**Adult Education and Literacy**

**Vermont Narrative Report 2018-19 (State FY19)**

# State Leadership Funds

1. State use of funds made available under Section 223

State Leadership funds are used to support the salaries of three State of Vermont Agency of Education (VAOE) adult education and literacy employees – the State Director, the Database Administrator, and the Program Technician. The State Director manages AEL Federal and State grants, plans and implements the professional development activities and participates in WIOA State Plan implementation, including one-stop partner meetings. The Database Administrator provides technical assistance and training directly to the field on NRS rules and on the local use of the Vermont Adult Education Information System, known as the DataWorks database, to monitor and evaluate instructional activities, assessments, and overall program performance. The Program Technician supports both the State Director and the Database Administrator to monitor, research and revise policy, coordinate communications, and coordinate activities.

*Alignment of AEL activities with other one-stop required partners*

The state director and division director participated in interagency core team meetings that focused on transition to the workforce and postsecondary education and training for students with disabilities. These meetings bring together core partners and other one-stop partners to provide a statewide alignment and leadership to the field, in support of the regional core transition team meetings. Other alignment activities included support to AEL providers in developing intake practices that encourage the provision of career services, regional referral protocols, and core partner cross-training.

A cross-disciplinary workgroup (including Department of Labor, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Community College of Vermont) for the Vermont Department of Correction’s Adult Reentry Strategic grant has participated in systems mapping that includes assessments used by service providers to determine job readiness (includes basic skills assessments) and workforce development services for adults re-entering provided by region. Coordination and planning of AEL services with workgroup members has developed beyond the formal meetings and agenda, including plans to provide professional development to AEL provider staff on best practices in serving this special population.

A plan to roll out eleven regional workforce summits in the fall of 2019 was developed in the reporting period. The summits, a strategy in the state plan, were planned and implemented by a contractor who met with core partners in the summer of 2019 to inform the content and activities of the summits. Businesses and service providers were gathered by region to discuss the regional workforce development needs and inform the development of the revised WIOA Unified State Plan. The contractor will provide a report of the themes and recommendations to the State Workforce Development Board. Additionally, the Vermont Agency of Education has participated in State Workforce Development Board meetings that have included cross-training of core partner programs through presentations from program providers and State-level partners.

A state-funded Career Pathways Coordinator position was established by the Vermont legislature in 2017. This position is tasked with aligning Career Technical Education (CTE) program offerings to the skill needs of growth sectors in Vermont’s economy. Cross team work within the Student Pathways Division, where both CTE and AEL are housed, included meetings to cross-train on Perkins State Plan development, IET programs and WIOA-required activities. The Vermont Agency of Education is working with education and employer stakeholders to build a statewide system of training and educational opportunities in high-growth sectors identified in Vermont’s Unified State Plan and the state’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies: health science, construction and green building design, advanced manufacturing, agriculture and natural resources, information technology/STEM, and hospitality and tourism.

*Professional development programs*

Professional development programs by the VAOE’s AEL staff are designed to improve instruction and assessment practices, ensure high-quality data tracking and reporting, promote and improve equitable access to services, and support continuous improvement through supporting the leadership of local provider programs. What follows is a list of professional development events that occurred in the reporting period:

* BEST Plus 2.0 Refresher Training
  + 13 provider staff representing each of the 4 providers maintain certification to administer this assessment.
* Planning for Formative Assessment of the CCR Standards
  + This face-to-face workshop, presented by New England Literacy Resource Center staff, helps instructors apply the principles of formative assessment to the CCR English Language Arts (ELA) Standards. It focuses on what to look for to determine whether students can apply their learning to real tasks and how they might capture that evidence. Participants consider ways to include students in the development of assessment tools and in the use of assessment information.
* New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) webinars are presented live, recorded and made available on the NELRC’s website.
  + For instructors and leadership staff:
    - Addressing Implicit Bias in the Classroom
    - Incorporating Technology to Support Workforce Skills
    - Teaching Critical Thinking and Argumentation
    - Where Math and ELA Skills Overlap
  + For provider leadership staff:
    - Building a Teacher Pipeline
    - Communicating/Marketing Adult Education’s Value
    - Differentiated Supervision and Support
    - Getting More from Your Data
    - IET Programs: How are They Evolving?
    - Preparing for the 2020 Census
* Personalized Learning Plans: Integrating Practices of HSCP and Act 77
  + This face-to-face This session provided an opportunity for AEL’s High School Completion Program (HSCP) staff to share promising practices, identify needs and challenges, and next steps to ensure that PLPs reflect fully integrated, rigorous and equitable experiences for students in the HSCP.
* STAR Program training
  + Through a contract with a New Hampshire Trainer, five people participated in the hybrid STAR training and four completed. There are now eleven STAR program instructors in Vermont, representing all four providers.
* Voices Training: Hope & Humor: Exploring Growth Mindset . . . With a Dose of Laughter
  + This day-long training to strengthen reading and discussion in instruction is presented by the Vermont Humanities Council staff several times each year. The training includes modeling and practice and each participant receives free books that are high-quality literature to stimulate discussions about history or other contexts.

Vermont also participated in the IELCE Building Opportunities Collaborative beginning in the fall of 2017, which included five coaching sessions with Joanie Rethlake in the reporting period. The coaching and tools have proven useful to the state as we have adapted a one-sheet for IET programs and participated in the IELCE self-assessment.

The VAOE requires that local providers annually update individual professional development plans for each direct service staff member. A template for the IPDP is posted on the VAOE’s website along with the professional development handbook, which describes the requirements for new staff to take assessment courses accessed through LINCS. Local providers are encouraged to use state grant funds to support professional development activities for their staff.

*Provision of technical assistance*

Technical assistance activities were robust and continuous. Two of the four local providers transitioned into new leadership as their executive directors retired at the end of the previous year. The VAOE, including the acting Secretary, invited each of the new executive directors to a meeting in order to provide a State perspective on the local provider’s strengths and challenges, explain the grant agreement requirements, and establish open communication.

Other technical assistance activities are listed below:

* AEL Budget Development Training
  + To assist local providers in creating a proposed budget for FY20 using a new State-developed budget template that aligns with other VAOE grant budgets. The workshop also included a review of the supplement and not supplant provision, the match requirement, direct/indirect costs, how to apply for an indirect rate, and other requirements.
* AEL Provider leadership meetings/trainings
  + The State held four meetings to collaborate on intake processes, clarify policy, and gather input to inform policy development. In addition, time at each meeting was set aside to provide training. Topics included: utilizing the digital library to access curriculum and formative assessments, understanding the requirement that Vermont schools develop proficiency-based graduation requirements, accessing Vocational Rehabilitation services for students with disabilities, and understanding the role of AEL providers in implementing the State-funded High School Completion Program.
* Data Specialist Training
  + Three events take place annually to train appointed local staff to oversee and support high quality and timely data entry.
* Implicit Bias training
  + The State requires that all local provider staff receive this training in order to better understand unconscious bias to ensure equitable access to employees and students. The State collaborated with the Vermont Human Rights Commission to provide the two events held in the reporting period.
* NRS Annual Refresher training – two live webinars were held by State staff.
  + Vermont provides two opportunities each spring for all program staff to participate in the mandatory NRS Annual Refresher training. The trainings require 100% provider staff participation. The training consists of a review of targets and performance for the WIOA Measurable Skill Gains measure, annual assessment policy updates, and a review of program improvement strategies. Embedded in the training are updates of NRS and WIOA reporting requirements for the upcoming program year as well as a complete review of the Federal statistical tables and the State Performance Report.
* Understanding Career Services Delivery and Tracking: Adult Education’s Role in the One-Stop System
  + This live webinar was created and presented by State AEL staff to support intake and other direct service staff to understand the role of Title II in WIOA, define career services, and to deliver and track career services. The webinar was recorded, closed captioned and made available on YouTube.

