

Iowa Narrative Report 2020-2021 (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021)

I. State Leadership Funds (AEFLA Section 223)

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Title II Section 223(a) mandates that the eligible agency shall not use more than 12.5 percent of its grant funds for both required and optional activities for State Leadership activities. The activities, programs, and projects supported with State Leadership funds are described below.

(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).*

On February 14, 2020, the Iowa Department of Education, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation released a request for proposals for a five-year federal grant to provide adult education and literacy Section 231 activities and services as well as a proposal for Section 243, Integrated English Literacy and Civics Engagement. Due to the impact of COVID-19 the proposal deadline was extended until May 1. The review process was also extended allowing the realigned local workforce development areas to provide feedback on eligible applications alignment with their local plans under section 108 of WIOA. Since the local plans had not been updated to reflect the new reduced areas, many boards had to consider consistency across multiple plans and multiple providers. Eligible providers under the previous grant cycle had their contracts extended to ensure continuation of service until the new grant recipients were announced on July 29.

On March 23 the Iowa State Core Partner Working Group, made up of state policy makers from the Iowa Department for the Blind, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and Iowa Workforce Development, announced the publication of initial guidance on requirements for local MOUs. MOU Guidance did not include Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA), as this is still under development and will be published at a later date. All local areas were required to execute an MOU by May 1 with technical assistance offered on April 2. The MOUs were routed to the Iowa Department of Education for review and signature as the state agency has maintained responsibility for one-stop activities.

Beginning in May, the State Core Partner Working Group under the direction of the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) began preparing the one-stop certification standards and included local area partners from across the state for feedback. The timeline for development and presentation back to the SWDB extended to November and focused on effectiveness, accessibility and continuous improvement. These standards will be applied by the local workforce areas in accessing the activities in the one-stop centers for coordination of services.

- *Establishment or operation of a high quality professional development program as described in section 223(1)(b).*

Iowa's professional development system is designed to coordinate state-level high quality professional development activities within Section 223(a). The projected impact of professional development on instruction and adult learner outcomes is evaluated against the following criteria:

- Potential for statewide implementation, adoption, and diffusion into AEL instructional strategies, methodologies, and curriculum infusion;
- Possible long-term improvement in program outcomes measured by the state and local programs' ability to continually meet negotiated benchmark levels; and
- Capacity for adult learner assistance to effectively meet participant and program literacy goals.

The state professional development system is managed in coordination with AEL administrators, instructors, and trainers representing all funded programs. A data-driven planning process is used to identify professional development needs and to set priorities for each program year. Iowa emphasized in PY2020-21 key areas of training in literacy, math, and English language instruction with a focus on critical life skills while supporting local programs pivoting to distant and virtual learning options. Professional development highlights of this PY included:

Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) - STAR has continued to assist local programs in making systemic and instructional changes to improve the reading achievement of intermediate-level adult learners. The remote training option with STAR, which continues to support Iowa's implementation of evidence-based practices to provide adults with the reading skills they need to achieve their goals in school, the workplace, and their daily lives, allowed Iowa to certify 26 new instructors representing 13 (87%) of Iowa's AEL programs.

Teaching Skills That Matter (TSTM) – The TSTM project aligned nicely with Iowa's efforts in implementing standard based instruction aligned with 21st Century skills with an emphasis in civic education, digital literacy, financial literacy, health literacy, and workforce preparation, based on researched instructional approaches. In this PY, four instructors participated in the training and as certified TSTM trainers developed a plan for future upscaling.

Canvas Training - Upskilling AEL instructors in online course development and delivery in Iowa's learning management system continues to be a priority. Three cohorts of AEL instructors (45) completed a seven-part webinar series and created research based content in a sandbox course.

Standards-in-Action 2.0 - In SIA 2.0 instructors and state staff experienced, examined and reflected on instructional models of core academic content in literacy and math for English learners. Instructors explored researched based approaches and were coached on evaluating and adapting their lesson plans to promote collaborative opportunities, scaffolding, and better supporting ELs learning. Instructors from nine (60%) providers completed the training.

IET Design Camp - The state IET consultant and four AEL providers participated in the IET Design Camp, March 2021. The camp supplemented the state's efforts to engage with local businesses in researching, designing and implementing an integrated education and training activity. The cohort has presented to other local providers in showcasing learned practices and will continue to highlight best practices through trainings and conference presentations.

