

Connecticut State Department of Education



2007-2008 Adult Education Annual Narrative Report to the U.S. Department of Education

Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and
Adult Education
Division of Family and Student Support Services
25 Industrial Park Road
Middletown, CT 06457

Introduction

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has successfully completed another year of implementing the goals outlined in its State Plan as mandated by Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Federal funds were utilized to target specific priority areas including: workplace preparation; workforce education; family literacy; transition to postsecondary education and training; technology implementation; English language acquisition/civics education; and the Connecticut Adult Virtual High School. A new competition to award funds in fiscal year 2008-09 was also conducted during 2007-08. This was designed to offer opportunities to those programs that may not have been funded in prior years, and to explore new priority areas while continuing existing ones. Augmenting Connecticut's commitment of state and local adult education dollars with the WIA Title II dollars has allowed the CSDE to expand its provider network while enabling existing programs to supplement their ongoing programming and offer services that are more comprehensive and cost-effective.

Seventy one organizations including school districts, volunteer programs, community/faith-based organizations, and other agencies provided adult education services in Connecticut by recruiting and retaining educationally and economically disadvantaged adults. By keeping the needs of learners, families, communities and employers in the forefront, adult education programs succeeded in enhancing the skills of Connecticut's learners, enabling thousands to attain a secondary credential, helping to close the skills gap in the workplace, assisting non-English speakers to learn English, preparing residents to attain U.S. citizenship, and helping families to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy.

1. Describe successful activities, programs, and projects supported with State Leadership funds and describe the extent to which these activities, programs, and projects were successful in implementing the goals of the State Plan.

The CSDE delivers a majority of its state leadership and professional development services through the Adult Training and Development Network (ATDN). The CSDE's professional development model supports the implementation of the goals of Connecticut's State Plan and consists of three distinct components:

1. Professional Development Basics;
2. Site-based Professional Development; and
3. Stipends for project-specific professional development activities.

Professional Development Basics

During fiscal year 2007-08, 1,359 practitioners attended 76 ATDN preplanned training events. An additional 19 sessions were conducted based on requests from the field and were attended by over 300 practitioners. Eighty four percent of all workshop evaluations were rated 5 or 6 on a 6-point scale for overall quality with 1 indicating poor quality and 6 indicating high quality.

Connecticut Competency System (CCS) training sessions were offered several times during the year to practitioners from both adult education and workforce development. The CCS is the CSDE's standards-based framework that connects curriculum, assessment and instruction and captures the progress made by learners in adult education. ATDN staff also supported the network of Program Facilitators – lead practitioners who ensure the high quality implementation

of CCS – through regional networking sessions that provided local programs with links to best practices, opportunities for sharing and an awareness of regional/national issues. Training and recertification sessions were also offered for the Workplace Speaking Assessment. These sessions attracted over 220 attendees. ATDN also worked with the CSDE to implement the statewide meetings for Program Facilitators and the CCS Roundtable sessions.

The Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) federal initiative continued successful implementation of its workshop series. In addition to a session that introduced the components of reading, specific sessions were offered in the areas of Alphabetics, Fluency, Vocabulary, Comprehension, Diagnostic Assessments, and Differentiated Instruction. A new workshop on teaching reading in math and science classes was also developed and delivered. These sessions attracted over 160 attendees. Thirty certificates of completion were awarded to teachers who completed the entire instructional series.

The Connecticut Adult Mathematics Institute provided adult education teachers with a continuum of professional development to help them recognize, assess, and remediate the areas of mathematics where their learners are having the most difficulty. Session topics included Quantitative Literacy Across the Curricula, Patterns and Relationships, Geometry and Measurement, Accuplacer Math, and Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment (CASAS) Math Test Item Writing Practice. These sessions attracted over 50 attendees.

The CASAS Functional Writing Assessment training was delivered four times during 2007-08. This 9-hour training is a requirement for programs to administer the assessment. Each provider is expected to maintain one Writing Contact Person who has participated in this training. To ensure the reliable and accurate scoring of writing assessment results, ATDN offered three training sessions around inter-rater reliability. Additionally, three recertification sessions were also offered to enable local scorers of writing assessments to work toward renewing their certification. These sessions attracted over 170 attendees.

ATDN's Scoring Service, for the CASAS Functional Writing Assessment, scored 2,210 standardized pre-post writing samples on behalf of local adult education programs. Intensive and ongoing training ensured the maintenance of the scoring service's accuracy.

