

Georgia Narrative Report 2020-2021

1. State Leadership Funds (AEFLA Section 223)

(a)(i) Alignment with Other One-Stop Required Partners

Fiscal Year 2020-2021 (FY21) was a year of change for adult education in Georgia. Just as in other states, COVID-19 affected the ways that we were able to provide services to our students. All providers transitioned to virtual intake, assessment, and instruction. Local adult education providers worked with One-Stops to ensure that unemployed clients who needed adult education services could access them in order to prepare for their next job opportunity.

In early July 2020, the Office of Workforce Development (OWD) met with the Georgia Office of Adult Education (GOAE) to learn more about TABE 11&12 so that they could develop a guidance document to help local areas transition away from already purchased paper-based TABE 9&10 assessments now that TABE 9&10 is no longer NRS-approved. GOAE provided basic information, advice on how to transition, and key test administration practices that would align the partners. GOAE also hosted a webinar to train WIOA Youth providers on how to use Data Recognition Corporation's TABE 11&12 test portal, Insight. In some local areas, the adult education program administered TABE 11&12 as a courtesy to the partner. This service also helped to find students who were also eligible for adult education services.

While GOAE continued to prioritize Integrated Education & Training (IET) as a key component with our workforce partners, the majority of IET opportunities had to transition to a virtual setting. Since some in-person IETs were unable to make the transition, such as welding and forklift, programs had to re-examine their IETs and seek out new ways to align to the high-demand industries within their region or local area. GOAE continued to offer support that included:

- Identifying meaningful IETs for a local area;
- Verifying industry-recognized credentials;
- Clarifying which AEFLA grant funds could be used to pay for credential exams;
- Reviewing planned IET schedules for all programs;
- Evaluating the Single Set of Learning Objectives (SSLOs) for all programs; and,
- Conducting observations of the adult education instruction portion of the IETs.

The Georgia Adult Education Virtual Spring Conference held on May 11-12, 2021 included workshops geared towards supporting the ongoing focus of providing IET programs across Georgia, which is a state mandate for all programs. Sessions included:

- Integrated Education: An Introduction to a Promising Practice
- Revisiting IET: Best Practices from Development to Implementation
- IET in Virginia: What's Working and Why?

GOAE also continued to participate in quarterly core partner meetings with OWD, the Georgia Department of Labor, and Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation to share updates and discuss topics such as performance accountability and metrics.

(a)(ii) High Quality Professional Development Programs

GOAE reassessed professional development plans for FY21 due to the continued disruptions in service caused by COVID-19. GOAE prioritized high quality and ongoing professional development

to prepare our adult educators and program leaders for the demands brought on by the pandemic, such as embracing remote learning opportunities and virtual instruction as opposed to face-to-face instruction, which had been the norm. The onset of the pandemic created great uncertainty; however, GOAE identified and promoted effective virtual teaching practices as the way to continue to provide instruction and support to our students.

GOAE modeled effective virtual instruction by providing rigorous, evidence-based professional development through a mix of live webinar and asynchronous courses that incorporated volunteer and paid local, regional, and national subject matter experts. These subject matter experts provided instruction on emerging practices, instructional strategies, and resource identification specifically targeting remote and virtual instruction. GOAE also officially adopted Blackboard as the statewide learning management system. All program leaders, faculty, and staff were provided training, technical assistance, and coaching on the effective use of Blackboard and distance education.

Examples included:

- End User Technology Basics Needed for Learning and Using Blackboard (2-hour live webinar)
- Blackboard Systems Training: Beginning with Blackboard (10-hour course)
- Revising Your Adult Education Classes for Online and Remote Instruction (series of 4, 2-week classes, totaling 20 hours of online classes and live webinars)
- Introduction to Course Building for Blackboard (6 virtual workshops, 3 hours each)
- Teaching Remotely and Using Blackboard Collaborate for Live Remote Instruction (3 virtual 2-hour workshops)
- Adding Instructional Content to Blackboard Classes (4 virtual 1.5-hour live webinars)
- Blackboard Systems Training: Advanced Blackboard Options (10-hour course)

