**New Jersey Department of Labor**

**Adult Literacy Programs**

**Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II**

***Narrative Report Program Year 2020-2021***

***(July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021)***



**December 2021**

**New Jersey Narrative Report 2020-2021**

**Introduction**

New Jersey Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Adult Literacy (OAL) is committed to being compliant with all federal and state requirements and acknowledges the hard work of directors, instructors and students during an extremely trying time due to the emergence of Covid-19 in March 2020. New Jersey Title II OAL utilized Program Year 2020 to hold a new WIOA Title II 4-year competition, provide ongoing professional development and training, conduct monitoring, and worked to discern the needs of staff and students in a rapidly evolving educational environment.

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

Consistent with WIOA Section 223, the NJ DOL has prioritized the following state leadership activities during Program Year 2020:

* NJ DOL OAL in conjunction with the DOL Division of Career Services launched a large working group to modernize the case management system utilized at all New Jersey One Stop Career Centers (OSCCs). The NJ DOL State Director for Adult Literacy was one of two lead staff in this modernization study. The impact of this modernization will help with co-enrollment and better tracking of all clients, including Title II students referred from the OSCC to Title II providers. The time and effort dedicated to this work resulted in numerous conversations with other states regarding their current systems, challenges in obtaining a new case management system, and involvement of specific Titles, including Title II in the development of data needs and tracking. This effort continued through the 2020 Program Year and has extended into the 2021 Program Year. Conversations with all required One-stop partners and use of a survey for a mixed-methods approach to gather information rounded out the work done in consultation with a hired vendor. This NJ Workforce Modernization effort continues to build the business requirements necessary in order to post the RFP in 2022.
* Delivery of professional development has been accomplished by way of Leadership funding which includes attendance at virtual literacy regional conferences such as NJALL and GSETA, program specific local training on resources including Teams and Zoom.
* Professional development programs in PY 20 included a CASAS recertification series in order to have all NJ Title II providers in compliance with the NJ State Assessment Policy. NJ DOL OAL staff also participated in these refresher trainings in order to be able to assist with onboarding of new staff and agencies.
* NJ DOL provided direct technical assistance to providers during the course of PY 20 with a continued heavy emphasis on online technical assistance. The NJ DOL OAL continues to utilize LiteracyPro Systems’ LACES (Literacy, Adult and Community Education System) software as the Management Information System (MIS). PY 20 training was provided by Literacy Pro staff to all New Jersey providers in separate, deep dives of agency specific data and best practices/errors. These trainings focused on further areas of concern in regards to data collection, student barriers at entry, and overall management, and specifically directed technical assistance was provided to each agency in order to help produce strong data. In tandem, NJ DOL OAL program staff continue to analyze the LACES data on a monthly basis and observe/document trends and other areas that could be perceived as areas of concern and/or remediation.
* Technical assistance was provided to any agencies interesting in applying to the Notice of Grant Opportunity (4-year competition). The TA was delivered virtually, recorded, and posted online on the NJ DOL website next to the Notice of Grant Opportunity. The TA also allowed for questions regarding the application for the grant award and allowable services, and this Q&A document was also available to the public in an open and transparent competition process.
* The monitoring and evaluation of the quality and improvement of adult education activities as per 223(1)(d) continued virtually in PY 2020. Regional coordinators work in tandem with central NJ DOL OAL staff to complete desk audits of all Title II lead agency programs and partner agencies. Areas of focus for PY 2020 included continued program monitoring (both in-person and remotely) regarding instruction and use of curricula which supports understanding of the College and Career Readiness Standards, data analysis to determine programs struggling to meet levels of service, and student retention.
* NJ DOL OAL staff continue to analyze, review, and monitor the following: provider budgets for reasonable and allowable spending, contracts and modifications; monthly draw-down of expenditure reports, NRS data in LACES including meeting negotiated benchmarks for performance.
* All Title II providers receive a detailed “report card” noting their agency’s progress in addition to a statewide summary of overall performance. Report cards were disseminated and discussed at the required Title II Director’s meeting in October 2020. These reports provide an overall provider “grade” as well as a ranking of each Title II consortia program statewide against negotiated performance metrics. The Covid impact correlated to many providers not meeting some of the required federally negotiated targets. Many directors shared frustration with student attendance and persistence and the State Director is developing professional development around these topics for Program Year 2021.