Writing Matters in Connecticut connects assessment to instruction by utilizing research-based writing instruction and teaching methodologies appropriate for adult learners. Three workshops were offered. They provided teachers with instructional strategies to strengthen learners' writing skills and abilities to express themselves. These sessions attracted about 50 attendees.

ESL teachers were provided multiple professional development opportunities. An all day professional development event was conducted by a national CASAS trainer and ESL expert. Teachers who participated in this event learned to examine their own language in the classroom and its impact on learner progress. They also learned to use focused listening techniques that are correlated to the CASAS Listening Content Standards. In addition to this event, specialized workshops on Pronunciation Strategies and Focused Listening were offered. These sessions attracted about 60 attendees.

ATDN continued its partnership with the CSDE to support a workforce development capacity building initiative. In addition to the 3-day Workforce Education Model training, two new sessions were offered: one focused on orienting teachers to workforce education while another dealt with assessment and evaluation in the workplace. Adult Education at Work user group meetings were also held on three occasions to facilitate the sharing of best practices among local providers. These events attracted more than 75 attendees.

The 16th annual Learning Disabilities Conference attracted 300 attendees. Breakout sessions focused on such topics as autism, disability disclosure, Connecticut's war veterans, transition to adulthood, and the link between oral language and text comprehension.

ATDN continued to provide training and technical assistance for the high quality implementation and statewide coordination of the National External Diploma Program (NEDP). The training sessions attracted more than 60 attendees.

Site-Based and Stipend Professional Development

The site-based professional development initiative provided resources to 14 adult education providers to impact student achievement in basic skills by improving the professional capabilities of teachers. An additional 15 stipend grants were awarded to other programs to expand professional development offerings and explore new pathways for program improvement. Of special interest are the projects that were conducted by Stamford (ESL professional learning community and retention strategies), Middletown (community resources, learning disabilities) and Valley Regional (learner motivation and persistence activities).

Extensive technical assistance through visitations, telephone conferences, email exchanges, regional forums, and follow-up meetings was provided by ATDN. Adult education staff from several providers conducted workshops at the annual state adult education conference (CAACE) in March that highlighted their grant activities for the year.

2. Describe any significant findings from the eligible agency's evaluation of the effectiveness of the adult education and literacy activities based on the core indicators of performance.

Learning Gains

The percent of learners who completed a National Reporting System (NRS) educational functioning level in 2007-08 achieved at least 90 percent of the negotiated target level for most NRS levels. The results, however, were somewhat disappointing at the ABE High Intermediate and the Low Adult Secondary Education levels. At a recent statewide meeting with program facilitators, strategies to address the issue were discussed.

Two key challenges were identified with respect to the ABE High Intermediate level. This level is the widest of all the NRS levels spanning 15 CASAS scale score points. Completion of this level is difficult, especially for learners who enter at the lower range of this level. Additionally, a research study conducted by the CSDE demonstrates that learners with math abilities in the upper range of this level are able to pass the GED test at substantially greater rates than those at lower abilities. As learners realize their closeness to this important milestone, i.e. passage of the GED test, there is limited incentive for these learners to demonstrate progress on the NRS levels.

This makes it challenging to procure a meaningful post-test; not surprisingly, this level reflects a substantially lower post-test rate than the other three ABE levels.

Another factor that depresses performance at the ABE High Intermediate and the Low Adult Secondary levels is the NRS policy which states that attainment of a high school diploma – a significant learner achievement – cannot be reported as a success at those levels. Of the 2,809 learners who are reported as not completing either of those two levels, 726 learners attained a secondary school diploma. If diploma attainment were allowed as an achievement, the success rate at those two levels will be 42 percent (as opposed to 26 percent) and 61 percent (as opposed to 32 percent) respectively. In spite of these challenges, practitioners identified proactive steps to improve performance at those two levels such as: (i) encouraging more learners to study longer in adult education and achieve more than the minimum passing score on the GED test; and (ii) providing more challenging instruction to these learners in GED preparation classes.

Performance at the ESL Advanced level continues to lag the negotiated target percentage. This too was discussed at the recent statewide meeting. Though this level spans 15 CASAS scale score points, practitioners identified strategies to help improve performance. These include teaching and assessing in the areas of reading and writing at this advanced level, incorporating the updated listening assessments that span the entire ESL advanced level, and offering challenging higher level instruction for these advanced learners.

