

Montana Narrative Report 2014-15

State Leadership Funds Describe the major activities supported with state leadership funds during the reporting period and the extent to which these activities helped you in implementing the goals of the state plan. Specifically describe activities related to the implementation of career pathways.

Activities Specifically Related to Career Pathways

OVERVIEW OF Moving Career Pathways Forward Initiative: Montana was one of 14 states selected to work on this 2014-16 project. The purpose of this project is to give Montana ABE the support needed to further integrate adult education in the broader career pathways system at the state and local levels. Access to coaches, who are assisting the state in leveraging and enhancing existing resources and tools, will result in the essential components of state career pathway system being in place across the state agencies; alignment of pathway services for adults will smoothly transition low-skilled adults to employment and positively support economic development. The state has made this the major state initiative for 2014-2016.

The pathway project was officially launched at the fall ABE Conference in September 2014. Each program brought a career pathway team consisting of the program director and at a minimum one teacher. At the conference, the teams learned about the project, explored the key components a pathway system, heard about examples of pathway activities in other states, and participated in an exercise to discuss current and possible ABE pathway activities. Armed with knowledge about career pathways, the team members were equipped to complete the ABE Providers Career Pathway Survey after the conference. The surveys were sent to the state coach for analysis to determine the pathway components that MT programs needed to target. Analysis revealed the State needed to work on coordinating with interagency partners and providing education and training services. October regional meetings were then scheduled to provide pathway teams with the resources needed to systemically begin to build ABE career pathways. The first regional meeting was scheduled to assist ABE staff in learning how to access labor market information in order to complete two assignments; they had to complete a template that aligned educational and training resources with training requirements for the high-demand jobs in their regional economies. Secondly, the teams were charged with completing a Building Partnership Worksheet; the goal was to identify new and existing partners that would be needed to help transition ABE students to the training and educational programs identified in their templates. All programs had two months to complete assignments before the next regional meeting. At the second regional meeting, program staff shared their approaches to the fall exercises with a focused discussion on the building partnerships worksheet. Participants readily shared information on new partnerships that were identified, as well as the expected benefits for ABE and partners. Existing partnerships were also discussed, as it became evident that these partnerships had to be strengthened to support student pathways. This discussion laid the foundation for the final assignment for the program year, which was introduced at the third regional pathway meeting, where pathway teams were guided on how to turn their pathway homework into a program action plan. All programs had to transfer relevant information from their Building Partnerships Worksheet to a Building Partnership Work Plan. The Work Plan had to include activities the program would undertake, the timeline for the activities, and the expected outcomes from the activities. Program teams were asked to update the activities, timeline, and outcomes as they worked with new and existing partners for the remainder of the program year. Completed Work Plans were submitted to the state June 30, 2015.

The *Moving Pathways Forward Project* provided all current providers with the tools and resources to support adult career pathways, work collaboratively with new and existing partners, and effectively communicate a mission larger than high school equivalency completion to partners, students, and the community.

The state ABE is also facilitating an interagency task force who are working to attain and sustain a statewide, systemic approach to the career pathways. The task force is committed to creating an awareness, promoting, and supporting the relevance and expansion of the adult career pathways. Members of the Interagency Pathway Team include representatives from: Office of Commissioner of Higher Education; Department of Labor, State Workforce Investment Board, Rural Employment Opportunity, Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Public Instruction, Office of Tourism and Commerce, Veterans Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Office of the Governor. The Interagency Pathway Committee completed several activities in the first year. Prior to the committee's first meeting, the agency partners completed a State Agency Career Pathways Analysis Form to become familiar with the components of a career pathways system and to assist the task force in identification of the components the state needed to target. At the first meeting the task force agreed that Building Partnerships, Identifying Sector or Industry Partners, Engaging Employers, and Using data to Monitor and Evaluate Performance as the important pathway components that required initial attention. At the second meeting the task force reviewed several visuals for a potential visual representation of the Montana Adult Career Pathway System. The task force agreed a visual is essential to guide participants and providers in their efforts to sustain the pathway infrastructure. At the third partner meeting the task force developed the State Career Pathway Work Plan. The activities in the Work Plan for the first year focused on building partnerships. The activities, timeframe, and outcomes in the Work Plan included: development of a shared web site for partners to upload documents and share individual initiatives; development of an organization profile so all state partners would have access to partner contacts and a brief description of services, and awarding of extra points to Carl Perkins Grant 2016 grant applicants that include innovative ideas for including ABE in their campus career pathway work. All of the activities were completed prior to June 2015.