**New Jersey Performance Data Analysis**

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be felt throughout New Jersey’s adult education programs during PY 2020. Enrollment, testing, retention and performance were significantly impacted by the ongoing pandemic. The digital divide exposed challenges for participants in many ways. The obstacles were overwhelming and students and staff encountered personal, medical, educational, and employment challenges. Participants needed to care for and assist their children that were learning remotely at home. Often, they also had to care for sick family members. Many lost their jobs, needed to apply for unemployment and faced challenges to put food on the table. They faced housing insecurity. The pandemic caused a significant number of deaths and illness in our communities.

Massive professional development plans were put together. Instructors became fluent in Google Classroom, Schoology among other resources including Kami, Nearpod, Padlet, etc. and online software tools such as Aztec and Burlington English became the norm. Agency staff had to support learners with increased flexibility and put great effort into engaging students reluctant to consider virtual services. Distance learning and remote instruction were often the only option. Agencies utilized instructional options for participants via computers, tablets, cell phones, and worksheet packets. Videoconferencing tools such as Google Meet, Zoom, etc. were the new way to provide engaging and interactive instruction.

Despite the decrease in the overall number of participants enrolled from PY 2019 to PY 2020 from 14,947 to 11,709 there was an increase of 192,628 in the total attendance hours for all participants and a sharp increase in the number of distance learners and their attendance hours. The number of distance learners in New Jersey increased from 8 students in PY 2018 with a total of 661 attendance hours; to 1,765 students in PY 2019 with a total of 164,380 hours; to 9,420 distance learners in PY 2020 with a total of 962,252 attendance hours. NJ had 7,655 more distance learners and 797,872 more attendance hours in PY 2020 than in PY 2019. Eighty percent of the PY 2020 participants were distance learners compared with just 12% in PY 2019 and 4% in PY 2018.

Although agencies were more familiar with remote instruction than when the pandemic hit there were still many challenges to overcome and performance was still affected amid the uncertainty of what the program year would look like and the difficulties participants continued to face. In PY 2020, NJ agencies only met 4 of 12 measurable skill gains as compared to pre-pandemic performance when NJ met all of the 12 MSG performance targets.

The four performance targets that were met were in English as a Second Language (ESL) educational functioning levels (EFLs). The performance targets for the other two ESL EFLs were only missed by 2% and 3%. This was significant improvement from last year when NJ was only able to meet 1 of the 12 educational gains performance targets. It demonstrated how hard agencies were working to posttest participants in spite of the restrictions, fear, and the level of intense planning, labor and time commitment that comes with remote testing/testing in parking lots, churches and other allowed locations.

PY 2020 our programs demonstrated increases in all the EFLs. The increases were greater for ESL students than for Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) students. From PY 2019 to PY 2020 the ABE/ASE level increases ranged from .55% to 7.18% with an average of 4%, whereas the ESL increases ranged from 1.34% to 13.20% with an average of 8%. NJ providers continued to struggle to posttest during year 2 of the pandemic, although there was a 4% increase in the number of participants post tested compared to the previous year.

Prior to the pandemic in PY 2018, New Jersey’s adult education agencies post tested 70% of their students. In PY 2019 they were only able to posttest 54% of their students and in PY 2020 they were able to posttest 58% of their students. Some of the issues limiting testing with NRS approved assessments were:

* Participants did not have the appropriate hardware, software or reliable internet;
* Participants did not feel comfortable with remote guideline parameters in their home;
* Participants did not have a suitable or a quiet place to test;
* Equipment was being shared with other household members; and
* Testing a small number of students was labor and time intensive.

Measurable Skill Gains (MSGs) performance targets for PY 2020 were established and agreed upon by the NJ DOL in collaboration with the United States Department of Education’s (US EDs) Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). The targets were set for PY 2020 at the same time as they were set for PY 2019 and were similar to the ones set for PY 2019. However, some of the ABE PY 2020 targets were significantly higher which made them difficult to meet (e.g. 45% to 52%, 46% to 50%, and 43% to 47%), especially under the pandemic circumstances and the testing challenges that were brought about as a result.

