Texas Adult Education and Literacy End of Year Report

Program Year 2017–2018

# Executive Summary

In Program Year 2017–2018 (PY’17–’18), the Texas Workforce Commission’s (TWC) full implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) supported TWC’s vision for the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) program, establishing AEL as a full and significant partner in the Texas workforce system by aligning accountability models with objectives that support all customers with service delivery. By contracting with core provider grantees and implementing State Leadership projects, TWC continued to expand the career pathways and has already served 22,243 participants, surpassing the AEL milestone of serving a cumulative 20,000 participants in career pathway programs by 2020.

The competition for receiving new grants beginning in 2018 built on the vast enhancement that the AEL program made in its first five years at TWC. The new grants expanded the requirements on aligning AEL services with in-demand jobs and implementing the career pathways models developed during TWC’s first round of grants. Additionally, the new grants ensure continued alignment of coursework with meaningful outcomes for all AEL participants.

Having previously created new models and expanded existing models, AEL’s focus in PY’18–’19 was to improve the models to ensure positive outcomes for participants.

# State Leadership Funds (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) §223)

## Alignment of AEL Activities with Other One-Stop Required Partners

TWC continued its Career Pathways Expansion and Accelerate Texas initiative to support the continued development of content and models that support career pathways, as required under WIOA §223(a)(1)(A), and to support and expand TWC’s objectives for the AEL program.

### Accelerate Texas

TWC contracted with the grantees in this fourth year of Accelerate Texas and started the annual competition to fund the fifth year of this successful model. Accelerate Texas is TWC’s strategic effort to expand Integrated Education and Training (IET) models and other postsecondary transition models, including workplace and apprenticeship projects with employers. The use of dedicated funds for IET program development and implementation allowed seven grantees to work with 549 participants.

### Career Pathways Expansion Project

The Career Pathways Expansion Project entered its second year, during which it continued to support the goal of IET program improvement and college integration for the benefit of AEL students who are transitioning to postsecondary education and training. The project has expanded the network of AEL provider mentees by adding seven AEL providers to the group of five peer mentors. In PY’16–PY’17, AEL focused on identifying and implementing more formal processes for integrating AEL programs at colleges. In PY’17–PY’18, an additional emphasis is being placed on improving outcomes for students who are entering IET programs. Twelve AEL providers (one-third of all AEL providers) are now a part of the growing network.

## Establishment or Operation of a High-Quality Professional Development Program

### The TRAIN PD Consortium

Texas A&M University continued to operate its Training, Resource, and Innovation Network for Texas Professional Development (TRAIN PD), a statewide effort to train AEL providers and other workforce system stakeholders. A total of 691 training sessions and other professional development activities were held statewide, including 80 online training through the TRAIN PD portal.

### Local Funding for Professional Development

To support local professional development, TWC continues to provide State Leadership funding directly to local providers. Direct funding allows providers to offer professional development training to their staff members and contract directly with trainers through the Contract Trainers and Training Database. The funding, first offered in 2014, helps providers find experts on various training topics to augment development of local program staff. In PY’17–’18, local grantees provided 1,331 professional development training sessions to their staff members.

### Professional Development Support for a Community-Based Literacy Network

In PY’17–’18, TWC contracted with Literacy Texas, a statewide literacy volunteer-training and advocacy organization, to provide professional development to nonprofit and community-based organizations through its annual conference and eight regional events. The 2018 conference hosted 932 individuals and offered 74 sessions highlighting best practices in instruction and opportunities for nonprofit providers to align their services with the WIOA-funded system.

## Provision of Technical Assistance to Funded Eligible Providers

TWC staff continues to regularly analyze the performance of grantees in order to offer them just-in-time technical assistance and ensure that their program objectives are met. In addition to offering technical assistance that is led by TWC staff, TWC uses the expertise of providers to support successful model expansion through mentor initiatives that seek to expand best practices.

