

NEBRASKA NARRATIVE REPORT 2010-2011

1. STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES

A. Professional Development

Program Year 2010-2011 provided a variety of staff development activities. Training was offered in a variety of locations, in some new formats, and on a variety of topics and served many purposes throughout the state. Decisions for topics were based on national initiatives, local program requests, and the need to recertify BEST Plus assessment personnel across the state.

In July, two full days of workshops by Nancie Payne and Neil Sturmski, national speakers in the field of Learning Disabilities, were held in Kearney. Nancie presented well-structured and highly interactive material regarding metacognition and the importance of developing metacognitive thinking with adult learners in the adult education classes. Neil also presented a highly interactive workshop regarding retention and goal setting. All the information and activities were timely and well received by those in attendance.

In August Kenn Pendleton, GEDTS math editor, presented two regional workshops around the theme of assisting students to meet the requirements for passing the GED math test. He provided national and Nebraska-specific statistics regarding students who take the GED math tests and the results. From those results, he offered many engaging teaching/learning techniques to assist students who are often reluctant math learners.

Two local program Directors' Meetings were held in the program year, the first in October 2010 and the second in April 2011. October's meeting provided performance measure updates, new information about gathering race and ethnicity information from students and general program concerns and questions. April's meeting went "on the road" with Western Nebraska Community College hosting the event. The theme for the two-day meeting was "Spring Into Action." Information regarding the TEAL project was provided and discussion centered on the previous year's performance measures and the new program year's standards. Directors shared new projects and program successes in their colleagues. One of the system analysts who work with the AIMS system was present to introduce new features and answer questions from the directors. Directors whose programs met or exceeded performance measures received certificate awards, and a new process for developing grant proposal budgets was rolled out for directors to see and experience.

The 29th annual state AE Conference was also held in Kearney, Nebraska October 21-22, 2010, with the theme of "Stepping Stones to Success." Over 160 AE staff members from across the state attended the conference and experienced sessions around topics of technology, retention of students, transitions to ABE/GED and beyond, DOL information to assist students pursuing jobs/careers, math, working with the millennial generation in the classroom, and Laughter Yoga. Focus sessions topics included: A poverty simulation, CAL's BEST Plus Updates and GED Essay Writing.

Nebraska was fortunate to be selected as one of 12 states selected to participate in the Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy (TEAL) project through the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) and conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR). A team of four people with diversified program and instructional area backgrounds were coordinated by the AE consultant. The team participated in a series of online courses surrounding topics of teaching strategies. As the project continues into the next program year, the focus of a scheduled August 2011 four-day institute will apply the strategies directly to writing content for use with students in classrooms across the state. Team members are testing out strategies and content in their classrooms and future plans will determine how this valuable information will be shared with fellow Nebraska AE staff.

An ESL/EL Civics Workshop was held in June. Two nationally known speakers presented at the two-day event. Robin Lovrien Schwarz provided information and activities surrounding the use of learning centers to assist learners and management of multi-level classrooms. In addition, a cohort group was formed that interacted via email in reaction to articles and questions with a follow up face-to-face meeting planned for the AE conference in October 2011. Rosemarie Park was a second speaker at this workshop, courtesy of LINCS. She presented on ways to assist ESL learners to adapt and succeed in the workplace. Both sessions encompassed very pertinent content for assisting the ESL student population to be successful in the classroom and beyond.

The typical BEST Plus New Administrator and required BEST Plus Recalibration sessions were held throughout the year in a variety of locations and on a schedule of daylong, morning, afternoon and Saturday sessions to accommodate those requiring the training.

Training funds for local program professional development were available in the program year. Once again a few programs pooled resources, invited speakers, used local talents and addressed needs and/or interests of local staff in the planning. Topics included: retention, communication and team building, immigration, technology, and specific curriculum including Step Forward and Health Literacy.

Program Visitation funds are also made available for local staff members to visit other areas and other programs for the sake of networking, gaining skills or observing best practices.