Fall Conference 2014: The theme for this conference was Pathways, Partnerships and Pushing-Up Academic Rigor. The three areas of focus were determined by a pre-conference needs assessment. The conference was launched with a pathway gallery walk that allowed pathway team members to explore each component of a career pathway system to discuss how this component of the pathway system was working in their region. The gallery walk transitioned into a series of activities designed to help teachers strengthen their existing instructional strategies to fully integrate the college and career readiness standards that support student career pathways. Activities included: Reading Ramp-Up/Review the Standards and Resources; Math Ramp-Up/Review the Standards and Resources; Define Digital Literacy; and the New ESOL. The first day concluded with round table discussions to review and share ideas on the presentations of the day. Day two of the conference was devoted to showcasing models of student orientation that allow students to begin their ABE experience with a career pathway. Promising practices for retention and recruitment were then presented by programs experiencing success with an increased emphasis on bridge programs. Participants left the fall conference ready for the ABE redesign and WIOA implementation.

Spring Pathway Team Meeting 2015: A significant amount of time at the annual spring directors' meeting was focused on preparing programs for the rebranding of their programs that was necessary for full implementation of career pathways. Pathway teams were required to bring current program marketing material; team time was then spent reviewing the material for its effectiveness in messaging the new ABE career pathway mission. Teams used a Materials Review Checklist to guide the discussion and report-outs. All teams were asked to use this discussion to help them complete a Refining Current Materials Form and The New Plan for Recruitment Materials.

At the conclusion of program year 2014-15, all programs were required to submit three other pieces of documented evidence that supported their transition to integration of career pathways: a list of rebranding activities, analysis of instructional material, and a *Moving Career Pathways Forward Project* reflection paper. Combined these documents, the Work Plan, and the Materials Review confirmed the programs' commitment to an official rebrand on July 1, 2015.

Career Pathways Weekly Updates in MTLINCS: In the MTLINCS Weekly Newsletter, there is a weekly update on career pathways resources and activities. The information is divided into state and national pathways sections. This is for readers to be able to quickly link to Montana specific information, and when necessary link into the broader national conversation. This continues to be the hub for the *Moving Career Pathways Forward Initiative*.

Other Activities Supported with State Leadership Funds

Montana Student Information System: Each program year a portion of the state leadership allocation is set aside to pay for ongoing maintenance and updates to the Montana Adult Basic and Literacy Education (MABLE) student information system developed by state programming staff. MABLE is viewed as an evolving program that is continually updated and modified to meet the needs of the National Reporting System (NRS) and local programs. This program year the state agency targeted funds to support enhancements to the reporting system to align data collection with changes to the State Assessment and Guidelines Policy updates. Enhancements were made in anticipation of reporting needs under WIOA. The State relays information on all modifications and enhancements to every local program via e-mail, Shop Talks, and face-to-face meetings on an ongoing basis. This state level activity is the underpinning of all ABE work, as valid and reliable data drives all innovations.

TABE Training: The state required TABE training was held on May 5th for 22 participants. The state has supported the train-the-trainer model for TABE training for several years, and each year we modify the training to provide the essential components of administering the TABE with fidelity and integrity with current issues and challenges. This year the state contracted with a local program instructor to collaborate with TABE consultants to create a training that integrated the connection between TABE, adult education content standards, and instructional strategies. Following the training, participants are required to annually submit a list of all teachers they train to the state. This documentation validates that tests are being administered similarly across the programs, which ensures student test data is valid and reliable.