While states are aware of the legal barrier that OCTAE has regarding being able to renegotiate targets even under the pandemic circumstances, it has been difficult to process the decline in performance after years of ongoing and consistent technical assistance to assist agencies in reaching and exceeding performance targets. Also, while states have been made aware that OCTAE is aware of the hard work of both state staff and local program staff and the impact the pandemic has had on performance, local programs feel overwhelmed and discouraged when viewing their NRS tables.

During NJ DOLs final PY 2020 director’s roundtable meeting, agencies that demonstrated exceptional performance, significant program improvement and resilience were highlighted to showcase the amazing efforts of some agencies and to promote an encouraging environment by sharing the successes of adult education programs with innovative practices combined with dedicated and determined program leaders and instructors.

A comparison of New Jersey’s performance targets for PY 2018, 2019, and 2020 and actual performance toward meeting the targets is provided in Chart 1 below. There is a clear correlation in the decline in performance for NRS Table 4 as a result of agencies’ challenges with post testing students as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Chart 1: New Jersey Adult Education Performance for the last three years**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Performance Objectives** | **PY18****Target**  | **PY18****Performance**  | **PY19****Target** | **PY19****Performance** | **PY20****Target** | **PY20****Performance** |
| ABE Level 1 | 50% | **54%** | 51% | **20%** | 51% | **28%** |
| ABE Level 2 | 48% | **53%** | 49% | **26%**  | 50% | **31%** |
| ABE Level 3 | 45% | **53%** | 46% | **29%** | 50% | **29%** |
| ABE Level 4 | 42% | **52%** | 43% | **32%**  | 47% | **34%** |
| ABE Level 5 | 55% | **63%** | 56% | **29%**  | 57% | **33%** |
| ABE Level 6 | 44% | **56%** | 45% | **26%** | 52% | **31%** |
| ESL Level 1 | 56% | **64%** | 57% | **54%**  | 57% | **55%** |
| ESL Level 2 | 55% | **64%** | 56% | **57%**  | 56% | **63%** |
| ESL Level 3 | 57% | **64%** | 59% | **52%**  | 57% | **63%** |
| ESL Level 4 | 56% | **60%** | 57% | **50%**  | 57% | **54%** |
| ESL Level 5 | 44% | **50%** | 45% | **44%** | 45% | **53%** |
| ESL Level 6 | 37% | **45%** | 38% | **33%**  | 40% | **46%** |
| Employed Q2… | baseline | **45%** | baseline | 44% | 45% | **38%** |
| Employed Q4… | baseline | **43%** | baseline | 46% | 43% | **39%** |
| Med Earn Q2… | baseline | $4,783 | baseline | $5,930 | $4,783 | **$6,370** |
| Attained SSD & PSE/Training… | baseline | 2% | baseline | 3% | 2% | **4%** |
| Attained SSD & Employed… | baseline | 18% | baseline | 22% | 18% | **25%** |
| Attained PS Credential… | baseline | 58% | baseline | 40% | 58% | **41%** |
| Attained any credential… | baseline | 28% | baseline | 31% | 27% | **34%** |

This chart shows data over the past three years on primary indicators of performance and measurable skill gains in the areas of: Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English Language Acquisition (ELA). Despite the challenges NJ’s providers and students faced because of the pandemic, Chart 1 shows consistent improvement in the median earnings, attainment of a SSD and enrollment in PSE or training, and attainment of a SSD and employed, primary indicators of performance. There was a decrease in performance for the attainment of a postsecondary credential while enrolled or within one year of exit. As a result of COVID-19 restrictions, closures, and many other significant challenges it was extremely difficult and at times impossible to provide students with hands-on training that would lead to credentials. There was a decrease in this indicator from 58% in PY 2018 which was the year prior to the pandemic, to 40% in PY 2019 and 41% in PY 2020. There was also a decrease in performance regarding the employment measures as a result of business closings/restrictions, health concerns/fear, students needing to care for themselves and/or other sick family members, the need to stay home with their children during remote learning due to the inability to secure childcare among many other factors.