- *Provision of technical assistance to funded eligible providers as described in section 223(1)(c).*

Targeted Technical Assistance Audience – State leadership funds continue to support the following activities and initiatives in providing technical assistance to AEL-awarded providers, core partners, and the education and workforce community:

AEL Coordinators - Each year state staff update the *Coordinator Handbook*, including key areas of WIOA implementation, Iowa AEL policies and best practices in instructional services and program management. The IDOE conducted annual training for new and experienced program coordinators in October 2020. Program leaders also met face-to-face and via zoom on a bi-monthly basis throughout the calendar year.

Data Specialist - Each year state staff update the data specialist handbook. The handbook is a comprehensive reference on entering data into the Iowa AEL management system (TOPspro Enterprise). In addition, a Data Dictionary is provided to set a statewide standardization of instructions and definitions for the data management system. Data specialists meet with a state consultant every other month to discuss topics such as registration, updates to the data management system, NRS guidelines, year-end performance and assessment policies.

Education and Workforce Community - Iowa AEL is responsive to requests from sector partnerships, Regional Planning Partnerships, and economic development committees. Staff participated in task forces related to developmental and correctional education, implementing Perkins V, and expanding scholarship funds for returning completers of high demand credentials. These collaborations expand AEL's participant pipeline and help connect students to meaningful pathways toward education and careers.

Technical Assistance (TA) – During this program year the Department developed and disseminated instructional and programmatic practices and guidance through multiple TA meetings. Topics covered included:

- Review of IET and IELCE program requirements, along with models of workforce training, eligible training costs, qualifying credentials, and the submission of program approval form;
- An overview and discussion of the new WIOA measurable skill gains for IET and workplace literacy activities and an updated approval form;
- Pre-monitoring meetings with providers, sometimes referred to as monitoring orientation meetings, include a review of the purpose of monitoring, the monitoring process, guidance documents, submission of supporting documentation, and associated timeline; and
- A five-part webinar series focused on implementing managed enrollment which included guidance on using local data to develop policies, design class and program schedules, and reporting attendance; dissemination of best practices of managed enrollment; standards-based instruction; and an opportunity for providers to meet in small groups to discuss creative solutions in local application for a managed enrollment delivery approach.

These targeted technical assistances were based on the department's review of monitoring outcomes and by conducting an analysis of key data points associated with provider effectiveness.

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

State staff assess providers' implementation of the Iowa Program Standards Framework with on-site and virtual monitoring. This process allows staff to gauge compliance with WIOA provisions, identify areas at risk of non-compliance, determine technical assistance needs, and note innovative or promising practices to share with other grantees.

Due to the continued COVID-19 pandemic and related mitigation efforts, the team again conducted on-site monitoring using a virtual format. Onsite-visits, which address all six program

standards compared to a targeted two-standard review for desktop monitoring, were rescheduled as virtual meetings during the previous program year at the onset of the pandemic. At that time, state staff implemented condensed monitoring criteria and activities to reduce the burden on programs already overwhelmed with facility closures and the shift to online services. This year, the team employed our full complement of monitoring criteria and activities virtually, including classroom observations and the use of secure portals for participant file reviews.

The team met its goal of conducting a full monitoring (all standards) of three programs identified for on-site monitoring through its annual risk analysis: Iowa Central Community College (4/28/2021), Hawkeye Community College (5/26/2021), and Southwestern Community College (6/2/2021). The remaining 12 programs received targeted virtual desktop monitoring of two program standards.

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

In addition to working closely with the core and required one-stop partners, Iowa's AEL consultants forged partnerships with organizations whose missions are aimed at improving the outcomes of underserved populations. Examples of these organizations and initiatives include: Coalition on Adult Basic Education; Iowa Literacy Council; Des Moines Civil Rights Committee; Iowa Culture and Language Committee; Leadership for a New Century; Minority Unemployment Committee; National Association of State Directors for Adult Education; and United Way.

Professional Growth - A web-based professional development platform was used in the program year to implement the administrative rules and instructor standards. The system captures, tracks, and reports in the areas of individual professional development plans; completed hours of training; and classroom observations. This system offers the capability of registering staff for professional development events, both at the state and local level, and to collect training evaluations. The evaluation component is used to identify professional development needs through classroom observations that are aligned with the state's instructor standards.

