Vermont Narrative Report 2015-16

**1. State Leadership Funds**

**Alignment with partners under WIOA:** In September of 2015 representatives from the Vermont Agency of Education (VAOE), Vermont Department of Labor, and VocRehab Vermont convened to plan the development of the WIOA Unified State Plan. These State partners continued to collaborate over the next several months, convening a one-day strategic planning session in November with the State Workforce Development Board to determine goals, and completing the development of an MOU for data sharing in December of 2015. The Unified State Plan, with input from AEL providers, was completed and submitted in April 2016, and substantially approved in June. The MOU for data matching remains under review by the Vermont Department of Labor and is still pending signature as of the date of this report.

**Professional development:** Vermont has used the State Leadership Funds to plan and promote the following State-funded activities:

Workshops:

* Administering assessments (TABE 9/10, CASAS, BEST Plus)
* College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education – next steps for supervisors and instructional leaders (3-parts)
* Formative Assessment – Writing (LINCS on-line)
* Formative Assessment – Basics (LINCS on-line)
* Annual Assessment and NRS policy updates
* Math Teacher Network meetings
* Adult Numeracy Instruction
* Reading Instruction: Orton-Gillingham Training at the Associate Level

On-Site instruction:

* Adult Numeracy Co-Teaching with Elaine Watson, consultant

**Technical assistance** was provided to AEL providers as needed for efficient use of the AEL database that tracks student progress, instructional hours, and status. This web-based data collection system allows for real-time analysis and review by local program staff and state staff. On-site training for new staff occurred at several local centers and regular updates to data system improvements were offered to local data teams.

**Monitoring and evaluation**: Quarterly Data Quality Reports pulled from the database are reviewed by state staff for auditing purposes. Results of such reviews prompt local providers to correct or input data, and to monitor when progress assessments are due. The four local AEL providers were required to complete grant applications that included a narrative describing their performance in the prior year, and a description of strategies for continuous improvement. Providers also submitted budget summaries with a narrative describing projected expenditures for the 2016-2017 period. These grant applications served as a documented report that reflected on the year 2015-2016 and provided a baseline for monitoring in the coming year. In addition, quarterly database audits conducted by VAOE staff of student records monitored the quality of activities as related to the administering of assessments and progress toward performance indicators.

**Permissible activities**:

* **Regional network of literacy resource center:** The State participated in the New England Literacy Resource Center as a full member. State staff and one-half of the State’s AEL provider directors sat on the board and attended meetings in the reporting period.
* **Transition planning** – Vermont takes transition planning seriously and considers it part of the process of intake when student interests are identified and incorporated into a personalized learning plan (PLP). During the reporting period, 105 AEL students participated in dual enrollment, a recognized flexible pathway for enrolled high school students and high school completion program (HSCP) students in Vermont. The dual enrollment program permits eligible students to enroll in up to two college courses with an accredited postsecondary institution, and earned credits can be recognized as college credit by subsequent post-secondary institutions. By statute, the student must be assessed and determined to be sufficiently prepared to succeed in a dual enrollment course. As an element of the student’s PLP, dual enrollment provides a viable pathway to transition to postsecondary education. In addition, any students in the HSCP who are below 18 must have a transition plan to workforce or postsecondary education.
* **Other activities:** The state director of adult education and the database administrator attended the June 2016 NRS training: LEAP into WIOA, Planning for Change.

**2. Performance Data Analysis**

The number of Vermont students served by AEL that qualified for the federal report in FY16 (2051) remained about the same as compared to the number of students who qualified during FY15 (2073).

Table 4 shows there was improvement in the percentage of students completing every level except one (ASE High). The greatest area of improvement in level completion was demonstrated in the ESL Low Beginning population -- up from 20% in FY15 to 45.45% -- and in the ESL Low Intermediate population -- up to 19.44 % in FY16 from 9.20% during FY15.

As depicted on Table 5, there was an increase in students obtaining a GED or secondary school diploma, increasing from 41% during FY15 to 45% in FY16. While the percentage of students Entering Post-secondary Education or Training for the current program remained the same at 20% there was an increase in the percentage of students entering post-secondary or training for the prior program year -- up to 25% in FY16 from 19% during FY15.

