**Montana Narrative Report 2019-2020**

**State Leadership Funds**

**1. State Leadership Funds (AEFLA Section 223)**

**(a) Describe how the State has used funds made available under section 223 (State Leadership activities) for each the following required activities:**

* **Alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other one-stop required partners to implement the strategies in the Unified or Combined State Plan as described in section 223(1)(a).**

A primary use of leadership funds has always been to further enhance the WIOA vision and mission such as including career pathway integration into the adult education classroom to align with the employment and training services of our core partners. Programs continue to analyze instruction, number of hours per week, commercially developed materials used, computer software/distance learning platforms utilized, and types of instructor developed material for each educational functioning level. This analysis assists teachers in discovering how well the materials they use provide contextualized learning experiences with a scope and sequence that truly supports the college and career readiness standards and student transition to employment, postsecondary education, and training. Teachers engage in reflective activities that help them understand how they are meeting core partner needs through adult education instructional activities. Core partner coordination, recruitment of diverse clients, intake, orientation, and client services remain integral to career pathway integration. Coordination of services is crucial to recruit and provide services to clients in a manner that result in occupational training, postsecondary education, and employment in a progressive career path.

Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs have been an ongoing focus of WIOA Title II Adult Education providers in Montana. Local programs continually work to develop IET programs that are aligned with student interests and needs. Relationships with community partners and local businesses are critical in designing and implementing these relevant IET programs. WIOA Title II Adult Education providers keep updated contact information for all partners they work with in their regional area. At the end of each program year, those partners are asked to complete a survey to evaluate knowledge of and services provided by WIOA Title II Adult Education providers. This survey allows the State and local providers to gauge satisfaction, make necessary improvements, and/or tailor services in their regional area.

The State recognizes the need to expand and strengthen existing components of career pathway instruction provided by all local adult education programs. The State continues to use the statewide career pathway curriculum via Montana Career Information System (MCIS) and our web-based math and English curriculum, EdReady. EdReady allows teachers to develop and use a variety of instructional strategies for lessons within this learning platform. Teachers across the State use lessons to positively influence student retention, high school equivalency attainment, and preparedness for postsecondary education and training. MCIS is a robust career-planning tool that motivates students to think about their next steps beyond adult education and engages them in thoughtful short- and long-term planning for further education and job attainment. Teachers integrate these materials and learning activities into existing career counseling activities. The use of MCIS and EdReady creates a systemic approach to adult education instruction across programs. In addition, the State includes components relevant to career pathways during fall/spring meetings and adult education staff have opportunities to network and learn from colleagues throughout the State. The State also created an IET work group that will convene Fall 2020 to focus efforts on IET program development, resources, and best practices.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for Montana, just as it has been for other areas of the nation. As of March 2020, WIOA Title II Adult Education providers faced facility closures and were tasked with transitioning educational services to a virtual format. Programs then operated at a reduced capacity, virtually, or in a hybrid fashion through the end of the program year. The State saw an increase in requests to approve additional distance learning platforms and programs began assessing students virtually using TABE and/or informal assessments. Programs became innovative and creative in order to serve students via Zoom, Google, telephone, etc. In fact, some local program staff even went into the homes of students to get technology setups established.

* **Establishment or operation of a high quality professional development programs as**

**described in section 223(1)(b).**

The State determined that an essential element of a high quality professional development program was the establishment of rules regarding required hours for professional development and the ability to track teacher participation. Therefore, the State developed business language for a professional development tracking component that is included in the data management system. The State policies were updated, as this gives the State the ability to analyze teacher participation in professional development and its impact on student outcomes. All programs are expected to participate in State sponsored professional development activities as well as required to seek out other professional development opportunities that align with their specific needs.

