Adult Education and Literacy

Program Year 2019 (State Fiscal Year 2020) Federal Narrative Report

## 1. State Leadership Funds (Section 223)

Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) has continued to work with state-level one-stop partners on planning, reporting, and coordinating WIOA activities. State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) meetings developed revisions to the WIOA State Plan vision and goals with core partner and stakeholder input. SWDB meetings also included cross-training through presentations by core partners on key elements of WIOA programs including performance challenges and successes. In addition, the SWDB, the Vermont Department of Labor, Vermont Agency of Education, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation contracted with Vermont’s Regional Development Corporations to convene 12 Regional Summits. The summits included employers, service organization staff, and WIOA-funded services. The regional summits were designed to: provide cross-training among workforce training providers; provide employers with state and local tools and information about how and where to access resources that will help them meet their labor force needs; generate regional feedback on pre-determined questions to be used to inform aspects of planning a 2020 workforce summit and the development of the 2020 WIOA State Plan; and, create a directory of local providers of workforce education, training, and support providers, programs, and relevant resources.

During the program year, the State Director of Adult Education and Literacy continued participating in the Adult Re-Entry Strategies cross-disciplinary work group led by the Vermont Department of Corrections (DOC). This group was formed as part of a planning grant awarded to the DOC and included multiple one-stop partners. The group met several times during the program year to identify strategies to be described in the implementation grant application that included plans for beginning the referral process to community services while the customer is still incarcerated in order to promote strong community connections and engagement, identify the information needed to be included in a referral from DOC staff to the community service provider, and promote continuous provision of services upon re-entry.

The State requires local providers to actively engage in collaboration and referrals with regional core partners, including developing local consent to release information forms and hosting in-person special events for core partners and students. Pre-pandemic referral practice often included physically accompanying students to the DOL and VR offices to provide referrals. After the pandemic began, local core partners collaborated to provide Zoom orientations to individual services for customers. Local collaborations include attending regular regional meetings hosted by core partners. As an example, Vocational Rehabilitation regularly hosts Creative Workforce Solutions in each region. The members of this multi-stakeholder group identify local workforce needs and pursue placement of individuals with disabilities who can meet employers’ workforce needs. The networking with employers and service providers that occurs during regular regional meetings and at other locally implemented events such as job fairs, is invaluable to the work of identifying local employer workforce needs.

Core partners continue to work toward improvement in data sharing activities. Several meetings held with Vocational Rehabilitation staff took place to explore the data elements needed in order to increase the number of co-enrollments and credential attainments in data reported. Other meetings to determine how to better track and report Effectiveness in Serving Employers with all three core partners have led to improved data sharing in PY20.

**Professional development** events held during the year: State sponsored events included the continuing focus on administering assessments, emphasis on quality data entered in the database, as well as high-quality contextualized instruction, such as using the topics of voting and participation in the census to engage students effectively.

PD events presented by State-level staff:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Event** | **Date** | **Format** | **Attendance** |
| Data Specialist Training 101 | 9/26/19 | In-person | 15 |
| AEL Policy Review for local leadership | 9/26/19 | In-person | 22 |
| Data Specialist Training | 12/12/19 | Skype | 10 |
| Data Specialist Training | 4/30/20 | Skype | 9 |
| Annual NRS Refresher | 5/20/20, 5/22/20 | Microsoft Teams | 51, 32 |
| Data Specialist Training | 6/29/20 | Microsoft Teams | 9 |

PD events related to the administration of assessments:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Event** | **Date** | **Format** | **Attendance** |
| Introduction to Assessment for Adult Education (LINCS) | 1/27/20-3/9/20 | LINCS online facilitated course | 5 |
| BEST Plus 2.0 New Administrator Training | 2/28/20 | In-person | 6 |
| Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy (TEAL): Formative Assessment (Math; LINCS) | 3/9/20-4/6/20 | LINCS online facilitated course | 3 |
| Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy (TEAL): Formative Assessment (Writing; LINCS) | 3/9/20-4/6/20 | LINCS online facilitated course | 3 |
| BEST Plus 2.0 Refresher Training | 5/15/20 | Center for Applied Linguistics online training | 12 |
| Vermont TABE Remote Testing | 5/29/20 | Data Recognition Corporation webinar | 48 |