Several local program administrators and staff members attended the annual COABE conference in San Francisco in March 2011. The learning opportunities were there for attendees to select from to attain the most pertinent information for sharing upon their return to Nebraska.

B. Technical Assistance

The state office staff members spend a great deal of time answering questions, responding to needs, providing contacts and resources, developing and delivering training, in addition to day-to-day operational information. The state office provides contact via email, phone, conference calls, videoconferencing, as well as regional, local and state training.

C. Technology Assistance

Technology needs continue to provide challenges in a largely rural state. WIA Incentive funds are being used to develop distance education opportunities for both the GED and ESL populations. Pilot sites will work with *i-Pathways* and *USALearns* to determine the usability, practicality and uncover any areas of concern before making it available to all programs and eligible students across the state.

This was the first year that programs could generate additional income by charging a minimal registration fee. Less than one-half of the programs initiated it, but, of the almost \$45,000 collected, many programs used these funds to purchase computers for their classrooms, a welcome replacement for some outdated technology in our classrooms.

The Adult Information Management System (AIMS) continues to make adaptations that allow administrative and instructional staff members more access to student information to assure that it is accurate and up-to-date.

D. Monitoring and Evaluation

OVAE staff visited Nebraska for a monitoring visit three fiscal years ago. While no compliance issues were found, there were five recommendations for the Nebraska program. The progress made during the 2010-2011 program year includes:

Recommendation 1: NDE should complete the functionality of the Adult Information Management System (AIMS).

In this program year, a number of program directors required that teachers register in AIMS to track their students' activities and verify the data that had been entered into the system. Prior to making it a requirement, it was optional and honestly, was rarely utilized because teachers had very limited accessibility. So, some program directors decided to require the teachers to use the AIMS program. With input from the teachers, additional individual class reports are being developed.

Each year, strides are made in the refinement and increased reporting possibilities with our student data system. Requests for certain forms/functions continue; some we are able to do, others we are unable to do. The question continues to be: is the time, effort, and cost in developing a certain form/function beneficial to the entire state program or just to the individual program that requested it?

Adult Education continues to have the services of two data analysts for AIMS. Naturally, they work for many other programs in the department, but they do answer technical assistance emails and calls directly from the field. The department's Help Desk is also available to answer more general questions concerning access to AIMS.

One item that has been on our "wish list" was an improved "student snapshot", like the one we had in the previous terminal server-based AIMS system; this was accomplished during this program year. The snapshot is a one-page synopsis of a student's demographics, assessment, goals, and attendance figures. It was easy to printout at the request of a sponsoring agency doing follow-up on a particular student and the teacher's like it as well. The state office uses the student snapshot in NRS trainings to provide examples of good NRS – related practices.

Recommendation 2: NDE should promptly select a new English language learning (ELL) assessment for reporting educational gain in the NRS.

This was the second year that we used the BEST Plus assessment statewide. New administrator and re-calibration trainings for test administrators took place throughout the year. Re-calibration has been a concern for some test administrators and Nebraska will be looking into providing some webinar refresher courses in the next fiscal year. BEST Plus trainings take a great deal of resources and some less expensive training, such as webinars or on-line reviews, would be advantageous.

During this year, a pilot was conducted with the BEST Literacy. No decision has been made as to whether the state wants to make the reading/writing assessment a required test or to have it remain optional.

Recommendation 3: NDE is currently revising the State's assessment policy. The policy should incorporate existing policies and procedures pertaining to the new ELL test NDE selects.

In June 2011, OVAE approved a minimally revised assessment policy. The changes involved the required number of hours required for posttesting with TABE and the different EFL levels. The assessment policy is

shared with AE staff at various professional activities and local programs are required to share any revised assessment guidelines with their individual staff members.

Since development of a distance education program is proposed with current Incentive Funds monies, a distance education policy will be written and approved by OVAE.

Recommendation 4: NDE should develop strategies to improve the accuracy of goal setting related to employment, high school completion, and postsecondary education.