## A Statewide Network of Peer Mentors at Community Colleges in Texas

Amarillo College developed a network of AEL providers at community colleges in Texas. The providers act as peer mentors to AEL one-stop partners by providing them with professional development and by encouraging collaboration. The Texas Peer Mentor Community College Network, described above, supports the role of providers as one-stop partners and the development through ongoing support and collaboration.

An experienced Accelerate Texas grantee, the college served as the mentor for six mentee programs, thereby supporting expansion of IET models, providing on-site technical assistance, and helping to develop a statewide network of trainers who are trained and vetted according to the standards developed by the mentors. Amarillo College established a website for its lab school lab school site to host providers to educate mentee schools about the implementation practices used for various aspects of service delivery, including senior and executive management practices. To ensure a unified statewide approach and make use of career pathways expertise and organizational knowledge, Amarillo College aligns its efforts with the efforts of other states and national pathways efforts.

**Teaching English Language Learners in Texas (TELL TX) Academy**

To serve the growing population of English language learners in Texas, the TELL TX Academy is implementing a project to provide an English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum and professional development designed to build capacity for delivering higher-level ESL instructional services. The project includes courses on reading and writing that are aligned with the new Texas AEL Content Standards 2.0 (Standards 2.0) and applies research-based best practices, curriculum development methods, and frameworks training and follow-up.

**Texas State Libraries and Archives Commission Collaboration**

Texas public libraries provide a widespread access point for AEL expansion. This initiative provides funding to increase alignment of the Texas AEL system with 550 public libraries statewide by hosting AEL events and classes, providing access to employment and educational resources, supporting recruitment, and providing public access to the internet to facilitate distance learning and job searching. In their role as technology anchors in their communities, libraries are also key partners in closing the digital divide and promoting digital literacy.

Statewide Leadership funding supported library liaisons and/or offer programs that provide training and technical assistance to public library staff statewide. The training and technical assistance help library staff members develop or expand their library’s engagement with local AEL programs, based on best practices identified statewide.

## The State’s Role in the Provision of Technical Assistance

AEL staff members continue to provide technical assistance to AEL grantees on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly basis. At the end of PY’16–’17, AEL staff analyzed performance outcomes and reworked current processes around the objective of improving student retention, a huge barrier to successful outcomes for AEL programs. Throughout PY’17–’18, staff continued to work on the issue, using the 4 Disciplines of Execution© (4DX) process developed by FranklinCovey© to identify the team’s core objective—improving student persistence—and understanding how the daily work aligns with it. The goal of the 4DX process is to ensure that work activities are adequately apportioned to provide the technical assistance needed to reach that core objective and reduce or reassign work that does not help meet the objective.

AEL staff members continue to use both 4DX and Rapid Process Improvement (RPI) to find more efficient and effective ways of supporting AEL grantees and improving outcomes. Specific technical assistance efforts are explained in the three subsections that follow, directly below.

#### Daily and Weekly

TWC program staff members proactively communicate with AEL grantees based on the provider’s performance and needs. Each time that technical assistance is provided, the details are entered into a database, including the type of assistance (category), the contents (what the assistance entailed), and the start and end dates. This information is used to inform biweekly AEL conference calls, which include all AEL grantees, subrecipients, and Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards). During these calls, AEL staff members address critical issues, make announcements, and answer grantees’ questions. The calls have proven invaluable in keeping grantees informed.

Staff monitors program data at least every two weeks to check for anomalies that may indicate a large-scale misunderstanding related to program implementation. For instance, staff might notice that a service type is coded in a way that does not align with the types of participants who are receiving the service. This misalignment would indicate that a misunderstanding exists regarding the service or the coding of the service. A core objective in PY’17–’18 was to develop new guidance specifically for areas where there were large-scale misunderstandings. AEL Letters, TWC’s method of issuing new guidance, were written on a variety of topics, including program eligibility and assessment, program performance, implementation of the IET model, and requirements and best practices related to aligning AEL services with postsecondary education.