Other PD events planned by the State:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Event** | **Date** | **Format** | **Attendance** |
| Implicit Bias Training | 3/10/20 | In-person | 8 |
| Stand Up and Be Counted: Using the Census and the Election to Teach College and Career Readiness | 5/7/20 | Zoom – presented by NELRC for Vermont local instructors | 10 |

Through Vermont’s continued membership in the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC), webinars developed and hosted by NELRC staff were made available to local provider staff. Due to the pandemic, the annual workshop presented by NELRC staff for Vermont providers was adjusted to a virtual event instead of a live presentation. NELRC webinars presented live in PY19, recorded, and available on the NELRC website:

* Census 2020 Activities for Adult Education Classrooms & Programs
* Cultivating Champions for Adult Education – The Who, How and Now of It
* English Now! Come explore an innovative, blended learning model
* Stand Up and Be Counted (The Change Agent)
* Census Ambassador Training (The Change Agent)
* Adult ELLs: Student Engagement and Learning: What does that look like in a time of crisis?
* Skillful Navigating and Advising from a Distance

**Technical assistance:** The pandemic necessitated a quick move to distance learning and the State also developed a virtual proctoring policy by working with the Center for Applied Linguistics and Data Recognition Corporation. Vermont Agency of Education provided continuous technical assistance by ensuring that local AEL providers had access to guidance issued to school districts, much of which applied to provision of services through AEL. This included guidance on protecting student privacy while providing remote services, accessing internet services for staff and students, and access to state-funded training on teaching online.

As part of the State’s priority to ensure access to services, Vermont opted to participate in the online proctoring pilot conducted by GED Testing Service in order to give Vermont students access to GED testing as soon as possible. Vermont continues to participate in the online proctoring service as local GED testing centers, maintained by AEL providers, are only able to provide limited access to in-person testing during the pandemic.

The State also provided guidance to allow an alternative evaluation for students to complete their diplomas through the High School Completion Program (HSCP) when it was not possible to progress assess students who had targets to graduate by the end of June 2020. State policy requires that students assess at NRS 5 or 6 in order to graduate through the HSCP unless an exception for those students with extenuating circumstances is granted through a prior approval process. However, the emergency response allowed for continuously engaged students assessing at NRS 4 to be evaluated for proficiency using measures alternative to the TABE assessments.

Further technical assistance that the State provided included weekly virtual meetings with AEL provider leadership staff to discuss the challenges of providing remote services. Nine such meetings were held during the last quarter. Previously, in-person meetings were held quarterly. The more frequent communication, which has continued into the new program year, has promoted trust and collaboration between the State and local providers.

**Monitoring** activities in the program year were entirely remote, and included quarterly student file audits, review of grant budget proposals, narrative reports, and supplemental data reports. At the start of the state’s shutdown in the spring, the State required AEL providers to submit for approval Continuity of Learning (COL) plans that prompted provider leadership to plan and evaluate for how they would continue to serve students in a remote environment, including plans to serve those most at risk of disengaging in their education, such as students with disabilities and those impacted by the closing of schools and childcare centers. These plans were carefully reviewed by the AOE and written feedback was provided to encourage deep thinking and strategizing.

State AEL staff have engaged with eligible agency’s Career Technical Education and 21st Century Grant teams to review best practices and develop strategies to continue monitoring remotely. This process is informing developing processes and plans that include identifying common elements of monitoring across teams, ways to leverage other teams to support AEL monitoring, and finally, to identify any areas of monitoring that cannot be done remotely.