Professional development offerings focusing on the essential components of reading and addressing specific adult learner needs included the Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) training program, College and Career Readiness Standards and English Language Arts Proficiency Standards training with the National Center for Families Learning, and Exploration of Standards-Based Instruction. GOAE also offered two virtual two-day summits focused on English Language Arts and Math instruction specifically. Highlights from the virtual summits include:

- From Surviving to Thriving: Helping Adult Learners Develop Critical Literacy and Technology Skills
- Helping Students Learn ELA and Build Transferable Digital Literacy Skills
- Keeping Them Close from Afar: Engaging Students in English Language Arts Virtual Classes
- Universal Design for Learning + Math = Exponential Results for Learners
- Unlocking the Secret to Effective Instruction in the Multi-Level Remote/Hybrid Math Classroom
- Parallel Tasks for Differentiating Instruction

The Georgia statewide adult education conference was replaced with a two-day 2021 Georgia Adult Education Virtual Spring Conference. The event targeted program administrators, instructors, data managers, and career services specialists and included 58 sessions featuring math instruction, English Language Arts instruction, work readiness, student engagement, data management, classroom resources, student recruitment, and integrating technology.

Finally, GOAE redesigned its website that included an expanded and more user-friendly web page for archived professional development sessions and adult educator support resources. Electronic versions of all professional development are catalogued on the TCSG website for instructors to reference and local programs to incorporate in their local professional development.

(a)(iii) Technical Assistance

All GOAE staff provide technical assistance to local programs. However, the first line of contact is often through four Grant Program Support Coordinators (GPSCs) who each work very closely with 7-8 local programs. The GPSCs provide a consistent source of information, guidance when a program is struggling, and accurate referrals to appropriate resources. This year was especially challenging because programs began the year by launching virtual orientations, assessments, and classes. All programs were also asked to adopt a new learning management system, Blackboard, so that there was a common learning platform for all providers across the state. Then, as the year progressed, most programs resumed socially distanced in-person classes while continuing to support other students virtually. Staff members quickly put together specific guidance and resources that local programs needed to continue operations.

Specific training related to the pandemic included:

- Virtual test administration
- It's GO Time with Blackboard (weekly sessions in July-Dec; biweekly sessions in Jan-June) – covered a variety of Blackboard training topics, including best practices from teachers and tips and tricks
- Blackboard Collaborate and course builder training
- Open Educational Resources
- IET: Intentional. Engaging. Transformative (webinar series): Beyond the Basics in IET— Building Capacity; Mapping Career Pathways; Establishing Program Identity and Promoting Program Services; Considerations for Partnerships and Funding; FY22 Approval Forms and Implementation Procedures

To ensure equity and access for individuals in need of services, the GOAE encouraged and awarded funds for local programs to purchase loaner laptops so that students without devices could connect to their programs virtually. The state's assessment policy was updated to include the Teacher Verification Model (TVM) allowing local programs to develop consistent materials to enable students that lacked technology to have access to program services. The GOAE hosted two Technically Speaking Webinars to support this effort. The first webinar focused on helping programs understand the guidelines for implementing TVM, and the second webinar promoted promising practices for TVM from programs within Georgia and other states.

GOAE also provided technical assistance to each local program's Career Services Specialists on providing access to employment, education, and training services to students. Technical assistance consisted of webinars, resource toolkits, and workshops. Specific training topics included:

- Utilizing Blackboard to provide career services to students
- Career Services Employability Toolkit
- NYSED/CUNY CareerKit Project
- Assisting Adult Education students towards postsecondary success
- Assisting English Language Learners during the pandemic

(a)(iv) Monitoring and Evaluation

GOAE has utilized state leadership funds provided under WIOA Section 223 to support the monitoring and evaluation of adult education programs in several ways. The main FY21 activities included: (a) virtual program monitoring, (b) dissemination of models and promising practices, and (c) targeted program evaluations. Each of these methods is further described below.