Table 5 is showing 0 in the employment categories due to the lack of a signed MOU for data matching. Vermont is planning to request that the table be re-opened as soon as the MOU is signed and the data match has been completed. For the 2014-2015 period, the survey method was used to obtain employment data. In previous years this data was obtained through a data match with Vermont Department of Labor -- a practice which was suspended in 2015 due to the lack of a signed MOU for data matching.

**3. Integration with One-Stop Partners**

Local AEL providers participate in regional networks and boards, and conduct outreach activities through regional conferences and other events. Some regions have existing high-quality relationships with local one-stop partners while others will benefit from State leadership to legitimate the value of adult education and literacy services and confirm the AEL providers’ important role as a core partner.

Specifically, AEL providers participate in a wide variety of local initiatives including serving on local workforce development boards and local youth councils, and display materials at job and resource fairs. In addition, some providers host Vermont Department of Labor staff during student orientation sessions and send AEL staff to DOL team meetings. Referrals are made on the local level between core partners.

At the State-level, no MOU has been signed between the core partners that describes jointly funding the one-stop infrastructure or that formalizes any other aspect of collaboration, such as data matching. As of January 2017, the Vermont DOL has a new commissioner who has been communicating with the Vermont Agency of Education regarding the need to formalize the one-stop partner agreements through the development of required MOUs under WIOA.

**4. Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) Program**

Vermont will compete the IELCE funds for the first time in its upcoming WIOA RFP for grants beginning July 1, 2017. In the reporting period, Vermont awarded IELCE funds ($60,000) to two eligible providers, based on census and other data that identified communities with significant concentrations of English language learners. Vermont is in transition to provide IELCE services in combination with integrated education and training activities. One AEL provider, Central Vermont Adult Basic Education (CVABE), used $20,000 from this funding source to engage in the following activities for 57 ELL students:

* Program efforts included civics education and activities such as, registering students to vote by walking to the Town Clerk together, encouraging voting, discussing the electoral process, teaching the difference between federal and state government operations and the three branches of government, utilizing government services including 911, getting library cards, and supporting basic financial literacy including understanding credit, interest, and minimum payments.
* An ESL class convened at the One-Stop Center for one session. Students met with the Career Services Specialist to review the concepts of resumes, cover letters, and common interview questions. Completion of this class is required before participants can receive one-on-one technical assistance from the Career Services Specialist. Some valuable insight was provided to immigrants’ existing resume to align with American norms such as not providing gender, date of birth or age, or mention of family status. The class resumed its sessions at the AEL center with follow-up areas of focus weekly for one month exploring topics such as mock interview questions and expected behaviors, and standard items that are included and excluded from resumes and job interviews in the United States. This class provided much speaking and listening skill practice.
* Since many students’ goals include finding suitable work, English vocabulary, speaking, reading, and grammatical structure were taught in the context of searching for employment. Students researched and read websites and local newspaper ads to pursue their fields of accounting, veterinary, medical, and retail and customer service in general. Students were supported by teachers and trained volunteers to complete online job applications.

Below are some specific examples of how the program helped individual ESL students with their employment goals:

* A student was matched with a small business consultant from the local Community Action Agency in order to put his entrepreneurial skills to work in his new country.
* A student with a communications background was introduced by his teacher to a local college radio station where he learned about a grant opportunity. He was helped in the preparation of a business plan for a syndicated national radio program and was subsequently offered the opportunity to produce shows on African culture in French and English.
* A student considering employment as a taxi driver studied maps of local cities, street names, landmarks, and municipal layouts with his instructor.
* A student received assistance to pass the written test of her drivers’ exam, which enabled her to get a better job off the bus route and on the weekends when the local bus does not run.
* A teacher arranged for the statewide Apprenticeship Program supervisor from the Vermont Department of Labor to meet individually with students who had practiced a trade in their home countries. For example, she personally advised students who had been a plumber and an electrician on their next steps. For both students, learning more foundational English was the essential first step initially, then they were encouraged to research and discuss opportunities in the field. Follow-up tutorials with students tackled the topics of trade-related vocabulary and studying for questions on the certification tests. The supervisor had also recommended a free online course to study field-related terminology and the students completed these with individual tutors’ guidance.

