

NEBRASKA NARRATIVE REPORT 2011-2012

1. STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES

A. Professional Development

Professional development continues to be an integral and essential part of the Nebraska Adult Education program. It is important that both the state-sponsored and local program activities address program needs as well as state and federal initiatives and best practices.

Each local program is encouraged to apply for state leadership funds to, either independently or in collaboration with one or more AE programs, offer a day's training in areas of particular interest and need for their programs. Many enjoy the networking with colleagues and this affords the opportunity for those staff who are unable to participate in other regional, state, and/or national events to attend.

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Adult Education Section, provided a variety of professional development activities during Program Year 2011-2012. Activities took place at locations across the state and on a variety of topics centered around key activities including: the Adult Information Management System (AIMS) student data system; Workplace Essential Skills; *USA Learns, I-Pathways*; Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy (TEAL); webinar trainings for teachers wanting to utilize distance education in their classrooms; *News for You* newspaper; and, of course, BEST Plus New Administrator Training and Recalibration. The highlight of the year was the 30th Annual Adult Education Conference held in Kearney, Nebraska, in October.

Some of the professional development activities are consistent from year to year, (i.e. state data management system, assessment policy, BEST Plus) while other trainings involve areas recognized as problems/challenges for instructors or students, or focusing on initiatives. The following professional development activities were planned to meet the needs of the Adult Education program personnel:

Two local program directors meetings were held during the program year. The first was held in August 2011 in Kearney and the second was held in April 2012 at Northeast Community College in Norfolk, Nebraska. The summer directors' meeting at Kearney featured two presentations focusing on careers and employment. Ms. Teresa Steinlage, a career development facilitator, introduced the Nebraska Career Connections as a resource for preparing clients for careers/employment; and Ms. Joan Modrell of the Nebraska Department of Labor spoke on The 2 C's of WIA Titles I & II – Collaboration and Cooperation. NDE staff concluded the meeting with information and updates on a variety of topics including a revised assessment policy, new AE claim forms, GED and distance education updates, state and federal legislative updates, and the directors shared success stories.

Last year, we started a new tradition of holding the spring directors' meeting in a community where an AE program is held. This year we gathered at Northeast Community College in Norfolk. Discussion centered on FY 2011 & 2012 state and local program performance, NRS changes effective July 1, 2012, and State Leadership announcements. Time was spent discussing transitions to post-secondary education and/or employment and the need for teachers and students alike to recognize the need for AE to include transition instruction in its curriculum. Kathy Boshart, the AIMS systems analyst from the Nebraska Department of Education, shared information with the directors on worksheet and spreadsheet changes in AIMS. Additional presentations were made by NDE staff on changes to the Distance Education Policy and Adult Education Proposals for FY 2013.

The thirtieth annual Adult Education Conference was held in Kearney, Nebraska on October 13-14, 2011. The theme of the Conference was CSI: Nebraska (Continuously Seeking Information.) Over 180 Adult Education staff members from across Nebraska attended the conference and experienced sessions on

a wide range of topics of interest to participants. The three-hour focus sessions on Friday morning included *i-Pathways*, *USA Learns*, TEAL, and How To Teach It So They Get It (learning styles). Twenty-eight concurrent sessions were also presented to conference attendees. The topics ranged from BEST Literacy to Low Level Readers to Math, ELL Ambassadors, Nebraska Career Connections, GED 2014, Characteristics of Quality Adult Literacy Programs, AIMS, Writing Essays, various technology sessions, and many more. Evaluations indicated a successful and enjoyable learning experience for the attendees. Planning began for AE Conference XXXI, to be held during Program Year 2012-2013 with a meeting of the conference planning committee and NDE staff on March 21, 2012 at the Nebraska Department of Education in Lincoln.