This is a never-ending endeavor of the state office and the local program directors. As reiterated in past reports, AE staff is constantly reminded, through staff development activities, the newsletter, and by whatever means available, the importance of appropriate goal setting. This is definitely an area that just needs constant reinforcement with our staff. To convince staff, partner agencies, and students of the need for students to remain in the program until they are really ready for post-secondary education and/or employment is a difficult challenge. This is a paradigm shift that needs constant introduction and reinforcement, and some progress is being made.

Recommendation 5: NDE should work with its local programs to strengthen the relationships between the programs and their local One-Stops.

Slow, but sure, AE is making progress in this area. At the state level, working with DOL on the WIA Incentive Funds distance education project does allow for more frequent communication and collaboration with DOL and the local Career Centers. The distance education program pilot classes are purposely being located in Career Centers to increase local partnerships.

Periodically, state staff meets with one Career Center manager to discuss our common concerns and to brainstorm about possible remedies/solutions. AE has invited Career Center staff to join with us at the Directors' meetings and to present at the annual AE conference in the fall.

See Section Four for additional information.

Regarding local program monitoring and evaluation are concerned, activities have not changed very much during this program year. They include:

1. Application process for local program funding provides the opportunity for directors to evaluate the previous year's successes and identify areas needing improvement as they plan for the next year's activities. It is a time to take an appraisal of what is working and what can be done to improve the program and see increased student performance.
2. At the close of the program year, each program completes an evaluation form for the year. They examine the year's goals; assess accomplishments and also those areas that were not successful. They evaluate the performance standards and their attainment or lack of attainment toward the state's performance goals.
3. A highlight for our local program staff this year: The AE professional assistant spent a great deal of time researching NDE and other states' RFP budget and reimbursement claim forms. This effort resulted in new computerized budget pages for both the proposal and claims processes. The new forms were a much-needed component; all programs appreciated the introduction of the new computerized forms. In the past, local AE programs had to provide documentation for only one claim during the program year, or upon request, or when program visitations take place. Now

programs include the documentation for all claims submitted, yet the process has been simplified and updated. State staff also conducts desk audits on reports submitted throughout the year. This affords the opportunity for the State Office to keep current with the local program activities and finances.

4. On-site visits/evaluations are the best avenue by which we can see classes and visit with instructional staff. Our goal is to support them in their work and make recommendations or commendations as we travel throughout the state.

E. Development and Disseminating Curricula

New curricula emphasized by the state office focused on employment and entry into post-secondary education. Workshops were held once again on **Workplace Essential Skills** to inform and reinforce the use of these materials in the classroom. The use of web-based activities available with WES is encouraged for use in the classroom as well as on-line learning at home.

Copies of instructional materials that were evaluated and recommended by state staff and/or local program staff were distributed to all local programs for introduction into their classes. Of great interest and immediately used were instructional materials geared toward math, reading, and writing skills needed for entry into post secondary education.

This is the first year that local programs were allowed to collect a registration fee from students. A number of the programs used these monies to have instructors develop curriculum needed/requested by their instructors.

2. EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES BASED ON THE CORE INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE

This was a very disappointing year with our performance standards, with a 71% overall average, a decrease of 7% from last program year. Some observations regarding the performance:

The negotiated state standards for EFL movement had been increased in 9 of the 11 educational levels, anywhere from 3 -7% from PY 2010 to 2011. (Two EFL standards remained the same percentage as the year before.) This was a total expected increase of 42 % for just 9 EFLs. In retrospect, this seems like an almost insurmountable expected gain in one year. These performance standards were negotiated on our state's performance for a year that we received Incentive Funds; this indicates that changes in the economy, posttesting requirements, and other factors can greatly affect performance two years later.

Performance increased in 8 EFLs (+ 20%) and decreased in 3 EFLs (-10%) , for a net gain of 10% in EFL movement.

While looking at individual program's post testing numbers, it is disappointing to see a significant number of students with over 60 hours of attendance and no posttest have been administered. While reports can be generated in our AIMS program and reminders are sent regarding posttesting, the state office finds that constant reminders are needed.