Virtual Program Monitoring

Due to the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, GOAE continued virtual document review and monitoring processes to conduct program monitoring visits during FY21. In FY21, GOAE virtually monitored six programs which were identified using the annual risk assessment. Programs can be monitored in up to three areas: (a) *Data, Intake & Assessment*, (b) *Instruction, Programming & Performance*, and (c) *Fiscal*.

One common finding from the monitoring visits was that local programs need additional support in developing regular, meaningful professional development for staff. This common finding prompted GOAE to begin planning additional training on conducting needs assessments to inform professional development plans.

For FY22 and moving forward, GOAE will utilize both virtual and in-person monitoring visits. In FY22, GOAE will conduct three virtual and two in-person monitoring visits.

Dissemination of Models and Promising Practices

GOAE utilized several methods to disseminate models and promising practices during FY21. These methods included:

- **It's GO Time with Blackboard:** GOAE held 32 sixty-minute sessions during FY21. This gave many local programs the chance to share their best practices for using Blackboard synchronously and asynchronously with students. This created new collaborations between programs and sharing of resources. For example, Gwinnett Technical College created a 3-hour video where instructors discussed their favorite open education resources and demonstrated how they used them with students. This video was disseminated to all programs.
- **Monthly Newsletter:** GOAE distributes a monthly newsletter to almost 1,000 subscribers. The monthly newsletter includes a spotlight article that features promising practices from local providers that have been identified through monitoring, evaluation, and technical assistance activities. Examples of spotlight article topics included recruitment and retention strategies, teaching and testing in correctional facilities, serving English Language Learners, and serving students in rural areas.
- **Adult Education Virtual Conference:** Due to COVID-19, GOAE hosted its annual spring conference for Adult Education providers virtually. The conference featured presenters from across the country and state who shared best practices in several areas such as English as a Second Language, math, reading, and virtual instruction. All sessions from the virtual conference were also recorded for future dissemination.

Targeted Program Evaluations

In the beginning of FY21, GOAE developed an evaluation plan to examine and identify best practices for IET implementation. The program evaluation consisted of focus groups with staff, a student exit survey, and analysis of data entered in the Georgia Adult Learners Information System (GALIS). Key

findings included a need for additional support in establishing strong partnerships with local workforce development boards and employers and creating a repository of curriculum and Single Set of Learning Objectives to share among programs. Additionally, GOAE also developed an evaluation plan for its Career Plus HSE pilot program. Career Plus HSE (CPH) provides a course-based alternative pathway for adult learners in Georgia to earn their high school equivalency by completing high school and postsecondary coursework simultaneously. The CPH program evaluation consisted of focus groups with staff, a student survey, student interviews, and student outcome data. Key findings included developing additional instructional supports for high school coursework and involving all Adult Education staff in recruitment and retention efforts for CPH. GOAE will use the findings from the IET and CPH program evaluations to inform program improvements and technical assistance in FY22.

(b) Additional Permissible Activities

Prior to COVID-19, adult education programs in Georgia had limited experience with providing distance education; only 5% of contact hours were delivered via distance education. When all instruction moved to a virtual model during the pandemic, most instructors felt unsure of how to make the transition, and program administrators were unsure of how to evaluate its quality. To assist with this, GOAE created the “Quality Assurance Rubric for Distance Education” that included five components of quality distance education instruction: Learning Objectives and Standards Alignment, Emphasis on Support and Community, Applied Learning (applied to objective), Peer-to-Peer Interaction, and Mastery of Concepts. Each level of performance (needs improvement, developing, proficient, and exemplary) had a written description to help teachers and administrators understand what performance at that level should look like. The rubric was introduced to program administrators during the annual Program Administrator Operations Meeting, and an asynchronous Blackboard course was developed to explain the rubric and provide examples of teaching at the proficient level. It also included six videos of classroom instruction where course members (mostly teachers) could evaluate the area of the rubric being demonstrated and the level of proficiency shown.

2. Performance Data Analysis

During FY21, GOAE implemented a new target negotiation process for local programs to set enrollment and Measurable Skill Gain (MSG) targets for the year. The purpose of the target negotiation process was to allow providers to negotiate reasonable, but ambitious, targets in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic while still ensuring GOAE fulfilled its roles and responsibilities as a pass-through entity of WIOA funds. GOAE provided local programs with data, a negotiations workbook, and factors to consider in a process that mimicked the federal target negotiation process.