A second provider, Vermont Adult Learning (VAL), received $40,000 and served 436 ELL students from 73 different countries. VAL’s fourteen ELL instructors utilized the six-level, standards-based curriculum framework in Cambridge’s *Ventures* program. Each unit of study incorporated all four skill areas—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—and provided opportunities for students to apply their learning within real-life, meaningful contexts as they worked toward personal, academic, and career goals. Units within *Ventures* deliberately integrated language and civics instructions, giving students opportunities to use real-life documents, apply new skills and understanding through meaningful communication and collaboration with peers, and negotiate topics and situations necessary for active civic participation and employment.

VAL’s ELL instructors also supplemented standards-based ELL curriculum with contextualized teacher-created civics units related to students’ roles as parents, workers, and community members. All instructors used authentic materials as the context for reading, writing, and conversation, and tried to connect language objectives to the students’ real-life goals. This often included the use of high-interest, low-literacy non-fiction texts focused on topics related to American history, government, and culture. Other examples of contextualized, integrated language and civics instruction included the following teacher-developed units/courses and center activities and initiatives:

* Student-centered conversation class curriculum developed through student inquiry into local social and political issues.
* Learning about Vermont history through teacher-created texts focused on important Vermont figures, events, and other topics.
* Exploration of America’s National Parks and celebration of the Centennial, including a visit to Vermont’s Marsh-Billing National Park.
* Small group instruction on the citizenship process and explicit preparation for the citizenship application, interview, and exam.
* Advanced ELL class—“American Lore”—designed to promote understanding of and conversation on common American cultural narratives.
* Class simulations to experience American life at different points in history, including music of the 1920s, the stock market crash, and rationing.
* Student and teacher involvement in voter registration activities, including a provider-wide initiative to register voters and simulate the voting process at learning centers.
* Contextualized instruction about health care and insurance options, centered on student-driven questions.
* Computer literacy classes and one-on-one sessions for ELLs integrating language learning with computer training. Examples included workshops on basic computing and word processing for ELLs, a digital storytelling course for beginning ELLs, and online learning platforms for reading.
* VAL administrators and instructors have developed a greater understanding of IET activities through ongoing professional development and conversations, including attending the NCTN conference and participating in New England Literacy Resource Center webinars focused on IET.
* Ongoing partnerships with Community College of Vermont’s Workforce Development division, United Way-Working Bridges, and Vermont Department of Labor with the goal of continuing work towards integrating English language education with workforce training.

Both providers shared challenges and lessons learned as part of preparing and placing IELCE program participants in unsubsidized employment.

**Challenges:**

* + Although the exercises related to improving work readiness were effective in that many students found employment, students finding work had a negative impact on student enrollment in daytime group classes. These students were matched flexibly with one-on-one tutors to meet as their work schedules allowed, and some were permitted to meet on their breaks at local work sites.
  + Limited English proficiency can be a barrier to employment.
  + ELL students have a range of computer literacy skills needed to create resumes, complete job applications, and search for jobs online.
  + Students may have difficulty using their prior education and work experience in an English-speaking workplace due to limited English skills.
  + Students may lack a high school diploma preferred by some employers.

**Lesson learned:**

* + ELL participants need significant language support through the job-seeking process.
  + Computer literacy is a key component in employment and retention.
  + IELCE services can improve work readiness, and workplace skills should be integrated into all adult IELCE curriculum.

Lastly, progress toward ensuring that IELCE program activities are integrated with the local workforce development system provides challenges in Vermont as CVABE reports:

Our results are achieved on a student-by-student basis and on the strength of rapport with individual professionals. An integrated approach of the workforce partners at this moment in time is only emerging, though we do have a business partner who is interested in offering ESL classes for their workers on-site. One challenge to the work is the absence of strong local WIBs with clear and defined leadership to enact WIOA in our three-county area.

VAL’s regional centers have initiated and maintained effective working relationships with the Vermont Department of Labor and VocRehab, including the following:

* + Presented at VDOL staff meetings to inform employees of VAL services.
  + Worked with VDOL and other area service providers on Chittenden County’s Adult Education Council to share updates and plan community events, such as the Community Resource Fair on March 9, 2016. The fair created an opportunity for community members to visit with two dozen different service providers who support needs around education, employment, parenting, finances, housing, and more. The second annual Community Resource Fair is being organized for April 2017.
  + Met with VDOL and VocRehab regularly to collaborate on shared goals.
  + Created a formal referral form and procedure between VDOL, VocRehab, and Vermont Adult Learning to ensure access to services and inform providers about client needs, assessment results, and instructional schedules.
  + VDOL case managers attended intake and orientation sessions at Vermont Adult Learning to help new students access VDOL support services.