The State regularly elicits feedback from teachers to generate an understanding from their perspective on what is meaningful to support high quality professional development offerings. The State encourages teacher reflection and opportunities via collaborative meetings and field surveys to identify critical professional development needs. The State takes recommendations from the field that may lead to professional development activities for the dissemination of information and promising best practices. Ultimately, the State is committed to offering professional development opportunities that will meet the learning needs of diverse adult students.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual spring meeting sponsored by the State was held virtually via Zoom. The positive feedback given from program staff was astounding. Programs appreciated being able to keep their programs operating, while still being able to attend professional development activities. The flexible agenda allowed a variety of program staff to attend the most applicable sessions. The virtual platform truly saved programs significant travel expenses and resulted in overall increased participation by staff across all programs. The State plans to continue utilizing the virtual platform for future meetings and professional development activities, as it was extremely well received. In addition, the State plans to implement program lead, virtual monthly Shop Talks for 2020-2021. This will allow all programs opportunities to share with other programs and showcase something that has been working well. The State hopes this will elicit positive feedback and results across all local programs.

* **Provision of technical assistance to funded eligible providers as described in section**

**223(1)(c).**

The State provided technical assistance to local programs as needed. State staff continually analyzed data, fielded questions/inquiries, and disseminated pertinent information to adult education providers. Technical assistance came after monthly desk audits of program data and performance or was determined and provided as needed on a case-by-case basis. Zoom has allowed the State to meet with local program staff, observe virtual classrooms, and engage in collaborative discussions with colleagues throughout the state. In addition, the State worked to develop a Google Site for WIOA Adult Education providers. This site, scheduled to launch Fall 2020, is a common place to share applicable resources and collaborate with colleagues statewide.

* **Monitoring and evaluation of the quality and improvement of adult education activities as described in section 223(1)(d).**

During the 2019-2020 program year, each program was monitored via desk audits. These monthly reports were mandatory for all programs. The reports had two sections, data analysis and a partner collaboration/activity log. The data analysis section required programs to report and analyze data on the educational gains for each functioning level, the number of students exited, the number of students post-tested, total attendance hours, and the number of high school equivalency completers. The partner collaboration/activity log section documented the programs ongoing work with agency partners to support their career pathway integration and coordination of services. Programs were required to report on all monthly activities with current partners and identify new partner meetings and activities. In addition, it was required that the program report on the outcome, or anticipated outcome, with the partner. The partner collaboration/activity log also required that the programs document ongoing strategies for increasing educational gains and specify what recruitment activities were completed throughout the month. The partner collaboration/activity log will become the basis for identifying models of promising practices.

State staff also continued revising a guiding document to use for program monitoring that directly aligned to the original WIOA Adult Education RFP. That monitoring tool will be used to monitor all local programs either onsite or virtually. The State also implemented peer monitoring, onsite or virtually, as well. All programs were required to visit and observe another program, gleaning new information and resources to implement. Local programs found this meaningful and beneficial. As mentioned previously, the State was able to observe virtual classrooms and activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the State is confident that future virtual monitoring visits would be manageable and successful. The State also hopes to work on updating monitoring processes to better align with federal monitoring requirements.

**(b) As applicable, describe how the State has used funds for additional permissible activities described in section 223(a)(2).**

Other activities supported by leadership dollars included: Director/Instructor Fall and Spring Conferences, distribution of pertinent information, assessment training, purchase of distance learning curriculum or educational materials, and monthly Shop Talks for program directors. It is important to note that a majority of state leadership funding is used to completely cover the cost of LACES for all programs. The 2019-2020 program year was the first academic year with LACES. Local programs and the State were highly impressed with the robust data management system itself as well as the support/training received from LiteracyPro personnel. Because LACES is so costly in relation to overall leadership funding Montana has available, other state leadership expenditures and opportunities are limited. However, transitioning to this robust and accurate data management system has been an extremely beneficial change for WIOA Title II Adult Education programs in Montana.

**2. Performance Data Analysis**

**Describe how the adult education program performed in the overall assessment of core**

**programs based on the core indicators of performance. Discuss how the assessment was used to improve quality and effectiveness of the funded eligible providers and any plans to further increase performance in future reporting years**.