GOAE’s data system, GALIS, produces state- and local-level reports to support regular data analysis by GOAE and local programs. For example, GOAE and local programs used Table 4 reports disaggregated by instructor, class, and student to monitor performance regularly. GOAE also created a weekly internal report to monitor each program’s progress towards its FY21 targets throughout the year. At least quarterly, GPSCs reviewed their assigned programs’ data and monitored progress towards their targets. All programs were required to complete a mid-year data review and reflection exercise in January 2021. Through this process and annual program monitoring, GOAE identified overall challenge areas to inform technical assistance as well as targeted support for programs with low performance.

Georgia's overall MSG percentage for FY21 was 40.41%, which did not meet the 90% threshold of the negotiated 53.7% target for FY21. As programs continued to face challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic during FY21, overall enrollment declined by 40% compared to the prior year and MSG performance remained lower than pre-pandemic rates. However, the overall MSG percentage was five percentage points higher than the prior year. When analyzing students who did not earn MSGs, the majority of students who did not earn MSGs in FY20 were those who exited due to site closures related to COVID-19. However, in FY21, students who did not earn MSGs were evenly split between exiting the program or remaining in the program without earning MSGs, and the percentage of students earning educational functioning level gains continues to be 15 percentage points lower than pre-pandemic percentages, indicating challenges with retention and student success. As such, GOAE plans to provide additional support for recruitment and retention in FY22 including targeted professional development, increased marketing, and introducing a customer relationship management tool to better engage students.

GOAE saw different trends in enrollment and performance for ABE and ESL students. ESL enrollment, which used to be one-third of the overall student population, declined by 50% during the pandemic compared to a 30% decline in ABE enrollment. However, ESL MSG performance increased by 10 percentage points to 47% in FY21 as opposed to ABE MSG performance, which declined by 4 percentage points to 38%. Additionally, the statewide post-test rate in FY21 remained low at 47% compared to 60% in FY19 before the pandemic; the ABE post-test rate was 44% compared to 56% for ESL students. The combination of the increased rigor of the TABE 11/12, virtual test administration, and retention struggles during the pandemic continue to create challenges for achieving MSGs for ABE students.

For the other indicators of performance, GOAE saw a slight decrease in second quarter employment compared to FY20, which was likely a reflection of the COVID-19 shutdown in 2020. GOAE saw increases in the remaining indicators compared to FY20 NRS reports. GOAE observed larger increases in high school equivalency (HSE) attainment and enrollment in postsecondary as well as postsecondary credential attainment. These data were impacted by improvements to our data match and report business rules upon clarification during a NRS regional training. Postsecondary credential attainment now includes industry-recognized credentials earned by IET students who meet the other cohort requirements. GOAE also began receiving data from the SWIS data exchange for FY21 reports.

Programs felt the sustained impact of the pandemic throughout FY21 and continued to rely on distance education and virtual services. In FY21, 62% of participants were classified as distance education and 64% of contact hours were proxy contact hours, compared to only 6% distance education students and 12% proxy contact hours in FY20. Given the challenges posed by COVID-19 and that FY21 was the first year local programs negotiated targets, GOAE used progress towards FY21 targets to identify programs for additional technical assistance throughout the year. GOAE also used FY21 performance to inform the revised target negotiation process for FY22, including providing more specific factors to consider when setting targets and identifying technical assistance, sanctions, and incentives. GOAE will continue to monitor progress towards these targets through regular data analysis. Programs that have not met at least 40% of their enrollment and/or MSG targets by mid-year may receive technical assistance or monitoring visits, and programs that do not meet their targets at the end of the year may be placed on a Strategic Improvement Plan.

3. Integration with One-stop Partners

Per 34 CFR § 463.415, GOAE delegated its required one-stop responsibilities to local providers. In Georgia, the 19 Local Workforce Delivery Areas (LWDAs) do not directly align with the service delivery areas of the state's 30 adult education providers. Therefore, GOAE designated a primary adult education one-stop partner in each LWDA to fulfill one-stop partner responsibilities, including signing the MOU and paying infrastructure costs. Adult education programs that were not the primary one-stop partner were still required to engage with their local one-stop(s) by providing direct linkage to their services.