**Permissible activities:** Due to the state of emergency as a result of the pandemic, Vermont was under a Stay at Home order from March 25-May 15. Vermont’s AEL system was experiencing a disadvantage due to the lack of a distance education policy. In response, the AOE issued guidance that allowed local providers to use TABE Academy hours that a student spent mastering content toward the 40 hours required between assessments. This emergency allowance assisted providers to engage students while working to ensure connectivity, equipment, and training for their instructors to provide remote services.

The State uses the IET checklist provided by OCTAE as part of an approval process for local programs to propose new IET program models. These approved checklists are reviewed by State and local staff together at the end of the program year to ensure that rigor and content of implemented programs meet requirements for inclusion in the federal report. Eight IET cohorts were implemented in the program year representing four IET program models:

* YouthWorks, a program for youth aged 18-24. It is a partnership with Vermont Department of Labor, Vocational Rehabilitation, and a local Career Technical Education program. Students participated in career exploration of a variety of pathways while receiving certifications in CPR, First Aid, ServSafe and Forklift operation. Then students chose a career path, such as LNA, CDL, Advanced Construction, Advanced Electricity, or Advanced Plumbing, culinary or welding in order to participate in a paid 8-week internship.
* Youth Agriculture Program, an IET for under-skilled and under-experienced adults. It is a training opportunity in the Restaurants and Food Services career pathway in the Hospitality and Tourism career cluster. Students learn about healthy food, safe food preparation, appropriate tool and equipment use, entrepreneurial skills, money management, marketing concepts, and customer service skills through direct practice. Activities take place in classrooms, educational gardens, at local farms, in kitchens and restaurants, and at markets.
* Community Kitchen Academy (described below under #4)
* Healthcare (described below under #4)

## 2. Performance Data Analysis

Analysis of the State’s performance was conducted by the AOE through review of the statistical tables as submitted. Local providers analyze their own data using the reports available in the AEL database, filtered by provider. Each provider’s performance was reviewed by the State through analysis of the statistical tables and also review of submitted narrative reports and supplemental data reports. Meetings were held with each provider to discuss their individual performance in program year 2019 and to plan for program year 2020. The State reviewed data collection rates and noted that co-enrollments, career services, and barriers to employment were likely under-reported. Each provider has been directed to review barriers to collecting data.

As enrollment in AEL programs has declined again in program year 2019 – an issue that pre-dates the pandemic – each provider was required to submit their marketing and recruitment plans. In program year 2020, State staff will meet with local leadership quarterly to review progress toward performance targets, especially those that relate to recruitment, retention, progress assessment rates, data tracking, and MSG targets. The State is currently working collaboratively with AEL providers through a workgroup to improve data tracking, such as social security numbers, barriers to employment, and provision of career services.

Vermont AOE has continued to encourage administering assessments for AEL students when able, even though multiple new barriers have developed during the pandemic. Virtual test proctoring is especially challenging. Due to Vermont’s low rate of COVID-19, in-person assessing is still possible and allowed when local staff and students follow all Department of Health issued guidance for safety. If a student cannot be assessed due to illness or other barrier, there are financial implications for AEL providers because High School Completion Program funded services are only permitted for students seeking a diploma and assessing at NRS 4 or higher. The AOE also continues to emphasize the importance of understanding current skill levels of students through assessments in order to design effective instruction and services.

Further data analysis shows that of the overall students served in Vermont (1,810), 72.82% qualified for the federal report, as compared to PY18 when 2,201 students were served overall with 71.42% qualifying for the federal report. Vermont will continue to work with local programs to engage with students to prevent lapses of 90 days or more between provision of services, which will continue to increase the federal qualifying population.

