Texas Narrative Report 2014–2015
Adult Education and Family Literacy Act

Background

In spring 2014, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) conducted a competition for its statewide adult education and literacy (AEL) system, the first time in almost a decade that Texas held a competition for Title II funds. The competition resulted in 35 new grantees across the state's 28 local workforce development areas (workforce areas). These grantees are a combination of sole and consortia providers, colleges, independent school districts, community-based organizations, and Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) tasked to expand service delivery and oversight across areas key to meet Texas' AEL objectives. Performance-based contract requirements include the following:

- Career pathways models across the state comprising integrated education and training models, workplace literacy, and specialized services for internationally trained professionals;
- Collaboration with Boards and other community partners to expand the services available to adult learners and prevent duplication of services;
- Transition models that support student transition into postsecondary education or training;
- Strong monitoring and fiscal oversight requirements, including monitoring of subrecipients than was previously required;
- Strict and stringent reporting deadlines than was previously required;
- Statewide distance learning implementation;
- Year-round program services; and
- Funding-based targets for total students served, students served in career pathways and transitions programs, and achievement of educational functioning level (EFL) gains.

Early Program Year 2014–2015 (PY'14–15) was spent ramping up new contracts, building out service-delivery models, and building internal systems to meet more stringent reporting and oversight requirements.

Despite ramp-up challenges, TWC accomplished major system reformation over the past performance year, setting the program up for strong implementation under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and creating numerous opportunities for individuals to move past AEL and into education, training, and employment.

> **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.

State Leadership Activities

Throughout PY'14–15, TWC developed and implemented projects that meet AEL program objectives and support WIOA-compliant development of the AEL program.

Professional Development System

TWC completed the state's professional development system in spring 2014. Under the new professional development model, TWC sought to increase local control and flexibility while maintaining the direction

and guidance of TWC's three-member Commission (Commission) on AEL services to further students' employment, education, community, civic, family, and support needs. The contract was awarded to the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning (TCALL) out of Texas A&M University, which partnered with other organizations across the state to form the TRAIN (Texas Research-based Adult Instruction Network) PD consortium.

The Texas PD system seeks to align resources with a development and delivery system that provides a centralized, state-directed structure to ensure alignment with Texas objectives, local flexibility to respond to performance data and community needs, and effective use of shared resources. Online delivery options will increase access, responsiveness, and cost savings for PD services.

Local Funding for Professional Development

To support local PD flexibility, the Commission allocated state leadership funding to local programs to spend on attending PD events or hiring contract trainers through the newly created contract trainer database. The contract trainer database provides a resource for programs to locate experts in various training topics to support the development of local program staff.

Learning Management System for Professional Development Support

In PY'14–15, more than 90 percent of local AEL staff was part time, requiring staff development needs to be convenient, just-in-time, and cost-effective. To support this objective, TWC purchased a learning management system to facilitate web-based PD. Managed by TRAIN PD, the system currently houses 16 types of curricula, each with a set of comprehensive lessons, and is accessed by over 600 AEL staff members across the state.

Professional Development Support for Community-Based Literacy Network

In 2012, the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) reported that, in addition to the students served by the federal adult education program, an additional 80,000 students were served by volunteer, nonprofit, and other provider networks. In the transition of the AEL program, TWC committed to the continued support of these non–Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA)–funded providers.

In spring 2015, TWC funded Literacy Texas, the statewide literacy coalition, to coordinate PD efforts for the volunteer community, aligning support and training with the federally funded AEL and workforce development systems.

Leadership Excellence Academy

The Leadership Excellence Academy (LEA), a partnership between the University of Tennessee and the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC), builds leadership capacity within AEL local grantee management. The Commission allocated funds for at least one member from each of the 35 AEL grant recipients for PY'14–15 LEA participation.

Workforce Integration Events

In spring 2015, TWC held 15 workforce integration events across the state. The events were coordinated by the 28 Boards and included participants from the Boards, AEL providers, and other stakeholder agencies from designated regions. The initial goal of the events was initially to build stronger partnerships across workforce and AEL systems; however, the passing of WIOA provided the impetus for these events to strengthen partnerships to support implementation of the new law.

Independent facilitators led structured feedback sessions that identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to collaboration and alignment of services among AEL programs, Boards, and other stakeholders. The result was the establishment of a statewide system of regional adult education and workforce integration planning efforts. Event facilitators submitted meeting results and findings to TWC, and TWC combined them into a report for distribution. The events served as a starting place for important conversations and planning that has expanded into PY'15–16.