Last year, three of the four core goals showed improved performance. However, this year only GED completion saw an increase. In Nebraska, the other three core goals have always fluctuated over the years and find that performance is not repeated year after year. Hopefully, when the new NRS changes take effect on July 1, 2012, we will see a more consistent performance in these three areas.

As always, performance standards will be a large discussion topic when we next meet with program directors and other AE staff.

Each year, we see more programs incorporating managed enrollment, which can explain the small decrease (103) in the number of +12 hour students served. Waiting lists continue in over one-half of our programs. Many managed enrollment classes have been re-designed to fit a quarter system, with additional classroom hours added to allow adequate hours needed for posttesting, particularly with ESL. Thus, some programs must decrease the number of classes offered. And, some decrease in class offerings are also due to several years of cuts in federal and state funds.

While we saw a decrease in the number of students (103) from last year, we saw an increase of over 77,000 contact hours over last year – a noteworthy accomplishment! Statewide, we are obviously making gains in keeping students longer in the classroom, a positive gain for us.

This is the first year since the 1980's that we had less than 2,000 students with less than 12 hours of attendance. One of our goals continues to be the decrease of the number of –12 hour students, either through “weeding out” those persons who really aren't serious about classes during the orientation process and also by increasing retention strategies.

The following two goals saw sharp increases and are probable signs of the economic situation: We saw a 31% increase in the number of persons entering the program with a goal of “entering employment” and a 46% increase in the number of students with a goal of obtaining a secondary school diploma. Results? We experienced a 20% increase in the number of adults getting a job and an impressive 72% increase in the number of people who received their GED credential.

With financial resources continuing to decrease at all funding levels, expansion of services is at a virtual standstill. Now, more than before, it is necessary for local programs to evaluate each and every class to determine if changes or elimination are necessary. Hopefully, or maybe just wishful thinking, resources can be returned to previous funding levels at some point in the near future.

It is, and will continue to be, more difficult year-by-year to meet increasingly higher performance standards, especially with decreased funding, and the addition of new and more costly initiatives, such as going beyond GED completion to prepare students for employment and/or post-secondary education. Each year is a challenge, whether we have new or continuing issues to address or overcome.

**NEBRASKA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS
TRENDS IN ACCOMPLISHMENT**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
ABE Beginning Literacy	40	47	46	25	37	44	30	26
ABE Beginning Basic Education	38	37	40	30	31	37	23	28
ABE Intermediate Low	33	34	38	28	31	35	22	24
ABE Intermediate High	31	34	35	25	28	33	21	23
ASE Low	39	39	42	31	31	35	19	22
ESL Beginning Literacy	40	39	43	50	46	44	21	23
ESL Beginning	ESL Beginning Low	33	35	39	46	50	33	37
	ESL Beginning High				35	48	45	37
ESL Intermediate Low	47	43	50	36	43	48	29	31
ESL Intermediate High	49	40	53	37	42	47	26	28
ESL Low Advanced	38	34	30	29	43	43	27	25
ESL Advanced								
Placement in Unsubsidized Employment	39	34	41	45	37	43	45	40
Retention in Unsubsidized Employment	31	74	62	77	74	63	65	47
High School Completion	46	64	64	58	55	60	50	59
Placement in Postsecondary Education/Training	25	40	59	47	31	31	40	33

NEBRASKA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS – FY 2011

Performance Measures	Negotiated State Standard	Actual State Performance	Percent Achieved
ABE Beginning Literacy	44	26	59%
ABE Beginning Basic Education	39	28	72%
ABE Intermediate Low	36	24	67%
ABE Intermediate High	34	23	68%
ASE Low	36	22	61%
ESL Beginning Literacy	46	23	50%
ESL Beginning Low	51	37	73%
ESL Beginning High	46	33	72%
ESL Intermediate Low	49	31	63%
ESL Intermediate High	47	28	60%
ESL Advanced	43	25	58%
Placement in Unsubsidized Employment	43	40	93%
Retention in Unsubsidized Employment	50	47	94%
High School Completion	59	59	100%
Placement in Postsecondary Education/Training	40	33	83%
OVERALL AVERAGE			71%

