motivation to continue with their individual learning plans.

Measurable Skill Gains (MSGs)/Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gain performance targets for PY 2019 were established and agreed upon by the NJDOL adult education and literacy staff in collaboration with the United States Department of Education’s (USEDs) Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). The targets were set for PY 2020 at the same time as they were set for PY 2019 and are similar to the ones set for PY 2019. However, some of the PY 2020 targets are higher which will make them extremely difficult to meet unless agencies are consistency able to posttest; and according to the WIOA statute the negotiated performance targets are unable to be lowered or changed in any way.

While states are aware of the legal barrier that OCTAE has in regard to being able to renegotiate targets even under the pandemic circumstances, it has still been difficult to process the steep decline in our performance after so many years of intense technical assistance to assist agencies in reaching and exceeding performance targets. Also, while states have been made aware that OCTAE is keenly aware of the hard work of both state staff and local program staff and the impact that the pandemic has had on performance, it is still very easy for local programs especially, to feel overwhelmed and discouraged when viewing their NRS tables. The feeling is one of frustration and helplessness due to the lack of an alternative to a federally approved NRS assessment as a means to show educational gains.

A comparison of New Jersey’s performance targets for PY 2017, 2018, and 2019 and actual performance toward meeting the targets is provided in Chart 1 below. There is a clear correlation in the decline in performance for NRS Table 4 as a result of agencies’ inability to posttest students as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

**Chart 1: New Jersey Adult Education Performance for the last three years**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Performance Objectives** | **PY17****Target**  | **PY17****Performance**  | **PY18****Target** | **PY18****Performance** | **PY19****Target** | **PY19****Performance** |
| ABE Level 1 | 48% | **53%** | 50% | **54%** | 51% | **20%** |
| ABE Level 2 | 46% | **54%** | 48% | **53%**  | 49% | **26%** |
| ABE Level 3 | 44% | **53%** | 45% | **53%** | 46% | **29%** |
| ABE Level 4 | 38% | **51%** | 42% | **52%**  | 43% | **32%** |
| ABE Level 5 | 39% | **56%** | 55% | **63%**  | 56% | **29%** |
| ABE Level 6 | n/a | **55%** | 44% | **56%** | 45% | **26%** |
| ESL Level 1 | 49% | **61%** | 56% | **64%**  | 57% | **54%** |
| ESL Level 2 | 54% | **60%** | 55% | **64%**  | 56% | **57%** |
| ESL Level 3 | 53% | **60%** | 57% | **64%**  | 59% | **52%** |
| ESL Level 4 | 53% | **58%** | 56% | **60%**  | 57% | **50%** |
| ESL Level 5 | 43% | **49%** | 44% | **50%** | 45% | **44%** |
| ESL Level 6 | 36% | **40%** | 37% | **45%**  | 38% | **33%** |

This chart shows data over the past three years on educational gains in the areas of: Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English Language Acquisition (ELA). For four years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, New Jersey demonstrated consistent and significant improvement in all of the Measurable Skill Gains (MSG)/Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gain areas. For PY 2015, PY 2017, and PY 2018 New Jersey met *all* of its performance targets; and for PY 2016, New Jersey only missed 1 of its performance targets, and only by 1%. New Jersey’s agencies were on track to meet their performance goals for PY 2019 for the fifth year in a row when COVID-19 shocked all of New Jersey but especially our adult education programs.

During PY 2019, educational services and instruction to adults were provided through a wide variety of program offerings including: ABE/ASE, ELA, volunteer literacy programs, adult high school programs, HSE test preparation, and programs at state and local correctional facilities. Despite the pandemic, agencies continued providing adult education services consistently through the end of the program year. The provision of supportive services and information outside of the direct realm of adult education became increasingly necessary and agency staff did an amazing job of supporting and assisting participants in unimaginable ways.

The ABE/ELA and Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) program services were delivered through 17 consortia and lead agencies with multiple delivery sites throughout the counties coordinated by the individual consortium, community/technical colleges or public and private non-profit agencies and New Jersey State correctional institutions. Together, 84 agencies participated in delivering services in PY 2019.

Chart 2 provides a breakdown of participants by EFL for PY 2018 and PY 2019 demonstrating the enrollment difference between the years. In PY 2019, New Jersey’s WIOA Title II agencies served 14,947 adult participants. For PY 2018 they served 18,439 adult participants*.* That’s a decrease of 3,492 between last year and this year as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The populations served included 4,957 ABE participants (4,233 ABE Levels 1 - 4 participants and 724 ABE Levels 5 and 6) and 9,990 ELA participants.