Activities to Support the Implementation of Career Pathways
During PY'14–15, newly awarded AEL grant recipients were charged with the implementation of career pathways as a part of their funding for services. To support capacity building and expand these efforts across the state, the Commission approved projects to identify and grow capacity for best practices in career pathways implementation.

Accelerate Texas
The objective of Accelerate Texas is to build Texas' capacity to expand, develop, and implement Integrated Education and Training (IET) models focusing on career pathways service approaches that include Career and Technical Education. Accelerate Texas is a brand developed by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), the state agency charged with coordinating higher education efforts, and jointly expanded with TWC in 2013.

Grant awards support targeted enhancement or expansion of existing models or the development and implementation of new models, specifically: workforce training, AEL services, coordination, staffing, curriculum development, student support, and other service-delivery components. Projects include objectives related to sustainability based on the use of local and other resources.

TWC developed, released, and awarded Accelerate Texas projects during PY'14–15 to begin in PY'15–16. Accelerate Texas projects represent strong integration across agency programs, as they are funded out of Title II state leadership and Title I statewide activity funds.

Texas Adult Completion and Skills Initiative
The Texas Adult Completion and Skills Initiative (TACSI) provides services to 16- to 25-year-olds who are out of school and do not have a high school diploma or high school equivalency. Through TACSI, grantees provide a strategic, comprehensive plan to help individuals earn a high school diploma through a partner dropout recovery organization, or high school equivalency through an AEL provider, as well as enter college training that results in employer-recognized credentials in high-demand occupations. College and career transitional support and employment services are included to help the participants obtain employment after program completion.

The first TACSI awards were granted in late PY'14–15. Like Accelerate Texas, this initiative is funded out of Title II state leadership and Title I statewide activity funds.

Adult Education and Literacy Performance Recognition Incentive Awards
In fall 2015, TWC recognized programs for activities that meet Commission objectives and support the transition of students into postsecondary education and training, including career pathways, employment, advancement in employment, and integration with Board services. The awards were in three categories: Employer Partnership and College Integration, both awarded based on an application process; and Board Integration, awarded based on data match between individuals enrolled in AEL and individuals enrolled in Board services.

State Leadership Projects Developed in Program Year 2014–2015

In addition to state leadership projects implemented in PY'14–15, the following projects were developed for PY'15–16 implementation:

Workplace Literacy projects facilitate expansion of employer-based AEL sites. Funds in this project will be used to support employer engagement with Boards, curriculum development with employer subject matter experts, and instructor salaries for prep and development of performance-based assessment with standardized scoring rubrics, as per National Reporting System guidelines.

Distance Learning Mentor Initiative projects make available mentoring services to adult education providers new to distance learning (DL) in Texas, providing a single point of contact to AEL grantees on DL initiatives and assisting in the development of a statewide inventory of DL programs, curricula usage, and local implementation/blended learning models.

The Assessment and Standards Project will update the Texas Adult Education Standards and Benchmarks for ABE/ASE and ESL Learners, last updated in 2007, revising the adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) acquisition levels of the standards and benchmarks and aligning them with the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), the Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency test, and the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA), with inputs from other relevant standards criteria. To ensure AEL standards align with WIOA assessment requirements, the project will also provide guidance on modifications to the Texas AEL assessment procedures related to WIOA performance and accountability changes, as determined after the release of WIOA regulations.

Focus on the Basics: Reading and Math projects will coordinate task groups for research-based best practices and curriculum for reading and math, with emphasis on reading at all levels and math at transition levels.

> **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.

Program Performance at TWC

In conducting the first competition of the state's AEL services in over ten years, TWC expected 2014–2015 to bring start-up challenges associated with general program ramp-up, recruitment, teacher training, partnership building, and the development of internal processes. Additionally, TWC completed the transfer of the Texas Educating Adults Management System (TEAMS) in the early part of PY'14–15, which came with new expectations around data reporting and accountability, as well as new system features to support both tightened security of student information and the vision of the AEL system structure under TWC.

TWC sets program performance as a top priority, and the AEL program is structured within the agency to provide regular monitoring, oversight, and technical assistance for program performance.

TWC's Division of Operational Insight (DOI) oversees all agency performance and worked with the AEL department throughout PY'14–15 to regularly analyze new data, understand adult education performance trends, and develop customized reports for AEL grantees. While TEAMS provides users with over 50 standard reports to use in program oversight, additional reports provide more in-depth analysis of program performance and help local grantees understand the Commission's priorities.