The COVID-19 pandemic definitely had an impact on Montana’s WIOA Title II Adult Education services and overall performance for the 2019-2020 program year. Many services halted as of March 2020 when programs faced mandatory closures, which resulted in the suspension of in-person assessment and instruction. Programs scrambled to implement distant learning initiatives, establish virtual classrooms and adjusted overall program procedures. Outreach via phone, e-mail, and text message was common but did not receive overly high response rates early into the pandemic. Programs turned focus and efforts to client support—such as how to get internet connectivity and computers/tablets to students to continued service.

Montana primarily served WIOA Title II Adult Education students in-person prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some programs opened back up with reduced class sizes and implemented COVID-19 specific restrictions in May, the State’s MSG rate was relatively stagnant from March 2020 to the end of the program year. The State only recognized 168 MSGs from March 18, 2020 to June 30, 2020. In comparison, the state recognized 295 MSGs during the same timeframe of the previous program year. Posttesting and IET programs suffered. There was a decrease of in-person assessments given for the students at or above the threshold for posttesting. The IET components such as clinical assignments were placed on hold. The State recommended virtual assessments, job shadowing, and training simulations if applicable. Virtual TABE assessments became available in early May, but there was lag time to roll that out across all programs as staff needed additional training and students needed to establish secure technology setups. Inevitably, not all programs were able to virtually assess students due to a variety of constraints including technology or staff availability. Also, no virtual assessment option for BEST Literacy resulted in some loss of ELL posttests. One local program got extremely creative and utilized the community college Wi-Fi to administer posttests in the campus parking lot.

While some students excelled at learning from home, many did not. Programs reported that students often had issues accessing internet services or did not have a computer at home. Inevitably, bandwidth issues were common as were interruptions such as juggling distance learning requirements for children at home. Also, the lack of motivation, high stress levels/cognitive loads, health concerns, family stressors, and modality challenges were apparent with many students. The programs that were able to continue services spent many hours supporting students and helping get them up to speed with technology. Navigating new services, finding distance learning platforms, and holding classes virtually was very time consuming for both teachers and students. Abruptly changing from in-person teaching and learning to distance teaching and learning created many barriers for adult learners. Although, some programs found that successes came easier than in other programs. One local program stated they were better able to mitigate the effects COVID-19 had on their data/success because of their previously implemented cohort model. For example, by the time the COVID-19 pandemic hit, they had already established ongoing relationships and appropriate communication methods with the cohort of students they were serving. Smaller programs seemed to not fare as well as larger programs during the transition to online service delivery. Larger programs have more resources including access to staff, technology, and educational materials.

Most HiSET test centers closed for several weeks and then operated with a reduced number of testing spots upon reopening. If students were ready to HiSET test, they were at the mercy of test center availability. Alternately, if students had appropriate technology, secure space, and adequate internet connectivity then the HiSET at Home exam was an option. However, the HiSET at Home exam was not ready for deployment in Montana until end of June 2020. Also, the HiSET at Home exam is quite expensive, which can be a heavy burden for this population of students.

There were ultimately many barriers and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are confident that had students been served in-person continuously, EFL and MSGs would be at or above where we were in previous program years. Some smaller programs did not have any new reportable students after March 2020, while the larger programs continued services and increased overall enrollment but at a lower rate compared to previous years. We are correlating continued service and increased enrollment in those larger programs due to heartier infrastructure, as well as more staff and developed resources.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **3/29/2019** | **4/1/2020** | **5/31/2019** | **6/1/2020** | **6/30/2019** | **6/30/2020** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total enrolled** | 1334 | 1483 | 1561 | 1543 | 1601 | 1575 |
| **Attendance hours** | 86716 | 104033 | 107651 | 117441 | 113189 | 123119 |
| **EFL gains** | 348 | 282 | 445 | 321 | 473 | 361 |
| **HSE gains** | 221 | 227 | 335 | 243 | 391 | 289 |
| **Separated no MSG** | 221 | 304 | 306 | 552 | 737 | 589 |
| **% of POPS with MSG** | 43% | 34% | 50% | 36.40% | 54% | 41.20% |