Vermont did not reach the negotiated performance target for Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) of 38% and the actual performance of earned MSGs was 28.92% in PY19 compared to 39.03% of MSGs earned in PY18. Despite not meeting targets, Title II has continued to provide access to services through the provision of both in-person and online services. The MSG rate was negatively impacted by the move to remote learning in March 2020 and the unavailability of virtual test proctoring at that time, though state staff moved as quickly as possible to develop guidance for [virtual test proctoring procedures](https://education.vermont.gov/documents/ael-virtual-test-proctoring-procedures-for-contiunity-of-learning) with the TABE 11/12 and BEST Plus 2.0. A closer look at specific populations served shows an MSG rate of 33.02% for the ABE/ASE population in PY19 compared to an MSG rate of 42.03% in PY18. The ESL population shows a greater drop in MSG gains in PY19 to 17.53% from 29.90% in PY18, which can be explained by the additional barriers to access that ESL students have experienced combined with the fact that the state was not able to approve the CASAS eTests Online for virtual proctoring in PY19. The State is taking steps to approve the CASAS for PY20 for virtual testing.

Despite the transition to virtual test proctoring, PY19 Quarter 4 progress assessment rates were still negatively impacted as it took time to get all program staff trained to implement virtual proctoring. Virtual test proctoring requires that multiple variables align for a successful test outcome:

* The student must have the proper equipment, as specified by the assessment publisher,
* The student must understand how to use the equipment well enough to access the test.
* The student must be able to understand the instructions of the proctor in order to follow the rules of taking the test.
* There can be no interruption in internet service during the assessment.
* Students must be able to verify their identity to the proctor.
* Students need a quiet and private space in which to give the assessment their full and undivided attention.

In addition, local staff time spent on preparation for and implementing virtual test proctoring is greatly increased as compared to proctoring a test in person. The proctor cannot be in the room with the student and otherwise engaged in an activity such as correcting papers, rather the proctor must watch the student on screen with full attention to ensure the integrity of the test. Preparations for the test that are time consuming include ensuring the student has the equipment and adequate internet connectivity. Finally, local staff have reported that trying to proctor assessments for more than one person at a time is so unwieldy that the focus is staying on administering one assessment virtually at a time.

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

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Provider** | **2018-2019** | **2019-2020** |
| **CVABE** | 51.77% | 38.70% |
| **NEKLS** | 49.25% | 31.42% |
| **TTC** | 38.38% | 32.14% |
| **VAL** | 49.75% | 39.25% |

The table above demonstrates the decrease in assessment rates. The State is working with providers to set a schedule to progress assess on a regular basis, rather than conducting the bulk of assessments in the fourth quarter, a practice that resulted in significantly lower progress assessment rates when in-person services were not possible between March and June.

Vermont does not have a mechanism in the AEL database to allow EFLs to be established without assessment scores. Alternatively, we encouraged providers to use the TABE Locator to assist with the design of curriculum and services until students could be assessed in-person or through virtual test proctoring.

## 3. Integration with One-Stop Partners

Vermont has a single federally-recognized one-stop center located in Burlington, the state’s largest city. However, the one-stop agreement specifies that the activities of the one-stop are to be developed and provided in each region of the state with an American Job Center. At the local level, AEL providers are required to engage local one-stop partners through active cross-referrals, cross-training, and participation in joint orientations for customers and students. Providers are required to track career services provided under AEFLA to each student in the AEL database, as below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Career Service** | **Methods/practices of provision** |
| Outreach, intake, and system orientation | Outreach: Cross-training with one-stop partners regionally to ensure that partners refer eligible individuals to AEL; Intake and system orientation: as part of the intake and orientation process, students are introduced to AEL and other one-stop partner services. |
| Initial assessment of skill levels | Skill level assessments using the TABE 11/12, CASAS Life Skills, BEST Plus 2.0 and the TABE CLAS-E. Assessments are provided to AEL students and also occasionally as a service for WIOA partners’ customers. |
| Referrals and coordination | Referrals from and to one-stop partners either in-person or virtually in real time. Technology support is offered to students in order to ensure access to partners’ remote services. |
| Provision of performance information and program cost | Using the Vermont Department of Labor’s WIOA Eligible Training Provider List, AEL staff reviews workforce training opportunities that includes cost, length of training, and other information. Based on student interests and goals. |
| Information on and referrals to supportive services | AEL provider staff assesses student needs during intake and orientation and makes appropriate referrals to services that will support the student and increase the likelihood of engagement in their educational activities. |

Career services and other one-stop services and collaborations are included as part of the AEL grant agreement requirements. The State continues to collaborate with central core partner leadership while the local providers work directly with regional one-stop partners.