For years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, New Jersey demonstrated consistent and significant improvement in all the Measurable Skill Gains (MSG)/Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gain areas. For PY 2017 and PY 2018 New Jersey met *all* of its performance targets and were on track to meet their performance goals for PY 2019 when COVID-19 shocked all of New Jersey but especially our adult education programs. There is great improvement from PY 2019 to PY 2020 especially in regard to English Language Learners (ELLs) but with the continued pandemic there remained challenges and uncertainty.

During PY 2020, educational services and instruction to adults were provided through a variety of program offerings including: ABE/ASE, ELA, volunteer literacy programs, adult high school programs, High School Equivalency (HSE) test preparation, and programs at state and local correctional facilities. Despite the pandemic, agencies continued providing adult education services consistently through the program year. The provision of supportive services and information outside of the direct realm of adult education became increasingly necessary and agency staff did a great job of supporting and helping participants in so many different ways.

The ABE/ELA and Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) program services were delivered through 17 consortia and lead agencies with multiple delivery sites throughout the counties coordinated by the individual consortium, community/technical colleges or public and private non-profit agencies and New Jersey State correctional institutions. Together, 81 agencies participated in delivering services to 11,709 participants in PY 2020.

Chart 2 provides a breakdown of participants by educational functioning level for PY 2019 and PY 2020 demonstrating the enrollment difference by levels between the years. In PY 2020, New Jersey’s WIOA Title II agencies served 11,709 adult participants. In PY 2019 they served 14,947 adult participants*.* There was a decrease of 3,238 between last year and this year. This was the direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. That decrease is similar to the one NJ experienced from PY 2018 to PY 2019 when the pandemic began with a decrease of 3,492.

The populations served for PY 2020 included 4,447 ABE participants (3,691 ABE Levels 1 - 4 participants and 756 ABE Levels 5 and 6) and 7,262 ELA participants. For PY 2019 there was a decrease from PY 2018 in ABE/ASE enrollment of 2,592 and of ESL enrollment of 900. From PY 2019 to PY 2020 the decrease for ABE/ASE was 510 (compared to 2,592 the year before) and 2,728 (compared to 900 the year before). Agencies reported that many students had a very difficult time continuing their learning because they were lacking technology, including equipment, internet/reliable internet, and/or basic computer skills. Despite the challenges, agencies reported that the participants they were able to enroll and that participated were eager and happy to do so, especially due to their isolation. The classes, even though virtual brought many of them some normality.

**Chart 2: New Jersey Adult Education Enrolled Participants**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Educational Functioning Level** | **PY 2019****Total Enrollment** | **PY 2020****Total Enrollment** | **Enrollment Difference between** **PY19 and PY20** |
| ABE Level 1 | 519 | 581 | 62 more students |
| ABE Level 2 | 798 | 713 | 85 less students |
| ABE Level 3 | 1,519 | 1,121 | 398 less students |
| ABE Level 4 | 1,397 | 1,276 | 416 less students |
| ABE Level 5 | 477 | 498 | 121 less students |
| ABE Level 6 | 247 | 258 | 11 more students |
| **Total ABE**  | **4,957** | **4,447** | **510 less students** |
| ESL Level 1 | 3,502 | 2,124 | 1,378 less students |
| ESL Level 2 | 2,428 | 1,662 | 766 less students |
| ESL Level 3 | 1,652 | 1,116 | 536 less students |
| ESL Level 4  | 1,190 | 1,025 | 165 less students |
| ESL Level 5  | 851 | 921 | 70 more students |
| ESL Level 6 | 367 | 414 | 378 more students |
| **Total ESL** | **9,990** | **7,262** | **2,728 less students** |
| **Total ABE and ESL** | **14,947** | **11,709** | **3,238 less students** |

New Jersey’s ELA programs are offered at different venues from literacy-based volunteer programs to adult education programs. The ELA population represented approximately 62% of all the students being served in the WIOA Title II program. This specific population may have limited reading or writing skills in any language and may function minimally or not at all in English.For the volunteer-based programs, the majority of services are provided through tutor-learner matches that deliver one-on-one or small-group instructional services. The majority of the ELA students served (29%) were assessed at the ESL Level 1 EFL. This information is reflected in chart 3. This population may only understand isolated words or phrases, may have no or minimal reading or writing skills in any language, and functions minimally or not at all in English.