Directors' Meeting: The 9th annual directors' meeting was held on April 27-28th in Helena, Montana. The agenda of the meeting was developed to provide updates and invite conversation on state initiatives, primarily career pathways. Other agenda items included: WIOA Implementation, Working with SWIB, Submitting an Extension Application, New Opportunities for Partnership, Data System Enhancements, and Great Ideas & Great Conversations. Open discussion at these meetings leads to program improvement, as the directors use networking opportunities and the focused, relevant information presented to begin strategic planning for the upcoming program year.

Distance Learning: A state goal is to support distance learning for programs that have incorporated distance delivery into their instructional practice in the previous years. State support included the purchase of Missouri Learns (with limited Skills Tutor seats). In spite of the challenges that distance learning poses, 17 students completed more than 51% percent of his/her instructional time using the distance learning curriculum for a total of 799 student learning hours. Twenty-four percent of the distance learning students made an educational gain. In the four participating programs, the distance learning students also achieved cohort goals; 100% entered employment, 58% retained employment, 80% obtained high school equivalency, and 75% entered postsecondary education or training in the prior year. This data validates that distance learning is helping some students in meeting their core goals and making educational gains. Program staff in the eastern half of the state participated in the Rural Services Education Grant in 2007-08, and this appears to have given them the skill sets required to sustain distance learning, as almost all of the students enrolled in distance learning are from two programs in the eastern part to the state. It is incumbent upon the state to continue to support distance learning in these programs and to continue to provide technical assistance for teachers interested in developing a successful distance learning model.

Montana LINCS: MTLINCS continues to be the virtual vehicle for supporting statewide initiatives and keeping all adult education teachers on the cutting-edge of state and national activities. The state renewed its contract with a state ABE teacher, who has worked on the MTLINCS Web site since it began as a collaborative effort between the Northwest Consortium and the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL). MTLINCS is designed to be the underpinning of professional development at the local program level. Directors and staff can peruse the topics to determine which areas they need to go into deeper to meet their program needs. The home page for MTLINCS features a star with a link to program improvement initiatives (L2A, distance learning, data quality, ESL, Career Pathways and SIA). All state activities related to each strand are posted. In minutes, readers can access Power Points, videos, and relevant state documents from trainings and meetings. The importance of MTLINCS cannot be emphasized enough; it is our virtual faculty lounge promoting research-based, ongoing professional development. Additionally, a weekly newsletter is sent to all ABE teachers, directors, and volunteers providing links to new information on each component of the star. Upon opening a link, recipients note a snippet of research on the selected strand with additional links to further resources and web sites. All information in the weekly newsletter is from the LINCS Community of Practice to provide a condensed version of the national conversation on an ongoing basis. The state vision is that MTLINCS Weekly Newsletter is a standing agenda item at all local staff meetings. The use of this site is steadily increasing.

Shop Talks: Monthly *Montana Shop Talks*, modeled after the *Shop Talks* conducted by OVAE for the state directors of adult education, were held throughout the program year. Regularly scheduled talks involving the state staff and all program directors were used to disseminate information, promote instructional leadership, and provide technical assistance.

The National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC): NAEPDC continues to be a source of information and support for the state director. The connection to the NAEPDC has allowed the state director to learn from and network with colleagues both nationally and regionally on issues that are important for successful state administration. The benefit of this type of affiliation is access to important information that can benefit the state.

Performance Data Analyses

Describe any significant findings from the evaluation of your performance data for the reporting period and efforts to improve outcomes for the core indicators of performance.

The state is in year seven of using a web-based data system to gain longitudinal trend data and support a systemic approach for collecting and measuring student data. The data system provides instructors and directors' clear understanding of what students need in their learning plan and what they need to do to help students make academic gains and achieve core goals. This has promoted changes in instructional practice, intake, and goal setting. The chart below shows the annual percentage change for students' educational progress.