Upon the issuance of new guidance, AEL staff members make an effort to review the guidance with local programs through conference calls or webinars to ensure that grantees are adequately supported. The significant increase in new policy and guidance resulting from WIOA has underscored the need to reiterate changes and enhancements using a variety of formats, and doing so has proven crucial in maintaining program understanding and consistency in implementation.

#### Monthly

Each month, as part of AEL’s RPI dashboard, staff reviews the technical assistance provided during the previous month to establish trends and determine whether a correlation exists between the technical assistance provided and the quality of program performance. This analysis helps AEL find ways to be more proactive about certain topics and develop new processes.

Another key activity each month is the Monthly Performance Report (MPR) meeting. During the MPR meeting, program staff, contract staff, finance staff, and division managers discuss performance trends, issues, and potential corrective action. The meetings result in action plans to be carried out and reported on at the next MPR meeting.

In PY’17–’18, staff also began providing a program status sheet to each grantee. The status sheet combines data analyzed during the MPR meeting into a format that clearly shows whether a grantee is or is not meeting performance standards, and it explains in detail how each measure is calculated. Providers have benefited from this process, given the steep increase in WIOA enhancements. The process also is crucial because it helps grantees understand how they are faring under the WIOA measures and helps ensure just-in-time remediation of performance.

Additionally, every month program staff members also hold a dedicated call with each grantee. The call, hosted by the assigned AEL program support specialist, has a standard agenda that includes discussing key areas of concern, including performance and finances; dispensing new information; and providing clarity on the programmatic issues that staff members report on during the next MPR meeting. The AEL contract manager, who manages the financial aspects of each provider grant, contributes to the call to identify expenditure challenges or other areas of concern and to ensure that contract deliverables are clearly identified and met.

#### Quarterly

In addition to the monthly activities, staff presents performance results to TWC’s three-member Commission (Commission) during the quarterly performance work session. The work session keeps the Commissioners apprised of areas of concern, helps staff to better understand TWC’s priorities, and furthers technical assistance efforts.

Depending on the type and amount of new information to be shared, TWC AEL staff holds statewide meetings two or three times a year. The time needed to hold a statewide competition for provider services in PY’17–’18 limited TWC’s ability to hold closed meetings for grantees; however, staff continued to make regular site visits, convening grantees from across regions, when feasible, to continue providing program support.

In PY’17–’18, staff also held regular webinars on key program and performance topics to ensure adequate and timely dissemination of information. The largest of the webinars included a series of virtual training sessions held to train small groups on the tracking of newly allowable measurable skill gains once the gains were programmed into the Texas Educating Adults Management System (TEAMS), the state’s information-management system. These virtual training sessions proved invaluable to understanding the gaps in the field and ensuring that programs were adequately supported.

## Monitoring and Evaluating the Quality and Improvement of Adult Education Activities

TWC staff uses multiple strategies to monitor and evaluate the activities being provided across the state.

#### Subrecipient Monitoring

TWC’s AEL staff relies heavily on TWC’s Subrecipient Monitoring (SRM) department to ensure that providers are compliant and are serving as good stewards of federal funds. Grantees are selected annually for on-site reviews based on a robust risk analysis that includes both objective criteria and input from AEL. All AEL grantees are monitored either in person or through a desk review, with all programs receiving on-site monitoring once every three years.

While on-site, SRM staff members review expenditures and records management—including eligibility documentation—and interviews the provider’s staff to confirm that internal processes for participant intake, screening, and placement comply with TWC’s AEL policy. SRM staff members identify records in TEAMS to compare with on-site records, including student test scores, student attendance records, and the staff members’ professional development hours.

The results of SRM reviews enrich the technical assistance targeted to local projects. Additionally, AEL staff members conduct sessions at AEL’s quarterly business meetings to discuss common issues, findings, and best practices, and to encourage peer-to-peer support.