GOAE accomplished this delegation through two grant assurances – one related to negotiating infrastructure costs and another related to ensuring programs have direct linkage to the one-stops in the LWDAs where they serve students.

Georgia's adult education providers provided access to career services in multiple ways. Several adult education programs had staff co-located at their local one-stops that provided information about the program, conducted intake, orientation and testing, and taught classes. Due to COVID-19, many on-site services through one-stop centers were converted to virtual or via telephone. For example, Lanier Technical College enrolled students and offered classes for students at their local one-stop. Lanier Tech was able to continue to offer these services at the one-stop – either virtually or through modified in-person instruction with social distancing requirements – during the pandemic. Another program began offering soft skills classes through their one-stop using Blackboard. Other programs provided direct linkage to their adult education programs through technology. In many instances, the adult education program had a designated phone line where interested students could call the adult education program to obtain information about the program and begin the enrollment process. Others also developed newsletters or videos specifically for their one-stop to distribute information.

GOAE provides multiple layers of monitoring and technical assistance to ensure local providers are fulfilling one-stop partner responsibilities. GOAE's Director of Accountability attended several of the MOU renegotiation meetings, reviewed several MOUs and infrastructure funding agreements (IFAs)¹, and provided technical assistance to local programs on the one-stop MOU renegotiation process. As part of its annual monitoring process, GOAE also reviewed one-stop MOU agreements, LWDB and one-stop partner meeting notes, and interviewed one-stop partners and LWDB representatives.

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

Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) grant funds were competed in Spring 2017 for the grant period of FY18-FY20, but due to COVID-19, the grant period was extended through FY21. The application for IELCE funds was separate and distinct, with the requirements of the grant clearly delineated. Eleven local providers were awarded IELCE grants for services beginning July 1, 2017. The grantees included six technical colleges, four community-based organizations, and one faith-based organization. (NOTE: During FY20, one community-based organization was terminated as a sub-grantee due to ongoing fiscal accountability issues.) The range of grant expenditures for FY21 was from \$20,688 to \$471,000. Georgia's IELCE providers serve a diversity of English Language

¹ In Georgia, the majority of Infrastructure Cost Agreements utilize the square footage methodology to determine each partner's proportionate share of infrastructure costs.

Learners, from refugees who lack literacy in their native language to professionals with degrees from their native countries.

All IELCE grantees had Integrated Education and Training (IET) opportunities for students during FY21. Training needs were identified by IELCE grantees through their participation in local workforce board meetings and/or one-stop partner meetings for their area. To support the need for the IET, programs reviewed employment data, communicated with employers and training providers, and conducted student surveys to find which IETs held the greatest interest for IELCE students. IELCE programs were able to use up to \$8,000 of their 243 funds in combination with other federal, state, and local funds to provide IET services. In total, 105 IELCE students participated in IET during the fiscal year. While most of the IELCE grantees partnered with a training provider to conduct the training, several providers opted to conduct their own in-house training for students; Catholic Charities, Center for Pan Asian Community Services, and Savannah Technical College offered an American Hotel and Lodging Education Institute training. Savannah Technical College also offered Entrepreneurship training. Some other IET offerings included Certified Nursing Assistant and Home Health Aide.

All IELCE providers had a Career Services Specialist (CSS) to support students by building strong relationships with other social services agencies in their areas. The CSS actively referred students for services that will support them and their families, including housing, childcare, schooling, and healthcare. Many CSSs also led the IET efforts for their program, offered soft skills training, and generally worked with students in all areas of college and career readiness.

GOAE provided technical assistance and professional development to IELCE grantees throughout FY21. Several grantees received targeted technical assistance with identifying and establishing their IETs. Other technical assistance included observation and feedback of instruction, and understanding performance accountability.