The State monitors local providers’ activities with one-stop partners through provider annual plans, written reports and verbal communications. The emphasis on the importance of working with local one-stop partners is made by the State when consulting on how best to provide services to those with barriers to employment, including disabilities, long-term unemployment, previous incarceration, and low income. The State has consulted on individual cases as well, most frequently cases when the student has disabilities, on leveraging one-stop resources that would lead to improved skill development for the student, access to a diploma, ongoing services after exit from AEL, and a successful transition to employment or postsecondary pursuits.

Although the one-stop partner MOU was not officially renewed after July 1, 2019, the State directed local AEL providers to continue to operate as outlined in the expired MOU to ensure continuity of operations under the WIOA Unified State Plan.

An infrastructure cost agreement was not in effect for PY19. It is the responsibility of the one-stop operator (Vermont Department of Labor) to initiate negotiations on infrastructure costs. The Vermont Agency of Education sets aside funds to cover infrastructure costs each year, but the Department of Labor failed to invoice the AOE in order to draw down the funds. This resulted in IFA-allocated federal AEFLA funds that were not expended.

## 4. Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) Program (Section 243)

The competition for IELCE program funds was last held in the spring of 2017 which resulted in two providers receiving funds. Roughly 88% of IELCE funds were awarded to Vermont Adult Learning, the largest provider in the State. Vermont Adult Learning serves more students each year than the other three providers combined and also serves roughly 90% of the ESL students in Vermont. Central Vermont Adult Basic Education received the other 12% of IELCE funds each year. The grant competition for AEL Federal and State funds was scheduled to take place in the spring of 2020 but was suspended until spring 2021 due to the pandemic. The new grant award period will be for two years beginning July 1, 2021.

Each provider receiving IELCE funds is required to make IET programs available to IELCE students they serve. In the program year, the two providers implemented IET programs open to IELCE students for three cohorts based on two separate program models:

* Community Kitchen Academy, a model that provides access to credentials, such as ServSafe, and also trains in entry-level kitchen skills. The pandemic has brought a dramatic shift in hospitality/kitchen/restaurant industry and work opportunities. Implementation of the program model continues, but focuses more on micro-enterprise opportunities such as food trucks, and take-out food preparation.
* Healthcare, a model that prepares students for entry-level nursing assistant positions through ESL contextualized instruction, training in beginning skills in the healthcare industry, and employment. After completion, students are employed in care/nursing homes and are required to continue study to obtain the Licensed Nursing Assistant credential. Through this program, students are able to obtain employment and access the rigor of the LNA program.

Local providers continue to be challenged to develop IET programs based on ESL student goals, as the population served varies in their interests, geographic location, and schedule availability. It is challenging to identify enough ESL students interested in the same career cluster in order to create a critical mass that would help to ensure a cost effective and successful program. With remote services in place, IET programs are also being adjusted in order to better meet the needs of students while also keeping them safe. A Community Kitchen Academy cohort that was begun in the spring could not complete due to the Stay at Home order, but in PY20 the program is being implemented with more remote services. The training component requires a limit on the number of students in order to maintain social distancing in the kitchen. The provision of remote services has prompted the State to facilitate discussions with providers to make IET programs available statewide, across providers. This would require planning and coordination for transportation for the in-person services but has promise as a strategy to expand the variety of IET programs accessible to IELCE students.