<u>Entering EFL</u>	<u>PY 13-14</u>	<u>PY 14-15</u>	<u>Annual Change</u>
Beg Lit	48%	33%	-15%
Beg Basic	40%	37%	-3%
Int Low	37%	37%	0%
Int High	28%	27 %	-1 %
ASE Low	24%	28%	+4%
<u>Entering EFL</u>	<u>PY 13-14</u>	<u>PY 14-15</u>	<u>Annual Change</u>
Beg Lit	62%	55%	-7%
Low	71%	67%	-4%
Beg High	67%	47%	-20%
Int Low	72%	58 %	-14 %
Int High	61%	65%	+4%
Advanced	73%	68 %	-5 %

Montana's ESL population remains very small at 155 students, and the number of students in each functioning level varies significantly from year-to-year. Proactive steps to improve education gains for ABE students are the same for the ESOL teachers, and again the positive impact is evident. The ESL teachers have formed a very collaborative network committed to student gains; their recent efforts have contributed to substantial increases in student educational gains. The state will continue to provide multiple forms of technical assistance to all programs to ensure student education outcomes continue to improve.

The outcomes in the cohort areas are listed in the table below. This is the third year of tracking student outcomes with cohort designation. The state has created a cohort report that can be used to help program staff identify students' potential cohort designation and plan instruction and goal setting accordingly. The state will strive to support professional development to help instructors more effectively prepare students to be workforce/postsecondary ready. Transitioning students beyond earning their high school equivalency diploma will continue to be a focus for the next program year.

<u>Outcomes</u>	<u>PY-13-14</u>	<u>PY 14-15</u>	<u>Annual Change</u>
Entered Employment	50%	74 %	+26 %
Retained Employment	68%	57%	-11%
HSE	90%	85 %	-5 %
Post-Secondary (current)	47%	33%	-14 %
Post-Secondary (prior)	46%	47%	+1 %

The number of students served in MT ABE programs has declined over the past years. This is due to the fact that Montana's labor market is currently facing unique circumstances and entering a sustained period of low labor supply, or in other words, a worker shortage. As of September 2015, Montana's statewide unemployment rate is at 4.1%, and has hovered around this level for several months. Going forward, the Montana Department of Labor and Industry Research and Analysis Bureau (DLI R&A) projects declining unemployment rates. Multiple factors will compound to make the worker shortage more severe including a large wave of retirements among the baby boomer generation, a relatively small number of young people entering the labor force, and a healthy pace of employment growth throughout. DLI projects approximately 6,400 jobs added per year in Montana while the labor force is expected to grow by only 4,100 workers. As a result, unemployment rates are expected to decline to levels below 2% within ten years. Low unemployment rates and a worker shortage will benefit workers by making it easier to find jobs and increase wages. For these reasons, ABE services will need to be modified and performance measures set to align with declining student numbers with increased barriers to employment.

☐ **Integration with Other Programs**

Describe how you have integrated activities funded under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) with other adult education, career development, and employment and training activities. Describe your efforts to develop or advance career pathway systems that include career and technical education, postsecondary education, employers, and economic and workforce development. Include a description of how your agency is being represented on the state and local Workforce Investment Boards, the provision of core and other services through the One-Stop system and an estimate of the AEFLA funds being used to support activities and services through the One-Stop delivery system.

State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB): The state Superintendent of Public Instruction appointed the state ABE director as full voting member of the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) in 2012. As a member of the Board, the state director is automatically given a subcommittee assignment. The director is serving on the Life-Long Learning Committee. This committee meets the day prior to the Board meeting and is responsible for making recommendations to Board in all areas addressing the needs of an educated workforce. The state ABE program director was also appointed by the governor in January 2008 to serve on the Youth Council, an ad hoc committee of the SWIB. The Youth Council is responsible for coordinating and researching the most current work force information related to youth education and employment for the purpose of making recommendations to the SWIB. The Youth Council holds quarterly meetings designed to augment the vision and mission of the SWIB. In March 2010, the state ABE director was selected as vice-chair of the Council. The state director continued to serve as vice-chair for the 2015 program year. Montana does not have Local Workforce Investment Boards, but all local ABE program directors serve on their County Management Teams, which focus on regional economic development. Although only one ABE

program is located in a one-stop delivery system, the remaining programs have established strong relationships with the one-stops in their community. Due to the small population in all Montana communities, all adult education programs are able to operate as though they are part of a one-stop delivery system. Current partnerships sustain formal and informal communication among the agencies. One-stop delivery is delivered through the SWIB single, statewide workforce area. The state does not contribute any funds to support activities and services through the One-Stop delivery system.