Virtual Conference - In February 2021 the Iowa Department of Education partnered with the Iowa Literacy Council to conduct the 2021 Iowa Adult Education Virtual Conference. The two-day virtual conference was an opportunity for AEL providers to learn innovative practices in adult education. Sessions included: Educating Adult Refugees and Immigrants, Explore Google for Education Free Applied Digital Skills, Developing Workflow and Process for IELCE Programs, and Canvas tutorials. All sessions were recorded and disseminated to programs for future use as needed.

Iowa Adult Education and Literacy Conference – In July 2020 Iowa held its annual AEL conference. The conference was delivered virtually for the second year in a row. The three-day conference included pre-conference sessions followed by two days of breakout sessions and two motivating keynote speakers and opportunity to hear from AEL experts and practitioners. Topics of note were leadership, career essentials for adult learners, innovative classroom strategies, Teaching Skills that Matter, and Iowa's Distance Education Adult Learning (IDEAL) project. The conference engaged adult education instructors, administrators, staff and advocates to strengthen leadership skills, build understanding of state initiatives, online teaching, and community. All sessions were recorded and disseminated to programs for future use as needed.

Future Directions in PY 2021-2022

- On further review of the annual data risk analysis tool, multiple new data elements were identified to better align the program standards and could be used to streamline the monitoring process. The revised risk assessment and monitoring will be implemented next PY.
- The Department's review of the monitoring outcomes identified areas of statewide continuous improvement which will include a series of technical assistance webinars over a six-month period. The webinars will address program goal setting, IET design and employer engagement, student recruitment, and retention strategies.
- Several additional high-quality professional development activities will take place next PY, including but not limited to the following:
 - **Teaching Skills That Matter** – Iowa's TSTM implementation will include three local trainings, a day long training at the 2022 winter conference, a TSTM strand at the 2022 summer conference, and statewide webinars. The plan also includes incorporating professional development facilitators to help train and disseminate TSTM to all AEL providers.
 - **Canvas and Online Instruction**- The Canvas training course continues to undergo refinement to meet the needs of online instructors. This course will be built out and modified to include Iowa's AEL instructor standards, the use of design tools and features, feedback and communication models, and best practices for retention and case management. Enhancements in the training will prepare instructors to adapt the course content, learn virtual classroom management, and distance education strategies.

II. Performance Data Analysis

(a) Describe how the adult education program performed in the overall assessment of core programs based on the core indicators of performance.

In program year 2020-21, a typical adult education and literacy student served was female, employed, a minority, averaging 25-44 years of age, with the highest year of school completed 9-12th grade without a high school diploma.