#### Performance Quality Improvement Awards

In PY’17–’18, at its annual conference, TWC again recognized AEL grantees that had achieved outstanding results in workforce integration, college integration, employer engagement, and high school equivalency achievement. Grantees were selected either through a nomination process or through objective data analysis.

Grantees that are recognized by these awards are required to share their successful practices with other grantees statewide. In PY’17–’18, grantees that were recognized at the annual conference hosted site visits, visited other grantees, and participated in virtual training sessions, through TRAIN PD, that covered a variety of topics related to the area of their award.

#### Large-Scale Evaluation Project

In PY’17–’18, TWC’s Division of Operational Insight continued working on a large-scale evaluation process that will analyze the effectiveness of professional development activities as they relate to programmatic outcomes. The project is ongoing.

## Other Permissible State Leadership Activities

TWC supported grantees through a variety of State Leadership activities in PY’17–’18 to support TWC’s performance objectives.

### Ability to Benefit

TWC started the Ability to Benefit pilot project in late PY’15–’16. The two grantees selected for participation developed strategies and best practices to be disseminated statewide for use as Ability to Benefit models in community colleges. The Ability to Benefit provision in federal financial aid allows individuals without a high school diploma or equivalency to receive federal Pell grants, if the individuals are participating in a career pathways program. In addition to developing strategies and best practices, grantees fund tuition and provide other services to students. In PY’17–’18, TWC extended funding for a grantee that had positive outcomes early in the program. One hundred and seventy-eight participants were served by this pilot project, exceeding initial grant projections. Because of the success of the pilot and the statewide interest in the model, a new round of grants will be funded in PY’18–’19.

### Distance Learning Call Center

The Distance Learning Call Center provides just-in-time math support to adult education participants through telephone conversations, screen-sharing, and the use of a virtual whiteboard. The center was designed to provide 20–30-minute tutoring sessions on specific math questions. However, in these first two years since the center opened, TWC found that the sessions last, on average, more than an hour, with many participants requesting additional sessions.

Because of the length of the sessions and the requests for more sessions, TWC revised the model in PY’18–’19 so that tutors were eligible to record their contact time with participants and so grantees could track the time in TEAMS through a subcontract with the project vendor, StudentNest. This revised model encouraged system usage, but TWC staff found that the system was still not used as a hotline for short sessions. Staff therefore revised the model again in late PY’17–’18 and will award additional funding allocated for the project to a select number of grantees who used the system in the first two years.

### Standards Alignment to Industry Clusters

Following the completion of the new, rigorous content standards in PY’16–’17, TWC sought to align the standards to its core mission of increased career pathways and employment opportunities. The alignment of these standards to selected industry clusters resulted in publication of Standards 2.0, a revision of the standards that aligns them the AEL content standards with the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for entry- and middle-skill level occupations in in-demand industry clusters in Texas.

The alignment of the standards involved engaging experts from the different industries selected—Advanced Manufacturing; Construction and Extraction; Healthcare Sciences; and Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics. The experts identified the basic education competencies that are required to work in the occupations within each cluster. The standards can be used to provide meaningful content in AEL instruction.

# Performance Data Analysis

TWC continues to see mixed performance outcomes across core measures, influenced by a variety of factors.

## Achievement of Measurable Skill Gains

As mentioned on page 3 of this report, AEL staff acknowledges continued challenges with program retention, which has resulted in local programs finding it difficult to achieve measurable skill gains. As a result, AEL staff members continue to research the issue and find ways to remediate.

TWC saw decreases in all 12 National Reporting System levels from PY’16–’17 and across nine of the levels for pretested and posttested participants. As TWC held a competition this year, it was anticipated that there would be some disruption in service delivery among grantees towards the latter-half of the program year. Other changes in service delivery included the opportunity to report gains across all domains for grantees as well as new MSG options. AEL and TWC’s Division of Operational Insight are reviewing the data to better understand the issues and develop strategies for providing technical assistance to improve participants’ outcomes in PY’18–’19.