COABE

Seven Nebraska educators represented Nebraska at the annual Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) Conference held April 8-13, 2012 at Norfolk, Virginia. Representatives attended various meetings and reported back to the state and local programs on the content of the meetings. These reports came in the form of verbal reports at Directors Meetings, presentations at the Annual Fall Conference, and articles for the monthly AE Newsletter.

BEST Plus Administrator Training and Recalibration

BEST Plus is the assessment instrument for Nebraska ESL. All personnel who administer the assessment must receive certification and will require yearly refresher/recalibration training. Four BEST Plus New Administrator Training sessions were held during the program year: in Kearney, Lincoln, Broken Bow, and Norfolk. Twenty-four new administrators were certified for BEST Plus.

Four BEST Plus recalibrations were conducted during the program year at Mahoney State Park, North Platte, and twice in Kearney. In addition, a BEST Plus Remediation session was conducted for those persons who did not receive an adequate score for approval at their re-calibration earlier in the summer. A session on both BEST Plus and Best Literacy was presented at the annual statewide Conference.

In May, the three state BEST Plus Trainers met with NDE Staff for a day of planning future sessions and strategies for assisting Test Administrators to prepare for Recalibration.

AIMS Training

Each directors' meeting addresses an approach for more and better use of data to drive program decisions and actions. Data-related information is included in the regular AE newsletter. Adult Information Management System (AIMS) training sessions are offered regularly for new staff members and/or staff members experiencing difficulty or wanting to keep skills and knowledge about the data system current.

Additional training in AIMS reporting was presented at the request of local program staff and at all state-sponsored activities. Ten workshops were held during the program year at the state office, local program in-services, the annual statewide conference and webinars. Both the state director and the AIMS systems analyst were responsible for conducting the presentations.

Workplace Essential Skills

All local programs have received *Workplace Essential Skills* (WES) materials and resources. WES workshops were held, with a trainer from Kentucky Educational Network (KET) in July at both Kearney and Lincoln. The workshops focused on specific ways to design lessons and use the materials in classrooms to assist students to be career-ready. At least two individuals were in attendance from each local AE program.

TEAL

Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy (TEAL) Training -- The Nebraska five-member team were among representatives from twelve states to take part in a TEAL training at Washington, D.C. from August 1-5, 2011. This project focuses on assisting students to become better writers through differentiated instruction and self-regulated learning.

Following the training, the team presented regional workshops for instructors of local programs at Fremont, North Platte, and Columbus. The team also made a presentation at the annual Adult Education Fall Conference in Kearney. A TEAL Planning meeting was held in February 2012 in Lincoln, with the team members and NDE Staff, where plans were made for additional presentations for later in the calendar year.

Distance Education: Two distance education programs were initiated in PY 2012 as part of the PY 2009 Incentive Awards project in Nebraska. A number of on-line instructional programs were examined and the decision was made to implement *i-Pathways* and *USALearns*. It will take time to build up the distance education program. Nebraska initiated a hybrid program, whereby students must come to class at least two times a month.

i-Pathways

i-Pathways is an online learning curriculum designed to help those seeking their GED credential prepare for the GED Tests. The program was piloted in four programs during the second quarter of the program year and went statewide in the third quarter. Just two programs did not initiate *i-Pathways* in PY 2012; one was the state-wide corrections program and the other was a small program which has yet to fully initiate computer-assisted instruction. Even though an orientation is required, many students are initially motivated, but their attention wanes and they drop out. Strategies will be developed so that hopefully students will be retained in the programs and be able to complete their goals.

USALearns

USALearns is the result of a project by the U.S. Department of Education. *USALearns* is a computer-based curriculum that is usable by English as a Second Language (ESL) students, both in the classroom and as a distance-education tool. *USALearns* is functional at multiple levels for students and offers both content instruction and computer-use instruction. The concept of *USALearns* was presented at the annual Fall Conference on October 14, 2011 by Melinda Holt, a program specialist with the Sacramento, California School District that maintains *USALearns*. A pair of Nebraska educators, Ryan Hinz and Maryjan Fiala, both experienced users of the program in their classes and part of the pilot project, presented webinars to assist interested instructors in beginning the use of this program. Webinars, of approximately two hours in length were presented on three days during March. Approximately 60 educators took part in the webinars. Additional presentations are planned for Program Year 2012-2013 including another focus group at the annual Fall Adult Education Conference.