PEP Talk: Between 2008-10 program years, the Department of Labor, ABE, and the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education utilized their Workforce Incentive grant to develop PEP Talk, a common intake activity to assist adults in developing a Personal Employment Plan (PEP), or career pathway, to seamlessly transition adults between agencies as client/student needs evolve. Since the Incentive Grant funds were one-time only, the team produced a sustainable, no-cost program. All materials continue to be available online; this includes workbooks, brochures, and training modules. The continuance of the PEP Talk collaboration does not rely on additional funding, and with each successive year an increasing number of students are completing their PEP Talk portfolio. Enabling unemployed and underemployed adults to gain the skills necessary to attain self-sufficiency and move up the economic ladder was identified as the collaborative goal for this grant, and PEP Talk is now the common language across the agencies. Each month the Department of Labor sends monthly data to the state ABE director showing the number of ABE students creating PEP Talk portfolios, the beginning of the career planning process. This year there were 2,268 logins and 1,209 new portfolios created at ABE centers. The Montana state agencies meet regularly to collaborate on ways to strengthen PEP Talk; PEP Talk is the lynch pin for adult career pathway as required in the WIOA.

TANF Eligible Support Grant: The 2011 legislature approved an amendment to the DPHHS budget to include grant dollars to support ABE programs willing to expand service to TANF eligible individuals during the summer months in 2012 through 2015. Five ABE programs were awarded grants to expand services to this targeted population. The awards ranged from \$10,000 to \$30,000 for each summer. The proposals submitted were unique and meet the needs of each area. During the 2013 legislative season, the grant was increased to \$400,000, and there are now seven ABE programs providing services to TANF eligible clients. Ultimately this grant is building a strong bridge between DPHHS and ABE, and it is challenging the ABE culture to think about serving students in different locations through technology integration and innovative strategies. The ultimate goal of this grant is to unite ABE and TANF programs to more effectively transition TANF eligible clients to the workforce and a career pathway.

GEMS: The Montana ABE dashboard was completed and launched in 2013. Through this web site ABE is part of the state's longitudinal data system and showcases ABE student transition to workforce and postsecondary.

Montana College Access Network (MCAN): The state director was selected to represent the state education agency on the Montana MCAN workgroup. The presence of ABE on this board is helping the group modify outreach activities that go beyond the secondary school audience. Beginning in 2014, the group added low-skilled and under-educated adults as a target population to be included in marketing material and college awareness activities.

WIOA Kick-Off: In April 2015, representatives from MT ABE, Department of Labor, Vocational Rehabilitation, and TANF began meeting weekly to plan an August WIOA Kickoff. The goal of these meetings was to create an agenda that would assist each agency in moving forward with the development of strong partnerships that will be essential in meeting the requirements of the WIOA.

□ **English Literacy/Civics (EL/C) Program**

Describe the activities and services supported with EL/C funds, including the number of programs receiving EL/C grants and an estimate of the number of adult learners served. (Only states receiving EL/C funds should respond to question #4).

BEST Plus Training: The state designates a portion of its EL/Civics dollars to comply with the Standards and Assessment Policy requirement for annual training. Each year designated BEST Plus teachers must participate in refresher assessment training. In order to effectively use state resources and staff time, BEST Plus training was held in conjunction with the ESOL teachers' annual State meeting. Ten instructors participated, and the training prepared participants for a perfect transition into the meeting the next day. To ensure readily available assessment training the state has paid for a Montana ESOL teacher to complete the BEST Plus training and serve as our state trainer.

Professional Development: Five programs have been awarded the EL/Civics grant. Each year the number of students served with this grant remains small and relatively constant. This program year 155 students were served. Since the expiration of the Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA) Network Grant that spanned July 2008-June 2010, the ABE director has signed contracts with the state CAELA team to continue to build on the professional development model put in place with the CAELA grant.