*Monitoring and evaluation of AEL activities*

On-site monitoring engaged two providers and took place at four learning centers: St. Johnsbury, Newport, Burlington, and Springfield. On-site monitoring included meetings with students, leadership staff, instructors, one-stop partners, and high school partners (who issue diplomas to students participating in the High School Completion Program). Classroom observations were also conducted.

Desk monitoring is conducted throughout the year for all providers though more intensive desk monitoring occurs for those receiving on-site visits. The on-site monitoring includes financial and student record reviews. Other desk monitoring activities in the reporting period included a review of personalized learning plans and assessment practices, reviews of local provider narrative reports and end of year budget reports, data analysis of provider performance including performance comparisons to prior years, and quarterly audits of student data records. All IET programs are approved by the VAOE, enrollment and completion numbers are tracked for IET participants in the database, and local providers must provide a narrative report of IET activities at the end of the year.

As the result of desk monitoring, one local provider was placed on a Corrective Action Plan (CAP). The CAP was developed with the provider’s input to include benchmarks. Three benchmark meetings were held with the provider to provide technical assistance and to ensure that the plan was being implemented with fidelity. The same provider was also monitored by the VAOE’s business office for fiscal compliance. As a result, a second CAP is in process.

The State developed a new, more detailed budget template for local providers to use for budget proposal submission during the reporting period. A budget development workshop coincided with the release of the template. The new budget template increases the State’s ability to monitor budget expenditures through detailed line items, organized by funding source, learning center impacted and State standardized object and function codes that align with other types of grants the Vermont Agency of Education awards and regulates.

1. Additional permissible activities

The VAOE continues to maintain membership in the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC). All four of Vermont’s AEL provider executive directors sit on the NELRC board, which meets three times a year. Professional development opportunities provided by the NELRC, as listed above, are developed with board input and direction.

The state director made site visits to the two providers receiving IELCE funds to discuss the program through a technical assistance lens, including the development of IETs. Parties agreed that holding statewide meetings for those implementing IET programs would be a useful strategy. A needs assessment will be conducted to guide the development of an IET training event.

Significant technical assistance was provided to ensure compliance and best practices for serving students with disabilities. TA took the form of consulting with the VAOE’s special education team, Vocational Rehabilitation’s transition specialists, and assisting local providers to find resources for specific students. Providers have been alerted to the responsibilities of schools to serve students with disabilities, which has empowered providers to better inform students who are entitled to receive special education services through the K-12 system. The VAOE has consulted with several schools considering sending students on IEPs to AEL and has unequivocally asserted that students must be provided with their entitlement under IDEA and that AEL is not required or equipped to provide special education services. Schools and providers are held to meeting requirements while holding the best interest of students in the forefront.

# Performance Data Analysis

The State of Vermont’s WIOA Title II program has met Federal performance targets for the past two years. This improvement in outcomes for students as demonstrated through increases in Educational Functioning Levels (EFLs) is a direct result of adherence to statute and policy. The charts below show progress over a five-year period, both as a state overall and as individual providers.

The greatest areas of improvement in completing levels came with the ASE and ESL levels 1 and 3 populations as shown below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Population and Level** | **FY18** | **FY19** |
| ASE Level 5 | 47.83% | 59.87% |
| ASE Level 6 | 36.16% | 47.55% |
| ESL Level 1 | 34.78% | 42.03% |
| ESL Level 3 | 32.65% | 50.00% |

The number of Vermont students served by AEL that qualified for the federal report in FY19 (1,549) showed a small drop compared to the number of students that qualified during FY18 (1,558). However, 70% of all students served in Vermont qualified for the federal report as compared to 63% in FY18 and 54% in FY17. This sustained improvement is the direct result of the state’s work with local programs to engage students continuously.

Vermont VAOE staff emphasized the need to increase progress assessment (a.k.a. post-assessment) rates in order to meet performance targets. Although we saw measurable improvement in FY18 there was a drop off in percentages of progress assessment rates by all local providers in FY19 for the federal report population. These drops are due in part to the introduction of the TABE 11/12 on 7/1/2018 for new students with full implementation on 7/1/2019. State staff will continue to monitor and provide technical assistance to emphasize the connection between progress assessment rates and meeting performance targets. State staff will also continue to provide technical assistance in FY20 in response to local providers reporting that the length of the TABE 11/12 assessment is negatively affecting retention, which reduces the provider’s ability to administer progress assessments.