News For You

News For You is a service from New Readers Press which provides adult ESL students and struggling readers with news that is topical as well as easy to read and understand. These articles cover a wide range of topics including world and national news, politics, health, sports and human-interest stories. *News For You* is available in print or online edition and comes with reproducible exercises and teacher lesson plans. The Nebraska Department of Education Adult Education statewide program purchases online or paper subscriptions for local programs choosing to use *News For You*. Presenters from New Readers Press conducted a seminar in the use of *News For You* in the classroom prior to the beginning of the Adult Education Fall Conference in Kearney, Nebraska on October 12, 2011.

Teacher Training

Training funds for local program professional development were available during the 2011-2012 Program Year. Some programs had individual sessions while some pooled resources with other programs to provide training. Topics included student recruitment and retention, team building, technology, health literacy and curriculum development, and the *Learning to Achieve* curriculum. Programs are expected to include topics of interest and need for their AE staff.

Volunteer Coordinator Workshop

The need for instructional volunteers increases each year as financial resources are cut. In addition, several programs have noted an increase in low-level ABE students who are in need of a great deal of the one-on-one assistance that a volunteer can provide. It seems that more agencies and groups are vying for

volunteers; so a Volunteer Coordinator Workshop was held at Northeast Community College in Norfolk on September 8-9, 2011. Major areas of discussion included recruitment, training, retention, and evaluation of volunteers.

Program Visitation

Program Visitation funds are made available for local staff members to visit other areas and programs with the intent of networking and observing best practices. This can also be used to make observations that may help a program that is struggling in a certain area. New and “seasoned” AE staff are encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity.

NRS 101

NRS 101 was a pilot training session in fall 2011 at Northeast Community College in Norfolk. The AE program director was very concerned about the poor performance on EFL movement from the previous year. The state director conducted the day-long training, reviewing program accountability, NRS, performance standards, intensity and duration, goal setting, and using AIMS reports for program improvement. About a month later, a webinar was held for the program’s teachers for instruction in using AIMS reports to aid in the tracking of student progress. A follow-up meeting was held in July 2012. The program saw a substantial increase – from an average of 36% for EFL movement in PY 2010 to an average of 70% for EFL movement in PY 2011. Two very abbreviated NRS 101 presentations were given, one in a webinar and one at a local teacher training activity, later in the year; it is the feeling that a full-day’s training is essential in getting the “whole picture” when it relates to performance standards.

AE Newsletter

The state office publishes an on-line, and paper on request, newsletter each month emphasizing best practices, tips, tech ideas, reminders, and success stories from the various programs. Local programs are encouraged to submit articles and state staff also contribute to the newsletter.

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, webinars (new this year), as well as regional, local and state training.

C. Technology Assistance

Technology needs are a challenge in a large and mainly rural state. WIA incentive funds provided the resources to initiate distance education opportunities in Nebraska. With minimal budget increases and increasing program costs, distance education is an excellent opportunity to add another dimension to the class offerings in the state.

Many programs used registration fees to improve technology in their programs; the need is there, especially with the introduction of computer-based testing with the GED program.

The Adult Information Management System (AIMS) continues to allow administration and staff more access to accurate and up-to-date student information for data-driven decision-making. The NDE systems analyst added additional items to the list of AIMS improvements: an AIMS manual for teachers; NRS EL/Civics reports; reports specific to individual teachers; and NRS changes required for the four core goals, effective July 1, 2012.