This year the state CAELA team lead the ESOL Career Pathway Project and planned the ESOL day-and-a-half spring training. Twelve teachers attended the spring training. On day one the leadership team presented a variety of projects and strategies for the instructors to adapt to their own instructional delivery. The agenda also included the following topics: Adoption of Best Literacy, Student Reporting Enhancements, Standards for ESOL, OER Commons, and WIOA/ESL & the Transition Year. The second day of the conference was used for group sharing on the success of the ESOL Career Pathway Project in their programs. Over the course of the year, the CAELA team worked with four of the five ESOL providers to integrate workforce preparation into their existing EL/Civics classes. Through monthly Skype meetings the team visited with instructors to discuss workforce activities that were taught in combination with ESOL lessons. Activities included student exploration of the Montana Career Information System (MCIS)/PEP Talk, student occupation projects, class trips to the job service, participation in skill and ability videos, and student generated Occupation Power Points. The teachers focused on 21st Century Skills needed for both college and career readiness. The teachers in the state ESOL pathways project shared that instruction in literacy, English language acquisition, civic participation, and workforce training can be woven into an instructional model. The participants left the training with renewed enthusiasm for standards-based instruction that supports student career pathways.

Secondary School Credentials and Equivalencies

Describe your state's policies related to how it awards a secondary school diploma or its equivalent to individuals who are no longer enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under state law. Include state recognized tests that are used to award the diploma as well as other criteria that may be recognized, such as competency-based or credit-based methods.

The state issues high school equivalency diplomas based on the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) which are adopted by the Board of Public Education. In 2013 the Board repealed all language from Chapter 66 Subchapter 1 referencing GED. GED was replaced with High School Equivalency (HSE); state diplomas are based on 10.66.117: ISSUANCE OF EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMAS AND OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPTS

1) All HSE diplomas are issued by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Official transcripts and diplomas will be awarded to those who successfully complete the HSE test. Candidates will have access to test results through an official state database. The Office of Public Instruction will maintain HSE records permanently. HiSET is the assessment currently used to issue Montana high school equivalency diplomas.

Adult Education Standards

Describe your state's progress toward implementation of adult education college and career readiness (CCR) standards, including whether your state has formally adopted a validated set of CCR standards. Describe how the state has determined the standards to be representative of CCR and the timeline by which such standards will be or have been implemented by all local programs. Describe how the state is supporting the use of standards by local programs and state leadership funds that are being used to support implementation.

In February 2015, the Adult Education (AE) unit at the MT Office of Public Instruction adopted the *College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education* that was released in 2013. These standards have identified the essential CCR standards that need to be incorporated into the adult education classroom. By adopting these standards, the MT ABE programs will have student expectations that are consistent with MT K-12 students and adult education students around the nation. After the release of the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards for Adult Education in April 2013, MT math and writing teams completed a cross walk between the Montana Adult Education Standards and the CCR standards. In 2015, teams followed-up with a gap analysis between the MT standards and the CCR standards, both teams determined adoption of the national standards was in the best interest of the ABE students and teachers.

College and Career Readiness Standards-in-Action (CCR SIA): Montana sent two teachers to the CCR SIA training in Alexandria, Virginia in March 2015.

CCR Math Work Group: The state contracted with two of the CCR math team instructors to host quarterly webinars with state ABE math teachers. The Webinars were based on thematic, standards-based lessons published in the quarterly ANN Newsletter. Prior to each Webinar, the participating teachers were to select a lesson from the newsletter, do the activity with their students, fill out a reflection form, and submit the form to the team leaders. During the webinar each teacher shared their lesson and reflection on the standards-based activity. This professional development format proved to be an effective way of involving a number of teachers from different programs in sustained, CCR standards-based professional dialogue. Forty teachers participated in these webinars.

Instructional Review Forms: All programs were required to complete an Instructional Materials Review form for every educational functioning levels in all five-subject areas taught. The forms were distributed to the programs in April with a fall deadline for completion. Completed forms will be used for programs to

complete a gap analysis between materials used and alignment to the CCR standards. Instructional analysis will be completed in program year 2016.

Ongoing Professional Development: The state requests that all professional development providers align their trainings with the CCR standards, as all instructional strategies must support the state adopted standards. The expectation for professional development is that all teachers return to their classrooms with new standards-based techniques to improve student learning. The standards initiatives and numerous volunteer hours confirm Montana commitment to accountability, professionalism, and content standards.