Performance at the ESL Beginning Literacy level exceeded the target for 2007-08 but was 6 percentage points lower than that in 2006-07. The lower performance in 2007-08 cannot be attributed to the post-test rate alone; there was very little difference in that rate between the two years. Another indicator, the percent of learners achieving a four-point CASAS scale score gain from pre- to post-test, was also within two percentage points indicating that learners in both years made progress. Therefore, the decline in 2007-08 may be due to the following two factors:

- a) The entering abilities of learners in 2007-08 were somewhat lower than that of learners in 2006-07. For example, 38 percent of learners in 2007-08 reflected pre-test scores in listening that placed them in the bottom part of this level (i.e. a CASAS scale score below 170) as compared to 33 percent in 2006-07. Learners who are functioning in the bottom range of this wide level may have an inherently lower likelihood of completing the level than those who are functioning in the upper range of that same level.
- b) The mean hours attended by learners at this level was about 15% lower in 2007-08 than in 2006-07. As each year passes, the ongoing cap on the state adult education appropriation puts increasing pressure on local program budgets. This impacts the intensity and duration of class offerings, and consequently the total number of hours that learners attend in a fiscal year.

Follow up Outcomes

The number of individuals establishing the “Earn a Diploma” and the “Enter Employment” goals reflected substantial increases. Programs are continually reminded that engaging with learners around their goals for participating in adult education can serve as motivators for persistence. Overall, performance on the diploma attainment and employment measures has remained consistent. The number of learners with a postsecondary goal increased by 15 percent from

2006-07. Though the response rate was similar, the performance outcome was higher by 5 percentage points in 2007-08. This can be attributed (at least partially) to Connecticut's concerted priority to improve the transition of learners in adult education to postsecondary education/training programs.

3. Describe how the eligible agency has supported the integration of activities sponsored under Title II with other adult education, career development, and employment and training activities. Include a description of how the eligible agency is being represented on the Local Workforce Investment Boards, adult education's involvement on the State Workforce Investment Board, the provision of core and other services through the one-stop system and an estimate of the Title II funds being used to support activities and services through the one-stop delivery system.

WIA title II funds enable the CSDE to effectively supplement the state mandated adult education system by expanding its provider network to offer more locally responsive programming while also enabling existing providers to compete for funds in order to offer more comprehensive and cost-effective services. Collaborative relationships have been developed between the CSDE, local adult education providers, other state agencies and the workforce development system to greatly expand educational, support, and training services to the target populations in the state. CSDE staff and local practitioners also work closely with regional literacy councils to strengthen the connections between CSDE funded adult education programs and other literacy related programs in the community.

Collaborations with Workforce Investment Boards (WIB), One-Stop Centers, the Connecticut Department of Labor, and the Department of Social Services

As part of an ongoing collaboration, the CSDE has continued to ensure that its needs assessment process aligns with the service delivery goals and objectives of each Workforce Investment Board (WIB) as a means of enhancing adult education service delivery strategies. The Commissioner of Education is a member of the Governor's Connecticut Employment and Training Commission (CETC) while the Associate Commissioner has continued to serve on the statewide Youth Committee. CSDE staff members served on all five local WIBs, Youth Councils and subcommittees. In fiscal year 2007-08, the CSDE provided direct and equitable distribution of financial support to all one-stop centers for a total amount of \$236,577. Staff also served as active members of CETC's Performance Accountability and Workforce committees. The employment outcomes achieved by adult education learners are reported alongside those from higher education, employment and training programs, thus providing greater visibility and credibility to the impact of adult education.

Memoranda of Understanding are in place with each area WIB regarding the roles and responsibilities of adult education as its partner. The CSDE continues to provide staff at all the one-stop centers with the training, technical assistance, and assessment materials necessary to utilize CASAS appraisals and computer-based CASAS testing to gauge customers' literacy skills during the intake process.

The CSDE continues to work closely with the Connecticut Department of Labor and members of the WIBs to assist them in responding to the *common reporting measures* required for youth in

WIA programs. Both education and labor continue to speak with one voice when it comes to competency-based curriculum and instruction, standardized assessment, and reporting.

The CSDE has continued its commitment to the interagency Design Group in order to strengthen the connections between the social service and the adult education systems. The Design Group includes representatives from State agencies (i.e. Labor, Social Services, and Education) and the WIBs. Several adult education programs have collaborated with their WIBs to provide intensive and integrated vocational and basic skills education to individuals receiving public assistance. Pursuant to the Federal Deficit Reduction Act, teachers of adult education learners who are participating in the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program are providing attendance verification information to the respective JFES staff. Since 2006, the enrollment in adult education of individuals receiving public assistance has increased by 82 percent.