One area of note is that participants in IET models performed, on average, 14 percent better than participants in other models. AEL staff members are analyzing the successful practices of the IET models to see how the practices can be applied to other models. In its new contracts for PY’18–’19, TWC required the implementation of the Academy model, which requires grantees to align a portion of their services to participants’ career and education objectives as opposed to levels. The model is built on the notion that, if participants more quickly see that their career and education objectives are being met through engagement in meaningful curriculum, they will be more engaged, remain engaged, and perform better. Given the higher performance of IET participants, TWC hopes that the model will improve measurable skill gains outcomes as well.

In addition to requiring new models in contracts funded for PY’18–’19, TWC completed its effort to align the TEAMS data collection system with WIOA. The modification gives grantees access to data that is aligned with WIOA methodology, thereby allowing grantees to conduct real-time management and analysis of program performance. The modifications are not yet complete, but TWC believes that the progress made in PY’17–’18 will greatly help TWC manage program performance.

## Achievement of Credential and Employment Outcomes

Because credential and employment measures were in baseline status for PY’17–’18, TWC has no gauge by which to analyze program performance based on federal methodology. However, staff members continue to monitor and analyze program performance using the local and state performance data that is reported to the Texas legislature each quarter.

The number of AEL participants employed or enrolled in postsecondary education in the third through fourth quarters after exit (one of TWC’s legislative targets) increased by 1.82 percent over the last two years, and the number of AEL participants employed or enrolled in postsecondary education in the second quarter after exit has increased slightly, by .36 percent, over the last two years.

The credential rate, the methodology of which aligns with WIOA, has increased by almost 10 percent over the past two years, with a numerator that has doubled in size, indicating a larger number of individuals are exiting the program with the successful outcome of having obtained secondary and postsecondary credentials.

# Integration with One-Stop Partners

TWC AEL grantees served as the one-stop providers under renewal contracts that were executed July 1, 2017, and served as the one-stop providers under contracts awarded during the procurement period in PY’17–’18. The contracts include assurances, as required by TWC’s one-year procurement extension, which was approved October 4, 2016.

TWC briefed AEL providers about requirements and processes related to Board plans, memoranda of understanding, and infrastructure costs, and provided support throughout PY’17–’18 to ensure that appropriate negotiations were taking place. Where applicable, TWC considered allowable administrative increases to pay for infrastructure costs and ensured that such requests were handled during the competition for services that took place in PY’17–’18.

**Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) Program (AEFLA §243)**

The TWC grants that were awarded in 2014 contained requirements for English Literacy and Civics (EL Civics). TWC incorporated new requirements for IELCE into its contracts in 2016 for all 34 of its AEL grantees. During the procurement period in 2017, TWC combined the procurement of regular AEFLA and EL Civics services, requiring the IELCE model of all funded grantees.

## State Efforts to Meet IELCE Requirements

In PY’16–’17, all 34 AEL grant recipients began providing IELCE classes that were designed in combination with IET. Provision continued in PY’17–’18, with an additional 9,514 individuals served by EL Civics models that prepare them for IET, including 2,273 individuals who are coenrolled in EL Civics and IET. To support the integration of this model with IET, TWC developed a differential cost model, calculating at a higher-cost-per participant for the purpose of setting targets for all career pathways models, including IET EL Civics. This additional funding is expected to help pay the costs of aligning the curriculum and help pay the participants’ tuition in postsecondary education and training.

## Preparing and Placing IELCE Program Participants in Unsubsidized Employment

Because the IELCE model is still fairly new, program exiters are only beginning to appear in the available employment data.