The strategic planning and accountability coordinator within the AEL department works closely with DOI in the development of customized reports, and maintains regular communication with AEL program specialists to address performance concerns.

Over PY'14–15, the AEL department worked to strengthen its performance oversight model. The model includes monthly meetings with AEL staff and TWC leadership to discuss program performance, priorities, and concerns. AEL staff uses these meetings to develop Technical Assistance Plans (TAPs) and further analyze data to make recommendations to the programs.

For programs performing below the minimum standard, a TAP with specific, measurable objectives to address performance concerns is executed. Strategies to address the objectives are agreed on by the grantee and TWC, and the TAP's benchmarks must be met in order for it to be lifted.

Performance Funding Benchmarks

The Commission approved three performance funding benchmarks that grantees needed to meet to access a portion of their funding. These performance funding benchmarks set the tone of the Commission's priorities for the performance year:

- **Enrollment:** Programs must have met 60 percent of their total enrollment target by December 31 (end of second quarter).
  While under the Texas Education Agency (TEA), programs were not held to a specific enrollment target; TWC established enrollment targets based on grantees' total allocation of funds in order to meet the state legislature's enrollment target.
- **EFL Gain Achievement:** Programs must have met an average of 95 percent of target for the 11 educational functioning levels (EFL) by the end of the program year.
  TWC wanted to stress continued success in academic performance for grant recipients, but encouraged programs to meet an average of performance to allow for the natural flux of performance across individual levels, which happens based on a program's priorities and/or the number of enrollments a program may have at a specific level.
- **Transitions and Career Pathways Program Enrollment:** Programs must have met 95 percent of their transitions and career pathways program enrollment targets by the end of the program year.
  State objectives place a premium on increasing the number of participants who move beyond AEL into postsecondary education and training and employment. While this type of program shift can take years to see results due to the enrollment cycle of participants and performance data lags, TWC wanted to encourage program activities that drive to these outcomes.

Performance Observations

Enrollment
The competition of the statewide AEL system created anticipated challenges in local program ramp-up. The competition aligned services to the state's 28 workforce areas and as a result, grants were awarded to entities new to providing AEFLA services or entities operating in new or expanded service-delivery regions or new locations, and with new partners within consortia. As a result, grantees statewide had to reconfigure recruitment and partnership efforts to reach eligible student populations and promote the expanded college and career objectives within the program.

In anticipation of these challenges, TWC extended PY'14–15 contracts for grant recipients that were refunded or subrecipients under the new competition to avoid any lapses in services. While the extension ensured no interruption of services to students, there was a delay in efforts to recruit new participants.

To support enrollments and related performance, TWC AEL staff provided targeted technical assistance to local programs around recruitment, and facilitated conference calls, webinars, and specific technical assistance training at statewide meetings to allow peer-to-peer sharing of best practices in recruitment and retention. Further, TWC released additional fiscal guidance to better support grantees in understanding what local funds could be spent on recruitment activities to support enrollment in their programs.

Educational Functioning Level Achievement
Texas has long had strong performance in EFL achievement; however, TWC recognizes PY'14–15 grantee challenges in these measures. Analysis of EFL achievement revealed trends that TWC has used to better inform practice and technical assistance efforts for PY'14–15.

Observation 1: Strong gains for students with a post-test

Table 1 outlines Texas' achievement in EFL gains for two populations: (1) all participants enrolled with a baseline assessment and 12+ contact hours and (2) participants enrolled with a baseline assessment, 12+ contact hours, *and* a progress assessment.

Table 1: Educational Functioning Level Achievement

CORE OUTCOME MEASURES (Federal)	2014–2015 % Gain for All Participants	2014–2015 OCTAE Target	2014–2015 % Gain for Post-Tested Participants
ABE Beginning Literacy	62.13%	74%	95.09%
ABE Beginning	53.01%	63%	84.01%
ABE Low Intermediate	53.74%	63%	84.81%
ABE High Intermediate	43.28%	53%	77.62%
ASE Low	49.44%	65%	84.49%
ESL Beginning Literacy	51.50%	65%	89.14%
ESL Low Beginning	56.37%	72%	89.69%
ESL High Beginning	60.66%	73%	89.02%
ESL Low Intermediate	61.88%	77%	73.74%
ESL High Intermediate	49.10%	66%	74.91%
ESL Advanced	48.81%	74%	82.37%

Results of the EFL achievement of post-tested individuals indicate challenges with retention, as opposed to instructional challenges. To further support this, it is noted that the post-test rate decreased from PY'13–14 to PY'14–15.