In the spring, ESL students experienced multiple barriers to continued engagement including internet access issues, the need to provide child care, the lack of a quiet space to receive instruction and services remotely, the lack of equipment, and language barriers to understanding how to participate in remote services and opportunities. AEL consequently saw a 17% drop in participation in ESL students in the final quarter as compared to the third quarter and approximately $11,300 of IELCE funds were unspent. The AOE, after consultation with OCTAE staff, met with IELCE providers to identify program needs and determined that the unspent funds will be re-granted in PY20. Funds will support the purchase of Burlington English slots and additional laptops to lend to students as needed.

## 5. Adult Education Standards

AEL content standards continue to be aligned with Vermont’s K-12 [Education Quality Standards](https://education.vermont.gov/documents/state-board-rules-series-2000) (EQS). The EQS adopts the Common Core State Standards, which incorporates the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS). Implementation challenges include ensuring that high schools in Vermont partnering with AEL through the state-funded High School Completion Program (HSCP) understand that the CCRS for Adult Education is aligned with the TABE 11/12. Through the HSCP, AEL providers and high school staff develop personalized learning plans with adult students to meet each school’s [Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements](https://education.vermont.gov/student-learning/proficiency-based-learning/proficiency-based-graduation-requirements). Although students may enter AEL services with enough high school “credits” to graduate after meeting only a minimum number of district graduation requirements, HSCP policy, as part of the AEL system, upholds the objective standard that students must demonstrate a minimum of high school proficiency on the TABE 11/12 in order to obtain a diploma. When students are unable to demonstrate their proficiency on the TABE 11/12 due to extenuating circumstances, such as disabilities, the AEL provider may submit a [Request to Graduate](https://education.vermont.gov/documents/hscp-request-to-graduate-form) form to the AOE for consideration. In this way, AEL students are assured access to transition services, referrals to other support services, and all other services that would create the best possible conditions for the student to gain a minimum of high school level skills and successfully transition to employment and/or postsecondary. Recognizing that AEL is the last stop for many to reach their academic and career goals, the HSCP maintains WIOA’s rigorous agenda.

PY19 was a transition year for local providers, as the state moved away from the Equipped For the Future Standards (used in combination with the CCRS for Adult Education) to Vermont’s [EQS Transferable Skills](https://education.vermont.gov/documents/proficiency-based-education-eqs-transferable-skills), which align with the skills identified in CCRS and in WIOA’s Workforce Preparation Activities, as below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Workforce Preparation Skill** | **Related EQS transferable skill** |
| Critical thinking skills | Inquiry, Problem Solving, Creativity, Innovation |
| Digital literacy skills | Use of Technology, Communication |
| Self-management: utilizing resources | Innovation, Use of Technology |
| Self-management: using information | Innovation, Problem Solving, Creativity |
| Self-management: working with others | All |
| Self-management: understanding systems | Inquiry, Collaboration, Problem Solving |
| Skills for successful transition to postsecondary education or training, or employment | All |

EQS Transferable skills:

* Communication
* Collaboration
* Creativity
* Innovation
* Inquiry
* Problem solving
* Use of technology

Professional development is being developed that will help AEL providers better understand this alignment of standards and skills and more effectively communicate this alignment to district staff when collaborating through the HSCP. We have learned that when the TABE 11/12 is devalued as a “standardized assessment”, negative assumptions are made about its relevance and role in ensuring that students possess the requisite skills they need before graduating and exiting AEL services. Since high schools in Vermont do not require specific testing scores to graduate students, there is a misunderstanding about the meaning of the 11/12 scores. The goal is that high schools and the AEL providers will maximize use of the TABE diagnostics to inform instruction and services and demonstrate the proficiencies needed for college and career.

## 6. Programs for Corrections Education and the Education of Other Institutionalized Individuals (Section 225)

Per the State’s WIOA State Plan, Title II funds are not used to fund corrections education for incarcerated individuals. However, AEL services are provided to adults upon re-entry.