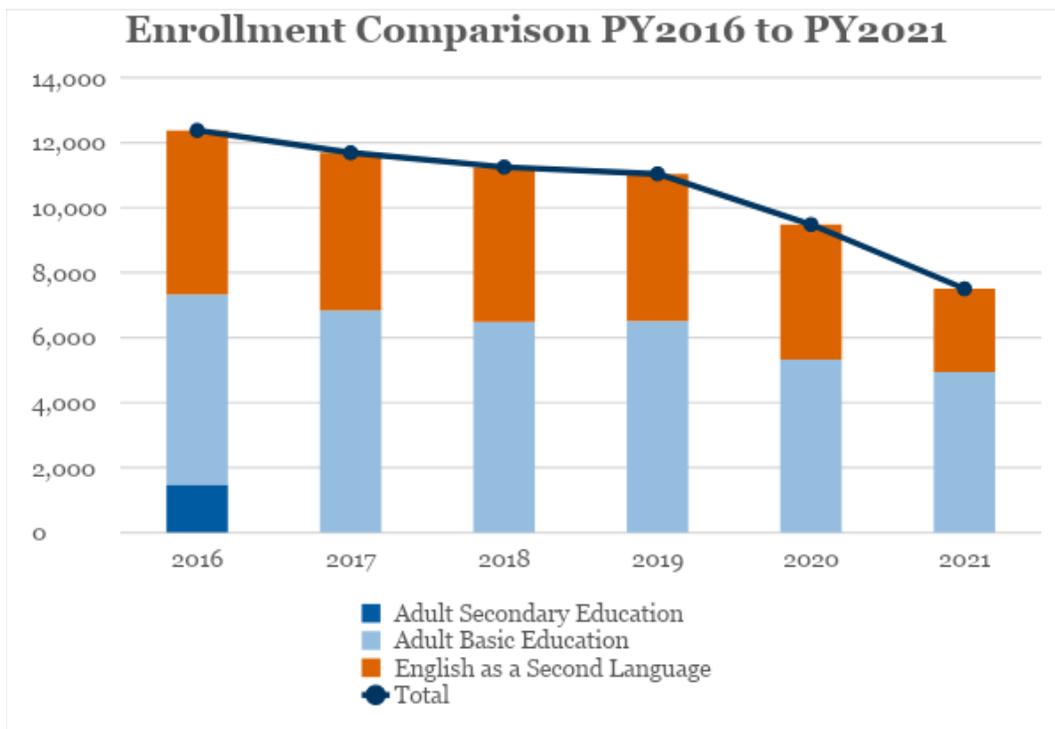
Covid-19 Impact on Performance

While enrollment continues to decline, distance education enrollment increased 95.7 percent and distance education hours increased 47.0 percent over PY 2019-20. In PY 2020-21, distance education served 2,290 participants with 241,203 hours. This increase in distance education enrollment contributes to the five-year average increase of 84.0 percent. It also compromised 30.5 percent of all enrollment.

Most programs have implemented some remote testing including 6.3 percent of all assessments. ABE participants compromised 72.5 percent of the 2,290 distance education participants. Overall, an MSG rate of 39.0 percent was achieved which is down from 41.7 percent in PY 2019-20. This is also lower than the overall MSG rate of 44.4 percent.

Iowa's Adult Education and Literacy Enrollment

Overall enrollment has decreased 10.5 percent over the past five years with ABE enrollment decreasing 7.8 percent and ESL decreasing 14.8 percent. Participants decreased 26.4 percent in PY 2020-21 with 7,501 participants compared to PY 2019-20 with 9,478 participants. Of the total number of participants that met the NRS guidelines, students in ABE, including ABE Levels 1-6, comprised the largest group by program type with 65.8 percent of the total learners served. This is nearly 10 points higher over last PY with 56.1 percent. Students enrolled in ESL, including ESL Levels 1-6, decreased to 34.1 percent from 43.9 percent enrolled.



Retention

Student retention is critical to the process of accessing progress. Persistence and sufficient hours increased slightly with 70.4 percent of the 10,653 individuals seeking services persisted for a minimum of 12 or more hours of instruction and a pre-test. Average hours of instruction for the 7,501 enrollees federally reported increased slightly this year to 67 hours. This is a significant decrease from three years ago where the average was 124 hours in PY 2018-19. ESL averaged the highest with 85 hours while ABE also decreased to 57. Using ABE Level 1-5 and ESL levels 1-6, the posttest rate dropped to 50%.

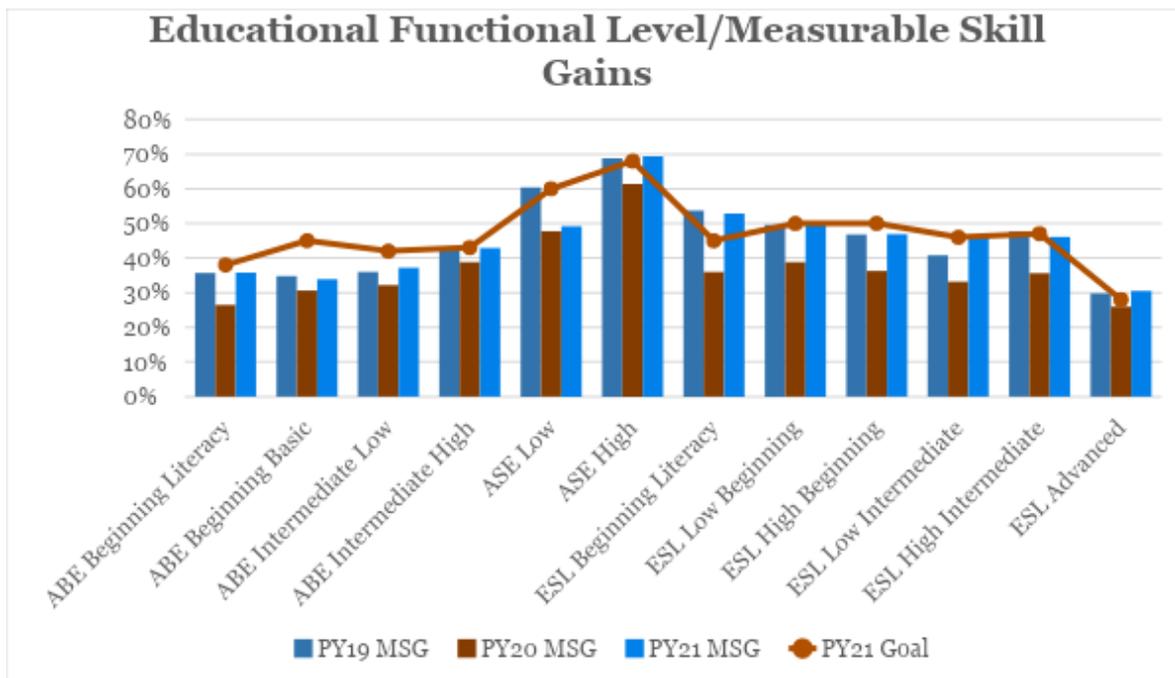
Of the 3,849 post tested, 65.0 percent achieved a measurable skill gain, down from 81.2 percent in program year 2019-20. Of the 611 participants at ABE Level 6, 69.4 percent achieved a measurable skill gain.