Strategies for Improvement
To address high attrition, TWC has begun the implementation of numerous strategies to support local programs. Strategies include the following:
- Monthly notification to programs of the number of students enrolled who have reached minimum hours necessary to test their progress;
- Incorporation of strategic recruitment and retention strategies into ongoing training;

- Development of an early alert student success system, which will provide programs with technological solutions to alert them to students who have stopped out, make direct and regular contact with students to support attendance, and allow for the regular update of case notes to document student challenges; and
- Better alignment of program services with Boards and other partner services to provide participants with support services to ensure they continue in adult education.

Observation 2: Students who enroll earlier in the year are more successful

Figure 1: Number of Participants by Month and Their Educational Gain Rate by the End of the PY

Source: TWC Division of Operational Insight
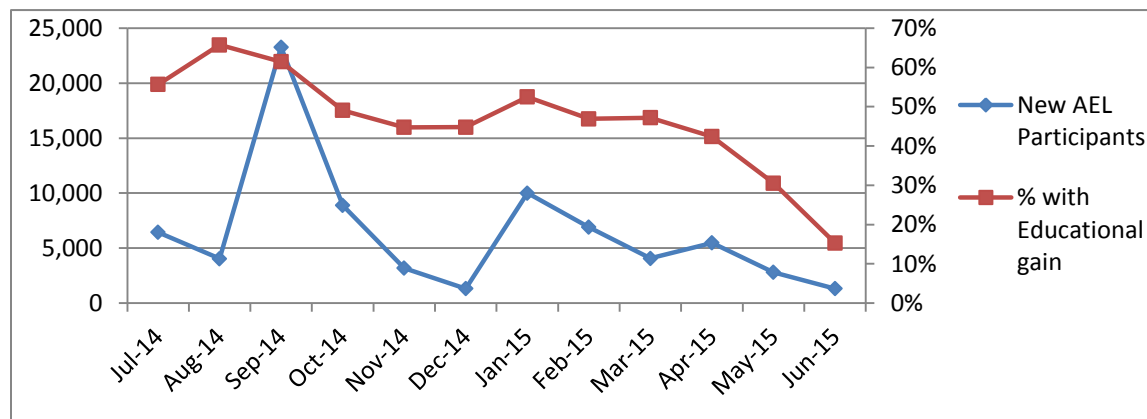
Analysis of participant performance indicates that individuals who enroll earlier in the year are more successful (Figure 1). While this model is supportive of a traditional education-focused program, TWC strives to move the AEL program to a more just-in-time model, which gives immediate service delivery to participants. Based on analysis of previous performance, grantees would be disincentivized for enrolling participants later in this year, which means they may not be immediately meeting customer needs.

Strategies for Improvement

To build a system that supports both educational outcomes and customer needs, TWC's AEL staff has worked with grant recipients to develop "while-you-wait" enrollment models that maximize immediate service delivery while also providing strong educational and career support outcomes. These models rely on immediate service delivery to customers who may have to wait for an enrollment cycle to begin by offering other types of services (one-on-one tutoring through volunteer collaborations, job exploration, résumé writing, career readiness, etc.) or the use of distance learning. These models engage participants immediately on a path that supports their goals.

Despite the evidence that late enrollment leads to poor educational achievement within a program year, TWC continues to support customer-centered models that provide immediate solutions to participants. In PY'14–15, TWC worked with AEL grantees to move program designs away from semester-based models and into models that enroll students on a more frequent basis, while encouraging best and research-based practices that avoid classroom turbulence. Over the next program year, TWC will continue to monitor educational achievement while also supporting grant recipients in creative solutions that support student success, employment support, and quality customer service.

Observation 3: TWC AEL Grantees Have Worked to Increase the Number of AEL Participants in Transitions and Career Pathways Programs

As outlined previously, TWC placed a priority on programs enrolling participants in Career Pathways and Transitions programs through an associated performance funding benchmark. While a low number of grantees met their Career Pathways and Transitions enrollment targets, many grant recipients had a high proportion of their total populations enrolled in one of these specialized service models, indicating a significant shift in service-delivery design. Over the next year, TWC will work to further incentivize and support the development of these funding models, including special allocations with a higher associated cost-per-student target to encourage implementation.