* 2019 final enrollment count – 1601 students
* 2020 final enrollment count – 1575 students
* 2019 increased total enrollment from late March to end of program year – 267 people
* 2020 increased total enrollment from late March to end of program year – 92 people (175 less people enrolled in that time frame)
* 2019 attendance hours – 113,189
* 2020 attendance hours – 123,199 (approximately 10,000 additional instruction hours logged)
* 2019 attendance hours between late March to end of program year – 26,473 hours
* 2020 attendance hours between late March to end of program year – 19,086 hours
* 2019 increased number EFL gains from late March to end of program year – 125
* 2020 increased number EFL gains from late March to end of program year – 79
* 2019 increased the numbers of HSE gains from late March to end of program year – 170
* 2020 increased the numbers of HSE gains from late March to end of program year – 62
* 2019 percentage of POPs with MSG total change from late March to end of program year – increase of 11%
* 2020 percentage of POPs with MSG total change from late March to end of program year –increase of 7%

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

**Describe how the State eligible agency, as the entity responsible for meeting one-stop**

**requirements under 34 CFR part 463, subpart J, carries out or delegates its required one-stop roles to eligible providers. Describe the applicable career services that are provided in the one-stop system. Describe how infrastructure costs are supported through State and local options.**

The Adult Education State Director is a member of the State Workforce Innovation Board and serves on the WIOA Committee for this board. In this capacity, the State Director is directly involved in all one-stop discussions and decisions at the State level. This provides an opportunity to share the perspective of adult education in one-stop agenda topics and action items. Although the COVID-19 pandemic affected in-person events, this workforce board was able to continue meeting virtually.

The State continues to work collaboratively with the other core partners to provide one-stop services in each of our 12 Montana Association of County (MACo) Districts. Through a variety of meetings, representatives from each core partner agency continue to utilize the WIOA Collaborative Agreement previously developed that describes our overarching one-stop mission. The agreement covers integrating core partnerships, a proposed service delivery model, the role of the community management team, and outreach to employers. The collaborative agreement has been sent to core partner staff working in each MACo District to guide them in delivering one-stop services. This agreement is the foundation for future core partner meetings and discussions of services. Also, at the beginning of the 2017-2018 program year, an initial MOU regarding the infrastructure costs was initiated, drafted, and signed by core partner agencies. That MOU continues to be utilized, evaluated, and renewed as necessary.

During the WIOA Adult Education RFP Competition in Spring 2017, all eligible providers were required to respond to specific questions documenting how they would be responsible for meeting the one-stop requirements that the State would delegate to them. The eligible providers were required to provide basic, individual, and follow-up career services. Basic services include a wide range of services from assessment to referrals to other programs and community partners. All adult education teachers have completed activities on accessing and understanding labor market data; all teachers have a working knowledge of labor market data that will be essential for delivering the career services. In our WIOA State Plan, all core partners committed to use the Montana Career Information System (MCIS) to provide individualized career services. All WIOA clients will set up a career portfolio that can be seamlessly transferred from one agency to another. The portfolio will include skills inventories, specialized career path assessments, and short- and long-term employment goals that are relevant for the client’s chosen career pathway. This statewide systemic approach to meeting individual career services will provide clients with streamlined career services with no duplication of activities to be completed. Regardless of the core partner that begins the individual career services, the client can be assured that all planning and information will be readily available to all agencies who are providing core partner services. WIOA Title II Adult Education providers meet with core partners such as Job Service or Vocational Rehabilitation, as well as other community partners, in their regional areas multiple times throughout the program year.