3. INTEGRATION OF ACTIVITIES SPONSORED UNDER TITLE II WITH THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT PARTNERS AND ONE-STOP CENTERS

A recommendation of the federal monitoring team was to strengthen our relationship with the Nebraska Department of Labor and our local One-Stop Centers. As reported last year, the state office has initiated more contact with DOL staff as well as challenging local program directors to make contact with and work with the Career Center staff. The distance education project, being paid with WIA Incentive funds, does require additional work with DOL and the individual Career Centers where AE classes are held.

Collaborations vary throughout the state. Some Career Centers pay for AE instructors; others do not. Some request rent; others provide classroom space for free. During 2010-2011, federal AE funds spent in support of classes held in the Career Centers totaled \$29,344.83. Of this amount, \$3,018.23 was for supervisory and other non-instructional costs; and \$26,326.60 was expended for instruction costs.

Some examples of cooperative efforts with the Career Centers continue to be: reciprocal referrals and presentations to the other program's staff and clients; serve on the other program's advisory committee; some Career Centers do pay GED testing fees for some fast track students; and the Career Center in one community pays the AE instructor's salary and other class costs. One local program director continues to serve on a regional WIB and Youth Council.

Department of Labor does conduct data matching for AE for the employment goals. The Commissioner of Education serves as the Department's representative on the State Workforce Investment Board (WIB). Both AE state staff and DOL staff have worked together to provide additional demographic and employment information for Nebraska Appleseed, who is advocating increased recognition of Adult Education and a need for increased state funding

Presently, due to budget concerns, Nebraska DOL has approached the Nebraska Community College system to house/host the Career Centers; no determination has been made. It is fair to say that increasing our collaboration with DOL is a continuous goal.

4. EL/CIVICS FUNDING REPORT

Nebraska's EL/Civics program served 640 students in PY 2011, a sharp decline in comparison to last program year (1,170). One of the largest AE program has indicated that ESL numbers have declined over the past year because of the backlash against illegal immigrants and many have returned to their country of origin. From one local program: "We have had many students talk in class or to the office staff about the 'politics' of this country. They do not feel it is 'safe' for them to come to class and there are times when we have seen empty classrooms as students hear there are raids in other locations. Additionally, I have had four requests to complete an apostile form for non-native English students who then transfer to GED classes and take that GED back home because they say there are no jobs for them in the USA." (NOTE: There have been no raids in AE classrooms, but in businesses in the area. Also, these referenced students take Spanish GED classes and consequently take the Spanish GED tests. The Spanish GED review classes are paid by a community foundation in this community, not with AE funding.)

In another large program, the number of hours included in the quarter-long EL/Civics classes were increased to allow for some absences in order to meet the 60 hour requirement for posttesting. As a result, fewer classes were offered and 230 fewer students were served.

The use of *USA Learns* has increased over the past year and will be part of the ESL distance education project being initiated statewide with WIA Incentive funds. This affords the opportunity for more computer-assisted instruction for our English language learners. Around the state there continues to be extensive use of **Step Forward** and other Oxford University Press materials, the **Civics and Citizenship Toolkit** by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, an increased use of employment materials, and a large variety of other print and hands-on learning tools for students.

One program reports that “the Civics topics are always high interest subjects that help students learn about their new country. I feel that it allows them to integrate more easily and it offers information that is useful in their everyday lives as well as offering background information. It is a comfortable atmosphere where students can ask questions and have information clarified.”

In June of 2011 a two-day workshop was held specifically for staff members who work with the ESL/EL Civics population. Many success stories about students in these programs are shared at every opportunity. As immigration continues to be a “hot” topic, it will become ever more critical to supply quality instruction in the local programs.