Comparison of provider post-assessment for the federal population rates:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Provider** | **2016-2017** | **2017-2018** | **2018-2019** |
| CVABE | 51.28% | 65.00% | 51.77% |
| NEKLS | 49.13% | 53.17% | 49.25% |
| TTC | 38.27% | 39.04% | 38.38% |
| VAL | 37.51% | 50.37% | 49.75% |
| **Statewide** | **40.91%** | **52.18%** | **49.39%** |

# Integration with One-stop Partners

Vermont has a single federally-recognized One-Stop American Job Center located in Burlington, the most populous city in the state. The revised MOU delineated the roles and services of the partners, including the career services provided. Career services provided by Title II programs include all of the allowed services as described in Attachment 7 of Program Memorandum 17-2.

The state delegated responsibility to AEL providers in program year 2017-2018 to provide the identified services. The focus in the first year was on the single one-stop in Burlington. In the second year, 2017-2018, the focus had expanded to include all providers in all regions to establish intake and referral procedures. In addition, the local providers are charged with working to ensure that regional one-stop partners understand AEL services and when to make appropriate referrals.

Local providers report that they have open invitations with core partners to attend one another’s orientation sessions, they meet on a regular basis regionally, and they are conducting warm referrals that sometimes involve accompanying students to introduce them to one-stop partner staff. They have ensured that core partners understand the services they provide and continue to build and maintain positive relationships. Some regions have written protocols for referrals, while others are still working toward formalizing their practices in writing.

VAOE worked with core partners to finalize the Infrastructure Funding Agreement, which took effect on January 1, 2018. The Title II contribution costs will be distributed by the VAOE, though no invoices have been received to date.

# Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) Program

*State competition for IELCE program funds*

Vermont’s most recent competition was held in the spring of 2017, which awarded two local providers IELCE funds for a three-year period. Vermont Adult Learning (VAL) received the bulk (87.6%) of available funds ($60,000) based on the need within the geographic area served. Central Vermont Adult Basic Education (CVABE) was granted the smaller portion of the funds.

*Providing IELCE services in combination with integrated education and training (IET) activities*

Of the 320 students served through the IELCE program, five students completed IET programs. Providers have experienced multiple barriers in designing IET programs that meet the needs of the small population of IELCE participants. CVABE had 58 IELCE students spread across three counties. The IET developed by CVABE served three cohorts during FY19. The IET was robust with strong partnerships in an in-demand industry (hospitality and tourism, specifically culinary arts). Unfortunately, no IELCE participants were able to participate though the program was made available to them. CVABE cites several reasons for not identifying a cohort of IELCE participants that would drive the development of an IET: the small number of ESL students in their service region; some are unable to work based on their legal status and/or family obligations; employment opportunities are readily available to them currently; and a variety of interests and educational backgrounds. The VAOE has made clear that CVABE must continue to explore ways to develop IET programs that will serve the IELCE population.

As the largest provider of IELCE services, VAL has also experienced challenges in creating IET programs that meet the needs of their ESL population. They ran three cohorts of an IET program that addresses the in-demand industry of healthcare, particularly in personal care and nursing assistants. The IET offers a Personal Care Attendant (PCA) training component. It took several attempts to ensure that the program was meeting the requirement of concurrent rather than sequential. Each cohort was small at the beginning with less than 10 students. Some were unable to complete the entire program due to competing responsibilities, the diversity of student schedules, or because some could only attend the training component and did not participate in the AEL activities. Several students did complete, however, and other cohorts are participating in the program in FY20 to build on the momentum as the program meets a need in the largest county in the state.