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

**243)**

**Describe how the State is using funds under Section 243 to support the following activities under the IELCE program**:

* **Describe when your State held a competition [the latest competition] for IELCE**

**program funds and the number of grants awarded by your State to support IELCE**

**programs.**

During the Adult Education RFP Competition in Spring 2017 under WIOA, two providers were awarded the IELCE funds for the 2017-2018 program year. Extension plans were required for subsequent years. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, related challenges as well as a shift in service modalities and delivery, the next WIOA Adult Education RFP Competition is scheduled for Spring 2022.

* **Describe your State efforts in meeting the requirement to provide IELCE services in**

**combination with integrated education and training activities**.

To understand the IELCE requirement and provide services under WIOA, the State was in continuous contact with the two IELCE providers. The purpose was to assist those two local programs and ELL teachers in developing an understanding of how they could expand their existing services to provide required IELCE services. The following modules are utilized with ELL students: Exploring MCIS, Student Skills Inventories and Interest Profiler, Exploring Occupations, and Researching Education and Training. The two IELCE providers are among our largest and most successful programs in the State. Their personnel are highly qualified and effective when working with this population of adult learners.

Over the past program year, the ELL teachers have been participants in all State-level workshops. Their participation allowed them to work with the adult education teachers in the creation of standards-based lesson plans and contextualized learning plans. This participation provided them the opportunity to see the planning required to prepare students for secondary credential attainment or transition to postsecondary education, training, and employment.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, IELCE and IET programs experienced disruption. One of the IELCE providers ensured their ELL students had access to technology and distance learning options by visiting their homes to help with initial setup. Citizenship classes were offered via a hybrid model so students could attend in-person or virtually. Students were able to complete an online Community Interpreter Training Certification program as well. These students engaged in this specific training certification program in-person or virtually.

ELL instructors (in-person and virtual) instructed students on the COVID-19 health and safety concerns in the following ways:

* Use of online resources such as New for You or Essential Education, integrated into reading and language lessons
* Introduction of vocabulary related to the pandemic so students understand the symptoms and where to seek medical treatment
* Guided students to understand building protocols so they were able to answer questions related to their health
* Use of measurements (yard stick, tape measure, etc.) to help students understand social distancing
* Referrals to partners for assistance with unemployment due to the pandemic
* Provided limited number of Chromebooks for students to participate in virtual learning
* **Describe how the State is progressing towards program goals of preparing and placing IELCE program participants in unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency as described in section 243(c)(1) and discuss any performance results, challenges, and lessons learned from implementing those program goals.**

The State previously sent an ELL lead teacher to participate in a three day Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) training presented by Miriam Burt. The teacher returned to Montana as a train-the-trainer to share cutting edge strategies on how to incorporate workforce strategies into the ESOL classroom. The strategies were based on the College and Career Readiness (CCR) standards with a focus on integration that connects reading, writing, and vocabulary using workplace situations. Additionally, there was a focus on soft skills so students have a cultural basis for reading exercises and workplace information.

That ELL lead teacher remains a strong and reliable resource for other ELL teachers throughout the State. She also continues to serve as the lead trainer for Best Plus and other ELL related trainings. She provided a BEST Plus training in August 2019. In addition, she leads ELL work groups and supports ELL activities throughout the State.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an IELCE provider collaborated with the Job Service/Pathways program, International Rescue Committee (IRC) and a childcare facility to develop a training program that will begin in January 2021. This program was specifically designed to teach ELL students the skills necessary to pass the certifications to work in a licensed childcare facility.

* **Describe how the State is progressing towards program goals of ensuring that IELCE program activities are integrated with the local workforce development system and its functions as described in section 243(c)(2) and discuss any performance results, challenges, and lessons learned from implementing those program goals.**

MCIS, which the ELL teachers have been trained to use with their students, has all the current Montana workforce information. This gives the teachers all labor market data and workforce information for the State. The State previously contracted with a lead teacher to build an adult/ELL student checklist within the MCIS system. Through this customization, the teachers can integrate relevant workforce activities into their instructional practice.