D. Monitoring and Evaluation

OVAE staff visited Nebraska for a monitoring visit four fiscal years ago. While no compliance issues were found, there were five recommendations for the Nebraska program. The progress made during the 2011-2012 program year includes:

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

In this program year, we saw an increase in the number of program directors requiring 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 was rarely utilized because teachers had very limited accessibility. Some program directors have decided to require the teachers to use the AIMS program. With input from the teachers, additional individual class reports were developed, including a much-appreciated report indicating which students were close to or at the point where post-testing could be administered.

Each year, strides are made in the refinement and increased reporting possibilities with our student data system. Our systems analyst is very receptive to ideas for new reports, but we do share her time with K-12 and their 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? The department's Help Desk is also available to answer more general questions concerning access to AIMS.

A training with AE directors, instructors, and volunteer coordinators rarely, if ever, goes without a segment being devoted to AIMS and how the student data system is an asset to the program and can assist with continuous program improvement and hopefully, meeting the state's negotiated performance standards.

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

This was the third 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 while brief discussions were held regarding additional on-line and/or webinar trainings, they did not materialize in PY 2012. BEST Plus trainings take a great deal of resources and some less expensive training, such as webinars or on-line reviews, would be advantageous.

There has been a certain amount of "displeasure" with BEST Plus. Students are not making EFL gains and some blame the assessment. Of course, its predecessor, the BEST test, almost guaranteed EFL gain – many of the students had the questions memorized! Discussion has taken place and many have decided that there needs to be more classroom oral communication skills practiced in the classroom so that ESL students can feel more relaxed and less stressed when taking a post-test. It will be interesting to see if this practice will improve upon BEST Plus post-tests.

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 post-testing 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 was developed with Incentive Funds monies, a distance education policy was 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.

Slow strides have been made, but with the incorporation of the new NRS core goals determination on July 1, 2012, the goal setting process for NRS will change dramatically. But, this year, as in the past, 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 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. We have had a small number of AE programs offer specific reading/writing and math classes for those who intend to apply for college entrance upon successful completion of the GED tests.

A nice addition is the policy of a community college to offer the first quarter's tuition to GED graduates who enroll in a college program – what an incentive for the GED students!

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

This is an area that also takes time and is sporadic at best. Periodically, state staff meets DOL staff 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 various trainings and/or meetings.

Regarding local program monitoring and evaluation, 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. Last 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. Now programs include the documentation for all claims submitted, yet the process has been simplified and updated. This program year, some revisions and updates were made to the process.
4. 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.
5. 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.

Some samples of college preparatory texts for reading, writing, and math were distributed to each program to encourage their use. Changing the mindset of AE staff and students, as well as agencies, institutions, and the public that AE should and can serve the individual to the 12.9 level is a challenge.

This is the second 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. (Most, however, used registration monies to purchase much-needed computers for the classroom.)

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

This year ended with an overall 9% increase with our performance standards, with an 80% overall average. Better than a decrease, but still not where we want to be. Some observations regarding the performance:

The negotiated state standards for EFL movement were the same as the previous program year. We did experience an increase in 10 of the 11 EFL; only one – ESL Beginning Literacy remained exactly the same.

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

For the core goals, in FY 2010 all but GED completion saw an increase in performance. In FY 2011, only GED completions saw an increase; in FY 2012, all but GED completions saw an increase in performance. This up and down performance with the core goals is nothing new. Hopefully, when the new NRS changes take effect on July 1, 2012, we will see a more consistent performance in all four 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 decrease of 539 students in the number of +12 hour students served. We also saw a decrease of over 62,700 contact hours. A number of program directors did mention that enrollments were down this past year. Even so, waiting lists continue in over one-half of our programs. Due to limited or reduced resources, some programs have reduced the number of classes offered. Some programs are now limiting the number of students in class, hoping that more individual assistance will retain students longer and result in more goal completions.