Measurable Skill Gains

Of the 7,501 participants, Iowa had 7,645 periods of participation. Of the 7,645 periods of participation, 44.4 percent (3,397) made a measurable skill gain. This is a 15.7 percent increase over the previous PY and a difference of 1.6 points short of our overall target.

Primary Indicators of Performance

Iowa utilizes a data match process to determine if performance targets have been met for the follow-up core measures. Employment the 2nd quarter after exit was down slightly to 53.0 percent from 57.6 percent the previous program year. Median quarterly wage earnings for 2nd quarter after exit were up 13.6 percent from last reporting year to \$6,682. IELCE participants continue to have the highest quarterly earnings with \$11,044 while IET participants have a high rate of employment at 65.6 percent. Distance learners were employed at 56.5 percent earning a quarterly wage of \$5,508. Overall employment in the 4th quarter after exit is 53.1 percent.



Improvements

Quarterly reports have been implemented as an additional check. With enrollment down significantly, a focus was put on achieving measurable skill gains. Five webinars regarding managed enrollment were provided with participation from all programs.

Future Directions in PY 2021-2022

- Providers are piloting daily attendance for better retention efforts and improving post-test rates;
- Additional technical assistance is being offered in reporting IET participants in the community college MIS for data validation and credential attainment; and
- Recruitment and retention strategies are subjects for future technical assistance as AEL providers continue to expand the Iowa Distance Education Adult Literacy initiative.

III. Integration with One-stop Partners

(a) 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.

The Iowa Department of Education is the state-level entity responsible for Title II. The department is a member of the state workforce development board and is represented on all state-level Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act working groups and committees. Working in collaboration with core WIOA partners, the Iowa State Core Partner Working Group has been engaged in fulfilling the strategic goals of the Unified State Plan. The Working Group continues to work with other partners around service integration to reduce duplication and ensure effective collaboration.

(b) Describe the applicable career services that are provided in the one-stop system.

Local AEL providers offer career services at one-stop centers and/or via direct linkages. These include outreach, intake, and orientation; skills and supportive services needs assessment; program coordination and referral; training provider performance and cost information; and information on the availability of supportive services and referrals. Some providers offer direct access to such services as workforce preparation and training at one-stops or nearby classes but have had services interrupted due to the pandemic and in person restrictions. The applicable career services provided in the one-stop system are documented with WIOA partners and tracked locally to help identify duplication, streamlining efforts, and cost sharing information needed for the Memorandum of Understanding. The competitive procurement of a one-stop operator did not happen during 2019-2020. Title II providers have been able to implement remote assessment to determine basic skill needs and have pivoted many services to an online delivery for participants.

(c) Describe how infrastructure costs are supported through State and local options.

Infrastructure costs are not currently supported by local agreements. State agencies responsible for WIOA have not yet intervened in the local negotiations. The new designated local areas have just received certification for board compliance. The state AEL team has provided and will continue to offer technical assistance on relevant federal laws and regulations.

Future Directions in PY 2021-2022

- Title II will launch a shared statewide distance education curriculum and provide digital literacy instruction at the one-stop centers; and
- Title II will continue to expand career services remotely with a partnership with SkillsUSA.

IV. 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.*

In 2021, the Department put out a new five-year (5) year federal grant opportunity for Section 243 funds. Allocations range from \$25,204 - \$70,612 with approved providers setting targets for the number of eligible participants the programs committed to serve per program year. Currently, the Department is actively assisting and advising these providers as they engage in their IELCE projects.