In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, one IELCE provider developed and delivered a healthcare literacy program for ELL students that also included CPR/First-Aid certification to prepare students for entry-level employment in healthcare fields. This was the result of a collaboration of IRC, Job Service and a residential long-term care facility. Ongoing participation in refugee employment meetings helps the program stay connected with the needs of this population in their community.

**5. Adult Education Standards**

**If your State has adopted new challenging K-12 standards under title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended, describe how your Adult Education content standards are aligned with those K-12 standards.**

The Montana Board of Public Education, upon recommendation from the Superintendent of Public Instruction, adopted the Montana Content Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics, on November 4, 2011. These standards, along with Science standards adopted in 2016, ensure that secondary students have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the 21st century economy.  Skills include problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, teamwork, research, and the use of technology.

In February 2015, the Adult Education (AE) Unit at the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) adopted the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards for Adult Education. These standards identify the essential CCR components required to be incorporated into the adult education classroom. By adopting these standards, Montana’s AE programs will have student expectations that are consistent with K-12 students. Additionally, AE programs will have access to K-12 tools and materials that support student learning.

* **Optional – Describe implementation efforts, challenges, and any lessons learned**

The State previously sent two adult education lead teachers and a professional development coordinator to the OCTAE 2016 CCR Standards Implementation Institute. The team brought all the information back to adult education and ELL teachers by presenting a two-day Summer Institute that gave all participants the occasion to delve deeply into the standards to understand key advances in their content areas. These individuals still serve as valuable resources for the other adult education teachers throughout the State. In fact, one of these teachers worked diligently to create an online course for mathematic standards in adult education during the 2018-2019 program year. This online professional development course is available for adult educators in our State, free of charge. It is important to note that enrollment in online professional development courses increased with the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

**Individuals (AEFLA Section 225)**

**What was the relative rate of recidivism for criminal offenders served? Please describe the** **methods and factors used in calculating the rate for this reporting period.**

The Montana Department of Corrections follows the Association of State Correctional Administrator’s (ASCA) definition of recidivism.

Recidivism rate– the rate at which adult offenders return to prison in Montana for any reason within three years of their release from prison. Each release can have only one corresponding return.

Given this definition, we would need to wait three full years before we could calculate a recidivism rate. With a 6/30/2020 end date, a recidivism rate for this group participants would not be available until sometime after 6/30/2023.

Some general statistics provided by our Corrections WIOA Title II Program housed at the Montana State Prison:

* + 65% of all inmates into Montana State Prison do not have a verified high school education.
  + 78% of those incoming inmates complete the HiSET and move on to job, post-secondary education or training program inside the prison or in the community within 18-24 months.

The most current recidivism rate available via the Montana Department of Corrections 2019 Biennial Report (most current report available):

* 2015 – Male Three Year Prison Recidivism Rate
  + Total Recidivism Rate – 38.6%
  + Violation – 33.7%
  + New Crime – 4.9%
* 2015 – Female Three Year Prison Recidivism Rate
  + Total Recidivism Rate – 24.4%
  + Violation – 21.9%
  + New Crime – 2.5%

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, HiSET (high school equivalency testing in Montana) has been extremely limited in correctional facilities. These facilities use primarily paper/pencil testing methods, and for some time the Educational Testing Service (ETS – HiSET) was not accepting these paper forms for scoring. Also, correctional facilities have experienced complete lockdowns due to the spread of COVID-19, which has impacted the programs greatly in terms of instruction and assessments. Some correctional institutions have started to transition to tablets, distance learning platforms, and computer-based assessments when applicable. However, technology access in a correctional setting is limited for inmates even for educational purposes. They have continued their work with re-entry coalitions, other educational institutions, and employers to help inmate students make a successful transition back into communities upon release.