**Chart 2: New Jersey Adult Education Enrolled Participants**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Educational Functioning Level** | **PY 2018****Total Enrollment** | **PY 2019****Total Enrollment** | **Enrollment Difference between PY18 and PY19** |
| ABE Level 1 | 969 | 519 | 450 less students |
| ABE Level 2 | 1,877 | 798 | 1,079 less students |
| ABE Level 3 | 2,250 | 1,519 | 731 less students |
| ABE Level 4 | 1,813 | 1,397 | 416 less students |
| ABE Level 5 | 441 | 477 | 36 more students |
| ABE Level 6 | 199 | 247 | 48 more students |
| *Total ABE*  | *7,549* | *4,957* | *2,592 less students* |
| ESL Level 1 | 3,952 | 3,502 | 450 less students |
| ESL Level 2 | 2,814 | 2,428 | 386 less students |
| ESL Level 3 | 1,622 | 1,652 | 30 more students |
| ESL Level 4  | 1,223 | 1,190 | 33 less students |
| ESL Level 5  | 933 | 851 | 82 less students |
| ESL Level 6 | 346 | 367 | 21 more students |
| *Total ESL* | *10,890* | *9,990* | *900 less students* |
| **Total ABE and ESL** | **18,439** | **14,947** | **3,492 less students** |

Agencies reported that many students had a very difficult time continuing their learning because of a lack of technology including equipment, internet/reliable internet, and/or lack of basic computer skills. They also indicated that even if they had a computer, tablet or cell phone it needed to be used by their children for remote learning as the majority of New Jersey’s K-12 schools were closed to in-person learning since March 2020. Agencies reported that between 10% and 43% of their students left the program as a direct result of COVID-19.

New Jersey’s ELA programs are offered at many different venues from literacy-based volunteer programs to adult education programs. The programs provide services from ESL Beginning Literacy to Advanced Level ESL**.** For the volunteer-based programs, the majority of services are provided through the use of tutor-learner matches that deliver one-on-one or small-group instructional services.

The majority of the ELA students served (35%) were assessed at the ESL Level 1 EFL. This information is reflected in chart 3. This population may only understand isolated words or phrases, may have no or minimal reading or writing skills in any language, and functions minimally or not at all in English. The percentage of students served in each ESL EFL remained similar from PY 2018’s percentages.

**Chart 3: New Jersey Adult Basic Education English Language Learners**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Educational Functioning Level** | **Total Number of ELLs PY 2019** | **Total Percentage of ELLs PY 2019** |
| ESL Level 1 | 3,502 | 35% |
| ESL Level 2 | 2,428 | 24% |
| ESL Level 3 | 1,652 | 17% |
| ESL Level 4  | 1,190 | 12% |
| ESL Level 5  | 851 | 9% |
| ESL Level 6 | 367 | 4% |
| **Total**  | **9,990** | **100%** |

As a result of the pandemic ESL students often found themselves struggling with assisting their children to complete their learning due to their own lack of basic computer skills or limited English for communicating with school staff and/or caring for sick family members. In addition, agencies reported that there was often a reluctance from some ESL students to pursue virtual education instead of face-to-face instruction. On the other hand, some agencies reported that ESL students became more engaged as they no longer had transportation or child care concerns.

From PY 2018 to PY 2019 our programs demonstrated significant decreases in educational gains in all ESL EFLs. New Jersey’s programs indicated a 10% educational gain decrease at ESL Level 1; 7% at Level 2; 12% at Level 3; 10% at Level 4; 6% at Level 5 and; 12% at Level 6. Of the 14,947 students served in the WIOA Title II program for PY 2019, 9,990 of them were English Language Learners (ELLs). New Jersey met only one of the ESL EFL gain targets for PY 2019. The decrease in performance can be directly attributed to several factors including agencies’ inability to posttest due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

New Jersey embraces its cultural diversity. It is home to the most ethnically diverse city in the nation, Jersey City. It is also considered the top-ranked city for the number of languages spoken. There are over 140 spoken languages and various dialects spoken in the state. New Jersey’s diverse makeup is consistent with its status as a gateway for immigrants. Agencies were required to integrate an English language/civics education component for their Section 243 funded IELCE programs. They are required to design their programs to prepare ELLs for employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency and integrate with the workforce development system.