The following two goals saw increases and are probable signs of the economic situation: We saw a 5% increase in the number of persons entering the program with a goal of “entering employment” and an 18% increase in the number of students with a goal of retaining a job. We experienced a modest 3% increase in the number of adults entering post-secondary education; and a very disappointing 49% obtaining their high school diploma, a decrease of 10%. However, with the current GED test series expiring in December 2012, we do expect this number to increase in PY 2013 and the first half of PY 2014.

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									
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	
ABE Beginning Literacy	47	46	25	37	44	30	26	41	
ABE Beginning Basic Education	37	40	30	31	37	23	28	34	
ABE Intermediate Low	34	38	28	31	35	22	24	30	
ABE Intermediate High	34	35	25	28	33	21	23	27	
ASE Low	39	42	31	31	35	19	22	25	
ESL Beginning Literacy	39	43	50	46	44	21	23	23	
ESL Beginning	ESL Beginning Low	35	39	39	46	50	33	37	41
				ESL Beginning High	35	48	45	37	33
ESL Intermediate Low	43	50	36	43	48	29	31	36	
ESL Intermediate High	40	53	37	42	47	26	28	30	
ESL Low Advanced	ESL Advanced	34	30	29	43	43	27	25	30
Placement in Unsubsidized Employment	34	41	45	37	43	45	40	45	
Retention in Unsubsidized Employment	74	62	77	74	63	65	47	65	
High School Completion	64	64	58	55	60	50	59	49	
Placement in Postsecondary Education/Training	40	59	47	31	31	40	33	36	

NEBRASKA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS - FY 2012			
Performance Measures	Negotiated State Standard	Actual State Performance	Percent Achieved
ABE Beginning Literacy	44	41	93%
ABE Beginning Basic Education	39	34	87%
ABE Intermediate Low	36	30	83%
ABE Intermediate High	34	27	79%
ASE Low	36	25	69%
ESL Beginning Literacy	46	23	50%
ESL Beginning Low	51	41	80%
ESL Beginning High	46	36	78%
ESL Intermediate Low	49	36	73%
ESL Intermediate High	47	30	64%
ESL Advanced	43	30	70%
Placement in Unsubsidized Employment	46	45	98%
Retention in Unsubsidized Employment	66	65	98%
High School Completion	52	49	94%
Placement in Postsecondary Education/Training	42	36	86%
OVERALL AVERAGE			80%

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 Career Centers. As reported last year, the state office has initiated more contact with DOL staff as well as continuing to challenge local program directors to make contact with and work with the Career Center staff. The distance education project, being paid with WIA Incentive funds, did 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 2011-2012, federal AE funds spent in support of classes held in the Career Centers totaled \$33,208.31. Of this amount, \$2,296.74 was for supervisory and other non-instructional costs; \$563.26 was for rent; and \$30,408.31 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 Workforce Investment Board (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 WIB. Both AE state staff and DOL staff have worked together to provide additional demographic and employment information for Nebraska Appleseed, which is advocating increased recognition of Adult Education and a need for increased state funding

Last year, it was reported in this annual report that Nebraska DOL had approached the Nebraska Community College system to house/host the Career Centers; the offer was declined by the community college system. In visiting with DOL staff, it appears that there will be more virtual Career Centers in the state.

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 765 students in PY 2012, a slight increase in comparison to last program year (640), but this is still a 34.6% decrease from two years ago. Again, reduced resources often result in a reduced number of classes being offered. There are often waiting lists for ESL and EL/Civics classes.

Many feel that ESL numbers have declined over the past few years because of the backlash against illegal immigrants and many have returned to their country of origin. ICE raids in one community can result in empty classrooms in a neighboring community.

Many ESL and EL/Civics instructors are now using *USALearns* in their classrooms. It is being used primarily as a supplemental part to classroom instruction; not a great number of these students have access to computers at home and they often need assistance in use of the computer. 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.

An interesting observation was made by a local program director: "The EL/Civics classes are beneficial to students so that they don't inadvertently break the law or be mistreated due to their lack of understanding of local laws. The students need to know the laws and customs to be good citizens."