One area of growth is IET EL Civics models in entrepreneurial training. The training prepares individuals to successfully own and operate their own businesses, which many are already doing to some extent. By building the entrepreneurial training models into reputable businesses, TWC can better support the objectives of economic self-sufficiency and business growth in Texas.

As a requirement of all program implementation, including the IELCE model, grantees are required to work with their Boards for the purposes of identifying and understanding labor market information, supporting participants with supplemental services to remove barriers from their educational goals, and identifying career opportunities. Additionally, several programs have worked with their Boards to broaden the program’s entrepreneurial curriculum, where applicable, to better serve participants in their region.

A good example is the entrepreneurship literacy programs offered by Workforce Solutions Dallas and the Irving Independent School District. The programs provide ESL and industry-specific training to help participants develop the skills they need to own a business and to provide them with transferrable work skills.

The 18-week training session includes job shadowing, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training. Business partners include Stahls’ clothing and textiles, Fuel Education, Irving Hotel Association partners, including Embassy Suites the Sheraton, the Hilton Double Tree DFW South, and The Home Depot. The in-kind contributions from these partners include instructor training, supplies and materials, on-site presentations, job shadowing, and exposure to financial opportunities for starting businesses. The Irving Hispanic Chamber of Commerce provides mentors experienced in an applicable field to give on-site presentations and demonstrations on developing partnerships. Upon completion of the program, participants receive an industry-specific certificate from one of the business partners.

Last year, 106 participants completed the program. This year, six students joined a cohort of business women in the Irving Hispanic Chamber of Commerce’s business leadership class.

## Key Program Challenges

A key challenge to implementing the IELCE model is that the population of English language learners in Texas varies. South Texas serves individuals who have limited English proficiency but are higher-skilled and can benefit from the IET model. Other areas of the state, such as northeast Texas, serve much smaller numbers of individuals who have limited English proficiency, making it a challenge to develop robust workforce training programs. As a result, many programs focus on lower-skilled English language learners who will benefit from the model in the long run but will take longer to show positive performance outcomes.

# Adult Education Standards

In 2015, TWC contracted with Texas State University (TSU) to lead a project to revise the AEL standards. TSU coordinated input from a wide range of subject matter experts, including representatives from K–12 Education, developmental education, adult education, Texas industries, and postsecondary institutions. TSU submitted a draft of the standards to TWC on June 28, 2016.

Over the past year, TWC has supported its grantees’ implementation of the new standards through a robust dissemination process, which included assigning project leads among the staff of each grantee and training the leads to implement the standards through their grantee. The new standards are rigorous and ambitious, requiring grantees to challenge their staff to take on new roles to help participants prepare for postsecondary education and training and ultimately find employment.

As mentioned earlier in this report, in PY’17–’18, TWC developed the Standards 2.0, which aligns the 2016 version with the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success in entry- and intermediate-level jobs in in-demand industries. The industries selected for this project represent those in which there is documented growth, statewide representation, and career pathways articulation. In PY’18–’19, TWC will begin disseminating the Standards 2.0 in the same robust manner that the 2016 version was disseminated.

# Programs for Corrections Education and the Education of Other Institutionalized Individuals

Individuals who have been incarcerated or have some other criminal history are distinctly challenged in regard to benefitting from AEL services and finding employment. In PY’17–’18, TWC began working with grant recipients to implement reentry models for participants. A total of 456 individuals have been served using the reentry models. Additionally, 50 participants were served in IET models designed for individuals with criminal histories. The models support training individuals who are nearing release to find employment in fitting occupations.

In the cohort data from 2012 and 2013, the most recent years of data available, the rate of recidivism for Texas was 21.31 percent (n=10,180) for the 2012 cohort and 21.04 percent (n=8,949) for the 2013 cohort.

In PY’17–’18, TWC served 2,101 participants who had been incarcerated or had other criminal histories. TWC will continue to follow these participants as well as participants reported in PY’16–’17 (2,029 participants) to determine the recidivism rate of AEL participants.