Workforce Coordinating Committee

The CSDE continues to convene a statewide Workforce Coordinating Committee (WCC) bringing together adult education directors; community colleges; workforce investment boards (WIBs); the Connecticut Business and Industry Association; the Departments of Economic and Community Development, Labor, and Social Services; and the Office for Workforce Competitiveness to foster coordinated user-friendly systems that respond to employer needs within each WIB region of Connecticut. The activities of the Workforce Coordinating Committee are supported at the regional level by coordinating groups convened by each of the five WIBs. These groups have been meeting on a regular basis and bring together representatives from adult education, community colleges and Department of Labor business services teams.

During the year, the WCC redrafted its purpose statement, participated in strategic planning and worked closely with other workforce development entities to enhance partnerships statewide. The WCC also has supported a number of grant initiatives including the Department of Labor's Early Warning System, the Connecticut Community College's SMART grant, and the Workforce Investment Board's STEM initiative.

The Workforce Coordinating Committee's work has strengthened existing partnerships and institutionalized workforce education services. Based on this work, the Department of Labor set aside funds over the last two years for projects to create educational and occupational opportunities for low wage and low skilled workers while piloting collaborative workforce development models and forging innovative partnerships.

WIA Title II Grants

The CSDE continued existing WIA Title II grants for 2007-08 for providers that reflected good prior performance. Eighty nine continuation grants were awarded to thirty four providers. Grantees coordinated their services with their WIBs and One-Stop centers. Overall, providers receiving WIA Title II grants demonstrated strong learner outcomes on the core indicators of performance. Some notable accomplishments are presented below:

- Workforce preparation grantees integrated career readiness activities including career portfolios, resume workshops, computer proficiency checklists, skill certification courses, and community service experiences into their adult education programming.

- Worksite programs provided adult education instruction to employees from different industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, agriculture, entertainment, education, and food services. Many programs solicited feedback from employers and prepared comprehensive reports on the effectiveness of their interventions.
- Grants funded within the priority of transition to post-secondary education/training helped adult education programs to bridge the “transition gap” by raising standards/expectations, partnering with higher education institutions, aligning curricula, awarding dual credit, coaching learners about their postsecondary options, and targeting instructional strategies to help them transition successfully to post-secondary education/training programs. Transition programs also feature written agreements between the adult education provider and its post-secondary partner(s), and a solid referral and support process.
- The Connecticut Adult Virtual High School facilitated greater coordination among adult education programs and increased access to learning opportunities by offering high quality mentored online courses to learners statewide: 1,006 enrollments were evidenced in the credit-bearing courses; 533 of those enrollments (53 percent) completed the courses and attained credit toward the adult high school diploma.

Some programs also supplemented their WIA grants with funding from other foundations to provide instruction in critical competencies such as health education and financial literacy

Young Adult Learner (YAL) Grants

In FY 2007-08, through a \$500,000 state legislative grant, the CSDE provided new and unique services within the Adult High School Credit Diploma program (AHSCDP) to over 250 young adult learners in nine school districts. Successes were evidenced in several areas:

1. **Curriculum**: All curricula strongly stressed classroom instruction in Language Arts, Mathematics, and Career Education. Personalized learning was vital. Many learners took Connecticut Adult Virtual High School on-line courses, allowing them to complete graduation requirements within the course of their busy daily lives.
2. **Community**: The concept of being an involved member of a community – school, city/town, state, country, world – was a central theme in the projects. For example, one project worked with the area high school to build a food bank. While doing so, they studied the United Nations’ Millennium Goals and ultimately visited the UN.
3. **Collaboration**: All projects established strong collaborative relationships with schools and agencies that provided learners with a wealth of services including community colleges, technical schools, One Stops, the American Red Cross, Job Corps, Family Resource Centers, Youth Service Bureaus, Habitat for Humanity and local businesses (for tours, job shadows, and internship opportunities).
4. **Support**: The utilization of counselors and mentors, the availability of staff beyond the work day, and the mutual respect which formed were indicative of the “caring” component in the Young Adult Learner projects.