- *Describe your state efforts in meeting the requirement to provide IELCE services in combination with IET activities.*

During the current PY, the Department continued to work with awarded providers to support the efforts of implementing IELCE programs and services in combination with IET activities. The Department provided relevant professional development with an emphasis on local employer needs, employer engagement and partnership. Professional development for the new Measurable Skills Gains was offered to providers in 2021 with guidance on documentation required for a training plan. In addition, providers participated in the LINC's sponsored national IET Design Camp training during the Spring session. These opportunities were designed to provide program staff with information and strategies necessary to develop and deliver quality IELCE services in combination with IET activities. Two statewide presentations were offered for all AEL staff which included technical assistance regarding the differences in the services provided in Section 243 along with guidance in submitting appropriate claim documentation.

- *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;*

During this PY, the Department adopted a new form for providers to submit information about the nature, need, and parameters of their Integrated English Language and Civics Education (IELCE) activity planned for their local area. Reported IELCE activities focused on healthcare, retail, and manufacturing sectors. Department staff also provided statewide technical assistance to address provider questions about IELCE, particularly about the Integrated Education and Training (IET) component, including in-demand industries and occupations.

- *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.*

Funded eligible providers maintained strong ties to local workforce development systems through participation on regional workforce boards and established referral processes with local one-stop centers. With the guidance and support of the state AEL team, every funded provider has secured one or more opportunities for program staff to be represented on workforce boards as members of a local board and/or members of workforce board standing committees. Provider engagement with community college continuing education and career and technical education programs that have established relationships with employers likewise assured their integration with local workforce development systems and the opportunity to promote IELCE as an avenue to address workforce needs.

Future Directions in PY 2021-2022

- The Department will continue to work with the recipients of section 243 IELCE funds, including the use of remote, on-line and hybrid modeling;
- Additional professional development opportunities will be based around the cohort work presented during the IET Design Camp; and
- Per trainings and conversations, Section 243 providers will be engaged in providing IET services for all of their programs beginning in June, 2022.

V. 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 Common Core State Standards (Iowa Core Standards) were adopted for all K-12 grade levels in 2010. All federally funded adult education programs in Iowa are required by Iowa's Administrative Rule 23.7(1), adopted January 14, 2015, to align reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English acquisition, distance education, and staff training practices with content standards for adult education. These standards include the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), 21st Century Skills, and English Language Proficiency standards. The FY21-25 Competitive Grant Application for AEFLA (WIOA, Sec 231 and Sec 225) required that all grantees are required to adopt and align instruction to the standards.

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

Iowa holds federally funded adult education programs accountable to the alignment with adult education standards through the AEL monitoring process. Iowa uses the monitoring to track the

implementation of adult education standards in lesson plans, curriculum, and assessment for preparation in transitioning participants to further education or employment. This PY there continued to be a need to transition to online learning due to the pandemic to adapt to the educational environment and increase access to high quality standard aligned content.

Future Directions in PY 2021-2022

- The Department will utilize its enhanced monitoring and technical assistance process to review standard aligned lesson plans for courses, curriculum, and assessments; and
- The Department will continue to deliver technical assistance and professional development related to intentional, standards-based instruction in the online environment.

VI. 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 Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA) developed definitions and terms used in Iowa's reporting on recidivism to establish standard performance measures. They defined a measure of recidivism—the return rate to prison—as the percent of offenders released from prison who return within three years. The releases tracked include parole; discharges due to end of sentence; and sex offender releases to special sentence supervision. The recidivism rate for PY 2019- 20 in Iowa was 38.7 percent – a slower growth rate than in previous years. Iowa's AEFLA funded providers enroll participants at state correctional institutions and local correctional and institutionalized facilities. Based on the terms of an MOU and the use of shared state leadership funds, all correctional education programs are accountable to the required WIOA performance, except when excluded, and they are subject to Iowa's assessment policies.

Corrections and institutionalized individuals constituted 1,131 of the total periods of participation in adult education reported in Iowa and 41.3% of them achieved a measurable skill gain. Access to post testing opportunities due to closures during the pandemic continued to impact performance.

Future Directions in PY 2020-2021

- The Department will continue to work with the Iowa Department of Corrections as part of Ascendium's Optimizing Post Secondary Education in Prison initiative to prioritize access to educational services which will include funding for education navigators;
- Clear pathways from basic skills to in-demand industry credentials will be developed expanding access to concurrent services with models of IET piloted.