In line with other groups of students, performance measures were more difficult to accomplish in FY21 due to the onset of the pandemic, which resulted in the closure of face-to-face classes. While programs quickly launched virtual instruction, the number of parents who stopped attending to care for their children, and the challenges many students faced related to technology, resulted in decreased enrollment. However, the MSG percentage for IELCE students was 47.71%, which was three percentage points higher than the prior year.

5. Adult Education Standards

GOAE adopted and implemented a statewide rollout of the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) beginning in FY17-18. The CCRS, which are Georgia K-12 aligned, along with the later released English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) provide the foundation for all instruction and assessment across the state. All GOAE funded programs are required to provide CCRS- and/or ELPS-based instruction to all students. GOAE provides rigorous training and technical assistance to instructors and posts standards resources on its [website](#).

In FY21, GOAE continued to provide structured professional development and technical support to encourage the integration of the College and Career Ready Standards (CCRS) and the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) throughout Georgia's adult education programs. GOAE delivers standards-focused professional development in two phases:

1. A six-week online introductory course: Understanding the College and Career Readiness Standards, provided by the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL). The online course is a prerequisite to attend phase two.
2. A three-part workshop series:
 - a. Part 1 – Classroom Resource Alignment Workshop
 - b. Part 2 – Instructional Activities & Learning Assessments Workshop
 - c. Part 3 – Sustainability: Instructional Preparation, Delivery and Leadership Support Workshop

With the sustained emphasis on online learning that began at the end of FY20, GOAE realized the need to transform the former face-to-face phase two sessions into online sessions as well. GOAE leveraged Blackboard to build out phase two of the standards training as an asynchronous, ten-lesson course designed to include support resources, a series of facilitated discussion board activities, and end unit assessments. The course also concludes with an overall evaluation.

The initial reaction to the new online standards course has been very positive. GOAE continually gathers and analyzes feedback to re-engineer and refine the course to meet the needs of the practitioners. The asynchronous design of the course has expanded access to professional development opportunities across the state. The design now allows part-time and full-time instructors to participate equally in the training at their own pace, whereas prior to the pandemic, the phase two training was previously only offered in person. GOAE continues to look for inventive and creative ways to maximize the availability of online professional development and to model effective virtual delivery of instruction and technical support.

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

The Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) has a distinct and independently funded education program for inmates. Since GDC's funds are not enough to serve all inmates and all facilities, adult education local providers support these efforts by offering classes in prisons, local jails, day reporting centers, and substance abuse centers. During FY21, 24 adult education programs served 929 correctional students throughout the state. The combination of health precautions and limited technology contributed to the 66% decline in enrollment compared to the prior year. Nevertheless, correctional students earned 380 measurable skill gains in 939 periods of participation (40.47%), which was 10 percentage points greater than the previous year which was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 shutdown.

Georgia's High School Equivalency (HSE) Office approved GDC and Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) staff to become certified test administrators so they could provide paper-based tests at hard-to-serve facilities. The HSE Office also encouraged partnerships between GDC and DJJ centers and local testing centers to facilitate more testing. Although COVID restrictions continue to limit testing capacity, GDC has expanded available dates and times for testing to accommodate more students and DJJ now offers testing in all 29 of their facilities, an increase from 9 facilities previously.

Some local providers worked to install new equipment in correctional facilities to support virtual classes. Other providers utilized recorded classes and worksheet packets to support inmates'

learning. As the year progressed, most programs were able to resume in-person classes in addition to virtual classes, and one program was even able to offer several on-site Forklift IET programs.

During FY21, GOAE worked with the Technical College System of Georgia's Data and Research team to establish a data sharing agreement with GDC to begin calculating recidivism rates specifically for GOAE correctional students. GOAE also began collecting GDC identification numbers for adult education students in GALIS to assist with the data match. GOAE is still working to improve the match rate, but was able to use the data to calculate recidivism rates for the students who matched. GDC's recidivism rate calculation looks at new arrests or parole violations with returns to prison within three years. The latest recidivism rate available based on FY18 releases for incarcerated adults completing GOAE programming (and who matched to GDC data) was 12%, compared to 29% for the general incarcerated population according to the latest report from GDC.