Three YAL programs received a small grant to participate in a learner persistence project. They engaged in study circles that utilized the most current research for promoting greater persistence among adult learners. They implemented comprehensive intake/orientation activities, different approaches to grouping learners and peer mentorships. Program participants also achieved outcomes (i.e. persistence, credit attainment, educational gain, and graduation) at rates greater than those of other learners in the AHSCDP.

Developing Tomorrow's Professionals (DTP)

The CSDE has continued the Developing Tomorrow's Professionals (DTP) program through the support of a federal incentive grant award. Designed to address the assumptions of public education, including the removal of barriers, leading to educational engagement and achievement, the DTP has dramatically expanded its scope, serving black and Hispanic young men, ages 15-19 in the New Haven, Meriden and West Haven school districts. Participants also include adult education learners who are 16 years of age or older and have dropped out of high school. The construct of the DTP includes wrap-around mentoring (each young man has both an academic and a professional mentor); training in education skill-sets; critical reading, writing and thinking; etiquette; leadership; and fatherhood. The long term goal of the DTP is matriculation to, and graduation from, a four-year college/university for each young man of color. The DTP has served 65 young men in the first two years of the program.

Family Literacy Initiatives

The alignment of adult education with Even Start has proven to be an effective method for increasing a family's literacy skills and served as a successful model for other family literacy initiatives. Of the 16 Even Start adults enrolled and exited in the Credit Diploma or GED programs, 12 (75 percent) received a high school diploma or equivalency. Of the 28 pre-kindergarten children enrolled in the program for 4 months or longer, 23 identified 10 or more alphabet letters on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) assessment.

Providers receiving WIA Title II grants under the family literacy priority area collaborated with other agencies to offer integrated services that included adult education instruction, parent education, early childhood opportunities and interactive literacy activities (e.g. children enrolled in School Readiness/Head Start to satisfy the early childhood component). One program even surveyed teachers of children in the elementary school to ascertain the impact of their interventions on the whole family.

The CSDE has continued support of a Family Learning Curriculum Connections project that encourages family engagement in children's learning by strengthening school-family partnerships and building unique collaborations between adult education programs and elementary schools.

Using data from the adult education management information system, the CSDE created a Results Based Accountability template for the Connecticut legislature that demonstrated the successes of the mothers of young children who are participating in adult education programs. This template elucidated the fact that mothers who improved their literacy abilities or attained their high school diploma through adult education are better able to ensure that their children are healthy and fully successful in school by age 9.

4. Describe successful activities and services supported with EL/Civics funds, including the number of programs receiving EL/Civics grants and an estimate of the number of adult learners served.

The State Department of Education distributed EL/Civics funds through a continuation grant of an original competitive request for proposal (RFP) to twenty-one adult education providers throughout Connecticut. Grantees utilized these funds to improve literacy skills including speaking, reading, writing and numeracy for immigrants and other limited English proficient populations and to provide contextualized instruction in civics education, which included the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; naturalization procedures; civic participation; and U.S. history and government. For the most part, Connecticut immigrants are working at low-wage jobs with little hope for advancement. Providing an opportunity for English language acquisition assists individuals who must be able to read and communicate in English in order to understand and navigate governmental, educational and workplace systems.

This past program year, approximately 3,000 individuals were involved in EL/Civics activities in citizenship and English as a second language classes. Specific program activities and outcomes directly related to the use of these funds included the following:

- demonstrated increases in learners' mean gains in program year-end reports;
- increased competence in idiomatic speech that improved communication with children's schools and other community agencies;
- utilized Internet research for the application of learning activities;
- increased participation in distance learning activities;
- incorporated cross cultural perspectives, civic responsibility, democracy topics and independent projects;
- acquired knowledge of the American education system with special focus on addressing needs of families new to the U.S. school system;
- developed technological skills that positively impacted competence in the workplace;
- enhanced learners' writing skills through the creation of opinion essays;
- improved study skills through the utilization of self-directed learning activities; and
- created opportunities for interaction with the local community.

Annual Narrative Report Summary

During fiscal year 2007-08, Connecticut expended \$42,741,163 in state, local and federal funds to serve 27,549 individuals for an average per pupil cost of \$1,551. By augmenting state and local dollars with Federal dollars, Connecticut has successfully assisted adults in achieving their educational goals, obtaining or advancing in their jobs, entering post-secondary education, and participating more fully as family and community members. The CSDE will continue to work closely with other organizations to ensure coordination of effort, increased accountability and program access to those individuals in need of adult education services in Connecticut.