The IELCE programs support the immigrant community and other limited English proficient populations. During PY 2019, 3,443 participants were served through the IELCE program. The ELA population represented approximately 67% of all the students being served in the WIOA Title II program. This specific population may have limited reading or writing skills in any language and may function minimally or not at all in English. Sixty-one of our ELLs passed their citizenship exam between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020. The IELCE program emphasizes contextualized instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation, and U.S. history and government, in accordance with the *National Standards for Civics and Government.* Types of activities supported by these funds included:

* provision of experiential learning opportunities including completing employment forms, completing the voter registration process, engaging participants in volunteer opportunities and linkages with community resources;
* provision of computers and software for instruction;
* citizen preparation including visiting of polling places and government buildings in the state capital;
* field trips to promote American cultural awareness and skills; and
* preparation of curricula focusing on issues of importance to non-citizens such as preparation for becoming a U.S. citizen, job training and placement, housing, parenting and civics preparation.

ELLs enrolled in programs that received IELCE Section 243 funding were offered the opportunity to participate in Integrated Education and Training Programs (IETs). Almost twenty-five percent of ELLs served with Section 243 IELCE funds participated in an IET. Continuing with the implementation of the IETs that were in place for PY 2019 was extremely difficult since the pandemic began. Some of the hands-on components of established IET programs were impossible to be completed.

Despite many of the major challenges faced by New Jersey agencies trying to continue with the implementation of their IET programs, there were also innovations that led to creative and successful results. One of our agencies contacted the testing/credentialing entity for their IET and the entity agreed to issue online testing codes for their IET students. These students were able to take the certification exam at home. All nine students who took the exam passed it and received their certification.

The NJDOL made a variety of investments to help individuals obtain their high school diploma or its recognized equivalent, improve their basic math, reading and writing skills, and attain basic English listening and speaking skills along with computer proficiencies necessary for employment including the purchase of the Aztec online software as a remote instruction tool for use by all WIOA Title II and Workforce Learning Link agencies.

Educational opportunities were provided to adults via programs ranging from ABE Level 1 through ABE Level 6 and ESL Level 1 through ESL Level 6 to prepare adults to:

* enroll and participate in the appropriate level of an adult education program and receive ancillary support services if necessary;
* move to the next EFL;
* sit for an HSE exam and, if successful, receive a New Jersey state issued high school diploma; or graduate from an adult high school;
* obtain gainful employment;
* enter postsecondary education or vocational training programs;
* attain an industry-recognized credential(s).

There were 25 Workforce Learning Link (WLL) programs throughout the state for PY 2019 compared to 29 from PY 2018. The majority of these programs are located at the One-Stop Career Centers (OSCCs). Through a combined training approach and computer-based instruction, the WLLs provide services that include basic computer literacy including typing, financial literacy, job search and employability skills, ELA instruction, and HSE preparation and testing. This effort has allowed New Jersey to expand its literacy services to provide interactive training services that allow participants to address individual employment-related issues at their own pace.

The WLLs are able to assist individuals to raise their basic skill levels, obtain employment, enter occupational training, and attain their high school diplomas by passing their HSE exams using computer labs in OSCCs throughout the state. For PY 2019, the state’s 25 WLL facilities helped approximately 1,588 individuals which was a *decrease* of almost 1000 individuals compared to PY 2018 due to the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic and related closures have led to this decline in enrolled numbers. WLLs have actively offered virtual/online literacy services and training to their participants in order to continue to provide learning opportunities during these uncertain times.

**Integration with One-Stop Career Center (OSCC) Partners**

NJDOL has communicated that OSCCs are to provide direct referrals to individuals interested in Title II programs. To ensure this was occurring the review of local plans was conducted by the State Director of Adult Education and Literacy Services in regards to Title II. Local plans were required to detail the partnership and alignment with local Title II providers and commendations and/or recommendations were made to further strengthen partnerships.

Under WIOA Title II a major requirement is to develop strong partnerships and program alignment within the community. In order to fulfill this requirement effective and efficient partnerships were required with local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and local One-Stop Career Centers. Many local areas utilize cross-informational training of appropriate staff to ensure all requirements are met. These partnerships were to be formalized through the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). MOU’s shall include such topics as; availability and delivery of services, referral process, coordination and planning efforts, career

pathway development, and others as deemed appropriate by the parties.

The NJDOL State Director for Adult Education continued to take part in the Title I and Title II Workgroup which included representation from NJDOL Title I/Title II staff, the NJ State Employment and Training Commission, local WDBs and Title II providers. The objective of the group in its second iteration focused on the development of a white-paper report which details adult learners moving through the NJ workforce system. This white paper will be shared with public stakeholders to not only raise attention to the growing literacy training demands within the state, but to ask for more funding in terms of state match dollars and other avenues.

* In PY 19 NJDOL adult literacy staff provided additional training on the LACES database to NJDOL Office of Research Information staff and the data validation unit; this information was used in the creation and additions to a public dashboard that showcases NJ Title II performance and populations served. This user-friendly dashboard was revealed to all stakeholders, partner agencies and the public and continues to be built upon.

**Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) Program** (AEFLA Section 243)

NJDOL continues to offer competitive IELCE program funding. 16 of 17 NJ lead agencies were provided with Section 243 funding. For PY 19, all Title II providers that received 243 dollars were required to offer two IET courses. NJ adult literacy staff utilized desk audits and technical assistance visits in the field to support grantees by way of IET/IELCE monitoring and information gathering.

* The IET monitoring tool is used to observe every Title II lead agency and any partners utilizing section 243 funding. Technical assistance was provided to ensure all required forms were completed, curriculum was current and aligned with the College and Career Readiness Standards, while concurrent and contextual classroom instruction was observed/documented.
* In-person monitoring and review of reasonable and allowable expenses pivoted to remote monitoring and program reviews to ensure classes were continuing. Unfortunately, due to the necessity and structure of IETs requiring face to face instruction for contextual learning many of the programs struggled to continue to this day due to mandated closures and lack of technology for participants.
* Late in PY 2019 NJDOL shared best practices in a forum with lead agency directors and staff to celebrate what has been accomplished thus far.
* NJDOL is progressing towards program goals of ensuring that IELCE program activities are integrated with the local workforce development system by way of a required MOU which details the collaboration and pathway for literacy activities between the One-stop, WDB, and Title II lead agencies/partners.
* To that end, all Title II grantees who were to receive continuation year funding were required to collaborate with the local WDB and document the collaboration via an IET planning form. This form also helped NJDOL discern that industry valued credentials are to be an area of focus for IET programs moving forward; a continued challenge is to have Title II providers understand their local labor demand occupations. As such, the NJDOL Office of Research Information (ORI) made recent industry cluster demographics and labor market data broken out by county available to Title II providers and local WDBs. This regional focus offers insight and analysis on the changing employment situation in New Jersey’s regional labor areas, including its industries and comparisons with statewide data. The articles, tables and charts illustrating employment by industry, unemployment rates, characteristics of the unemployed, and highlights of economic activity helps Title II providers to better understand the changing needs of their region and to develop IET programs which align with regional and local needs.

**Adult Education Standards**

New Jersey DOL continues to utilize the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards for adult education. NJDOL adult literacy regional coordinators regularly review grantee/partner curriculum and monitor instruction to ensure the CCR Standards are being effectively met. Regional coordinators disseminated a follow-up survey during PY 19 in regards to next steps for CCR Standards training; it was determined that training for remote learning with the CCR was most requested by grantees. NJDOL plans to implement professional development involving technology for learning in the next program year.

**Programs for Corrections Education and the Education of Other Institutionalized Individuals**

(AEFLA Section 225)

Prisons and jails throughout the State were severely restricted due to COVID-19 policies and related closures. NJDOC is a Title II provider. NJDOL staff works to ensure all policies are implemented and NJDOC staff are included in trainings, targeted trainings, webinars and are monitored accordingly.

* For staff and student safety, NJDOC suspended HSE testing from mid-March through mid-October. It was not possible to offer remote testing to individual students due to the lack of internet connectivity inside State prisons.
* It is important to note that educational services were never suspended. Inmates enrolled in education received individualized, paper-based independent work designed and graded by their regular teachers.
* Paper-based distance education was provided on a continual basis.
* The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting closures exposed a general lack of technology and connectivity in State prisons (and elsewhere) which presents a constant challenge. Students do not have access to mobile devices or internet connectivity.
* NJDOC uses a return to DOC custody (i.e., a reincarceration) within three years as a measure of recidivism. For the 2015 release cohort, the reincarceration rate was 30.4%. Said another way, 30.4% of persons released in 2015 returned to DOC custody within three years.
* Offenders are served as mandated by NJ Rev Stat § 30:4-92.3 (2016), NJDOC’s Office of Educational Services ensures that ABE and HSE programs are made available to all adult inmates in NJ State prisons who do not possess high school credentials. NJDOC Office of Educational Services (OES) is not responsible for providing education services inside county jails, nor is OES responsible for providing education services to individuals who are on parole or probation.

**Concluding Statement**

The COVID-19 pandemic essentially challenged and changed NJ Title II services. Many of our Title II providers continue to offer remote only instruction due to rising COVID cases and subsequent restrictions. Many New Jersey residents in Title II programs work at minimum wage jobs or without a job and cannot access the technology for testing and remote courses to continue their education. My hope is that USED/OCTAE can continue to be supportive and recognize the barriers and challenges overcome by all states during this unprecedented time. NJDOL remains committed to researching and taking on new ways to fully support our Title II providers.