*Progress toward goals of preparing and placing IELCE program participants in unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries*

All IETs serve as entry points to career pathways in in-demand industries. Providers often rely on partners such as the Department of Labor, who is experienced with career placement. VAL’s PCA IET does result in placement at nursing homes, who are always in need of personal care attendants due to high turnover in the field.

*Progress toward ensuring that IELCE program activities are integrated with the local workforce development system and its functions*

Both AEL providers collaborate with local one-stop partners and their local workforce investment board (or with the group or entity addressing functions of local investment boards). During the reporting period, activities included:

* Collaborating with the Association of Africans Living in Vermont (who provided the training component of the healthcare IET) and a local community action council (who provided the training component of the culinary arts IET.)
* Conducting outreach through the Refugee Immigrant Service Providers Network.
* Providing work readiness support and job placement service through Reach Up – Vermont’s TANF program that helps eligible parents gain job skills and find work so they can support their minor, dependent children.
* Teaming up with local colleges to develop entry-level career options and access to training in healthcare and manufacturing as a partner to the federally-funded Strengthening Working Families Initiative.
* Collaborating with VSAC to provide outreach coordinator/counselors who meet with interested students at learning centers to match academic and career goals with funding and training programs.
* Attendance at open State Workforce Development Board meetings as guests in order to collaborate, stay informed, and share information about AEL activities.

Challenges include the need for continuous messaging about Title II activities, as AEL often is misidentified as Adult Technical Education. English Language instruction as an AEL activity is not universally understood. For example, the state legislature passed a bill in 2019 to provide state funds for English language instruction based on a belief that those services were not readily available. Another misunderstanding about Title II is that only people who do not have a high school diploma are eligible for AEL services. Concerted regional efforts have been made through ongoing communication and cross-training with one-stop partners to raise awareness among employers about services available for the ESL population and for others who lack basic skills needed for their jobs, such as math and writing skills.

In addition, the role of Title II as a core partner is also sometimes overlooked in the state, perhaps because it is easier to understand that the other core partners have one name each with regional offices of the same name, whereas the AEL system in Vermont is delivered by four separate entities with four different names. The lesson learned is that the VAOE and the local providers must take advantage of every opportunity to be at the table where collaborations and decisions are made that affect services to WIOA-eligible customers.

# Adult Education Standards

Vermont’s Flexible Pathways Initiative includes Dual Enrollment, Early College, Career and Technical Education, Work-Based Learning, Expanded Learning Opportunities, and the High School Completion Program (HSCP).  This statute, “Flexible Pathways to Secondary School Completion,” also requires secondary schools serving publicly-funded students to create Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) for all students in grades 7-12, and flexible pathways to secondary school completion which can include opportunities for learning that fall outside of a traditional school setting.

The 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 (approximately 86% in 2018-2019) who participate in the HSCP are unenrolled from school. Adult Education and Literacy providers are responsible for developing a personalized learning plan with the student and the assigned high school that will meet the graduation requirements of the high school in the student’s district of residence.

Additionally, Vermont’s State Plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) aligns with adult education in several ways. Career and College Readiness indicators will be used to measure academic proficiency, as well as graduation rates, English language proficiency, and standards in English language arts and mathematics. Of special note are the career and college ready indicators that will be used as part of ESSA, which are also outcomes tracked under WIOA.

ESSA requires that States hold schools accountable for the graduation rate using the federal definition of a 4-year cohort calculation. Vermont will also measure the percentage of students graduating within a 6-year extended graduation rate. In 2014, the Vermont State Board of Education adopted the Education Quality Standards, which call for a proficiency-based graduation requirement that emphasizes mastery rather than time as the critical factor in determining if a student has met career and college ready expectations. As such, students are encouraged to pursue flexible pathways that enrich their learning and better prepare them for positive post-secondary outcomes. Consistent with this legislation and with adult education, Vermont places greater value on completion of secondary school with mastery of critical skills than completion within a traditional timeframe.

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

As described in the Vermont Unified State Plan, AEL funds were not competed to provide education for incarcerated individuals, who are enrolled in the Community High School of Vermont and therefore do not meet the definition of eligible individuals under WIOA, Title II.