VAL has learned that collaboration with local agencies and employers is essential to ensure student access to community resources, open communication between agencies, and awareness of the workforce needs in the area.

**5. Adult Education Standards**

Over the past three years, the educational landscape of Vermont has changed substantially. Through multiple pieces of policy and legislation that emphasize personalized learning, proficiency-based frameworks, and the need for consistency in the availability of educational services and supports, Vermont schools are reconsidering how, what, and where students learn and teachers teach.  Adult Education and Literacy services have been developing practices that align with these statewide changes, which have been driven by equity concerns: concerns about eliminating equity gaps across traditionally underserved student groups in the state, and about providing equitable access, statewide, to a shared baseline of educational services and supports.

In June 2013, the Vermont legislature passed Act 77, outlining the state’s Flexible Pathways Initiative, and including the High School Completion Program (HSCP).  This Act requires schools to create Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) for all students in grades 7-12, and to offer opportunities for learning that fall outside of a traditional school setting.

HSCP is a potential component of a flexible pathway for any Vermont student who is at least 16 years old, who has not received a high school diploma, and who may or may not be enrolled in a public or approved independent school. The majority of students (78.5% in 2015-2016) who participate in the HSCP are unenrolled from school. Adult Education and Literacy providers are charged with developing a personalized learning plan with the student and the assigned high school that will meet the graduation requirements of the high school. This flexible pathway for students incorporates proficiency-based learning and draws on local resources to assist the student in meeting the requirements delineated in the PLP.

In April of 2014, the Vermont State Board of Education released the Education Quality Standards (EQS), which describe what Vermont schools are expected to provide to all students.  These standards prioritize the importance of a well-rounded education that prepares our youth to fully participate in the civic and economic future of the state.

Schools must provide students the opportunity to experience learning through flexible and multiple pathways, including but not limited to career and technical education, virtual learning, work-based learning, service learning, dual enrollment and early college. Learning must occur under the supervision of an appropriately licensed educator. Learning expectations must be aligned with state expectations and standards.

Students must be allowed to demonstrate proficiency by presenting multiple types of evidence, including but not limited to teacher- or student-designed assessments, portfolios, performances, exhibitions and projects.

*Vermont State Board of Education Manual of Rules and Practices, Series 2000 – Education Quality Standards, 2120.2*

Vermont’s state plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act will articulate the directive to align adult education learning opportunities with Vermont’s Framework of Standards (i.e., Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, etc.). The Vermont Agency of Education and the adult education and literacy providers have adopted the [College and Career Readiness Standards](http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CCRStandardsAdultEd.pdf) (CCRS) as the key academic content component of the adult education framework of standards. This subset of the Common Core State Standards was adopted by Vermont in 2010. The state will continue to promote and implement the alignment of standards.

**6. Programs for Corrections Education and the Education of Other Institutionalized Individuals**

In Vermont, incarcerated individuals are enrolled in the Community High School of Vermont and do not meet the definition of eligible individuals under Title II. The Community High School of Vermont is operated by the Vermont Department of Corrections (DOC), and as an independent school approved by the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE), also operates under the regulations of the Vermont AOE in service of its learners at multiple sites around the state who are enrolled in the school. The Community High School of Vermont serves those individuals, regardless of educational level, who do not have academic, social or technical skills that will allow them to successfully participate in the community upon release. All persons in the custody of the Commissioner of Corrections, including those who are incarcerated, on parole, or on probation have access to these educational services.

Referrals are routinely made as learners transition from the Community High School of Vermont to the community. A referral protocol has been established between the Vermont AOE and the staff of the Community High School of Vermont. This protocol describes how formerly incarcerated persons -- who are no longer enrolled in the Community High School of Vermont -- seeking adult basic education or adult secondary education will be referred to the local AEL provider. At that point of engagement with the local AEL provider, the students are eligible individuals and receive the range of services afforded any adult learner.

During the reporting period, AEL served 50 students from community corrections. Of those 50 students, 13 of them completed an Educational Functioning Level. Nine were in the cohort to obtain a GED or secondary school diploma with 4 achieving that outcome.

No funds were set aside to support the education of other institutionalized individuals in the reporting period.