Preliminary enrollments for PY'2015-'2016 indicate:

- 277 percent increase in career pathways and transitions program enrollments when compared to the same period last program year (July 1 – October 31);
- 5 percent increase in the total population enrolled in a career pathways or transitions program when compared to the same period last program year; and
- A 20 percent increase in overall enrollment when compared to the same period last program year.

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.

As outlined in previous sections, TWC has worked diligently over the two years since program transfer to fully integrate AEL with other agency programs. The state competition aligned providers with Texas' 28 workforce areas to better support overall system alignment and integration.

Through both the required implementation of career pathways models in provider grants as well as the implementation of special initiatives such as Accelerate Texas, TWC made great strides in the expansion of career pathways models in Texas during PY'14–15. Part of the aim in requiring provision of Career Pathways and Transitions programs was to encourage the creation of consortia that fully support customers in their transition from AEL into postsecondary education and training and employment. AEL grant recipients met this challenge and in PY'14–15, 100 percent of grant recipients implemented Career Pathways programs, Transitions programs, or both, providing customized services to 4,117 participants and supporting their transition beyond AEL.

AEL grantees, including 16 colleges and three Boards, have expanded partnerships and integration in the workforce system through regular meetings and integration events. Multiple grantees have developed advanced referral processes and, in some cases, systems to ensure customers are supported with service delivery from AEL grantees and Boards. Additionally, numerous grant recipients are colocated at Workforce Solutions Offices (Texas' one-stop centers), running classes and intake and assessment services.

In PY'15–16, each of the 28 Boards will receive funding for the direct purpose of supporting system integration and alignment, including the expansion of career pathways models. TWC will also continue

to support Board integration by awarding incentive funds to entities that excel in integration with colleges, employers, or Board services.

Every Board in Texas is required to have one member from a local literacy council and one member from an adult basic and continuing education organization. Boards are required to establish memoranda of understanding with local AEL providers. Additionally, each Board now has a designated AEL planning representative who acts as an operational contact for local AEL providers. TWC's executive director sits on TWIC, the state's Workforce Investment Board.

Texas' close partnership between AEL and other workforce education and training programs, and the enhancements in performance reporting for adult education providers, position Texas to achieve high performance in the integrated workforce and adult education service delivery system required under WIOA. During PY'14–15 and into PY'15–16r, TWC staff across all departments continues to work together to align service delivery and performance and accountability systems.

English Literacy/Civics: 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.

In the 2014 competition of AEL services, all 35 grantees were required to provide English Literacy and Civics (ELC) services as a part of their contracts. In PY'14–15, 13,413 students were enrolled in ELC coursework.

During this year, ELC providers continued services related to effective practices in providing and increasing access to English literacy instruction integrated with civics education. Local activities included engaging students in effective participation in civic opportunities, while assisting them in mastering the English needed to understand and navigate governmental, educational, social service, employment, and other key institutions, including banks and health care providers.

Beginning in PY'14–15 and into PY'15–16, TWC has supported capacity building for integrated ELC services under WIOA. One of the models approved for Career Pathways programs under new contracts provides services specifically to internationally trained ESL students. One grantee began services under this model with additional grantees developing models in PY'15–16.

TWC continues to support capacity building for integrated ELC under WIOA through allocation of funds specific to the development of these types of models.

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.

TEA is the administering agency for high school equivalency certificates in Texas. GED Testing Service, LLC, is the current provider of high school equivalency testing in Texas. On passing all four of the exams, test takers are issued a State of Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency.

In summer 2015, the State Board of Education approved the development of a Request for Proposals soliciting alternative assessments of high school equivalency in Texas. If approved, new assessment alternatives would be available to Texans in summer 2016.

Additionally, TEA rules support efforts to engage adults up to age 26 in receiving a Texas high school diploma and encourages school districts to reengage dropouts by awarding districts credit for recovering dropouts and counting recovered students in the high school longitudinal completion rate for the school district. These models were supported through integration with TWC's service delivery to aid students in selecting the best pathway toward achievement of a high school diploma or equivalency. TACSI is outlined further in the first section of this report.

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.

The Assessment and Standards Project, funded with state leadership funds in PY'14–15, will update the Texas Adult Education Standards and Benchmarks for ABE/ASE and ESL Learners last updated in 2007, revising the ABE, ASE, and English language acquisition levels of the standards and benchmarks and aligning them with CCRS, the Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency test, and TSIA, with inputs from other relevant standards criteria. To ensure that AEL standards align with WIOA assessment requirements, the project will also provide guidance on modifications to the Texas AEL assessment procedures related to WIOA performance and accountability changes, as determined after the release of WIOA regulations.