**Chart 3: New Jersey Adult Basic Education English Language Learners**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Educational Functioning Level** | **Total Number of ELLs PY 2020** | **Total Percentage of ELLs PY 2020** |
| ESL Level 1 | 2,124 | 29% |
| ESL Level 2 | 1,662 | 23% |
| ESL Level 3 | 1,116 | 15% |
| ESL Level 4  | 1,025 | 14% |
| ESL Level 5  | 921 | 13% |
| ESL Level 6 | 414 | 6% |
| **Total**  | **7,262** | **100%** |

As a result of the pandemic ESL students often found themselves struggling with assisting their children to complete their learning due to their own lack of basic computer skills or limited English for communicating with school staff and/or caring for sick family members. In addition, agencies reported that there was often a reluctance from some ESL students to pursue virtual education instead of face-to-face instruction. On the other hand, some agencies reported that ESL students became more engaged as they no longer had transportation or child care concerns. Another agency reported that participants experiences were more meaningful and relevant as they acquired the ability to utilize today’s technology while learning English and civics content.

From PY 2019 to PY 2020 our programs demonstrated increases in educational gains in all ESL EFLs. New Jersey’s programs indicated a 1% educational gain increase at ESL Level 1; 6% at Level 2; 11% at Level 3; 4% at Level 4; 1% at Level 5 and; 13% at Level 6. Of the 11,709 students served in the WIOA Title II program for PY 2020, 7,262 of them were English Language Learners (ELLs). New Jersey met four of the ESL EFL gain targets for PY 2020 but was very close to meeting the other two ESL performance targets. These increases in performance for our ELA programs show the importance of analyzing and gathering information to determine best practices for serving ELLs now and in the future.

 New Jersey embraces its cultural diversity. New Jersey’s diverse makeup is consistent with its status as a gateway for immigrants. Agencies were required to integrate an English language/civics education component for their Section 243 funded IELCE programs. They are required to design programs to prepare ELLs for employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency and integrate with the workforce development system. The IELCE programs support the immigrant community and other limited English proficient populations.

 During PY 2020, 2,315 participants were served through the IELCE program. Eighty-five of our ELLs passed their citizenship exam between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021. The IELCE program emphasizes contextualized instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation, and U.S. history and government, in accordance with the *National Standards for Civics and Government.* Types of activities supported by these funds included:

* provision of experiential learning opportunities including completing employment forms, completing the voter registration process, engaging participants in volunteer opportunities and linkages with community resources;
* provision of computers and software for instruction;
* citizen preparation including visiting of polling places and government buildings in the state capital;
* field trips to promote American cultural awareness and skills; and
* preparation of curricula focusing on issues of importance to non-citizens such as preparation for becoming a U.S. citizen, job training and placement, housing, parenting and civics preparation.

ELLs enrolled in programs that received IELCE Section 243 funding were offered the opportunity to participate in Integrated Education and Training Programs (IETs). Twenty-three percent of ELLs served with Section 243 IELCE funds participated in an IET. Implementation of the IETs for PY 2020 continued to prove difficult as a result of the ongoing pandemic. Some of the hands-on components of established IET programs were still impossible as they could not be duplicated virtually.

The NJ DOL made a variety of investments to help individuals obtain their high school diploma or its recognized equivalent, improve their basic math, reading and writing skills, and attain basic English listening and speaking skills along with computer proficiencies necessary for employment including the purchase of the Aztec online software as a remote instruction tool for use by all WIOA Title II and Workforce Learning Link agencies. The NJ DOL utilizes state funding to enhance adult education alternatives directly related to welfare registrants, dislocated workers and other jobseekers.

Educational opportunities were provided to adults via programs ranging from ABE Level 1 through ABE Level 6 and ESL Level 1 through ESL Level 6 to prepare adults to:

* enroll and participate in the appropriate level of an adult education program and receive ancillary support services if necessary;
* move to the next EFL;
* sit for an HSE exam and, if successful, receive a New Jersey state issued high school diploma; or graduate from an adult high school;
* obtain gainful employment;
* enter postsecondary education or vocational training programs;
* attain an industry-recognized credential(s).

There were 24 Workforce Learning Link (WLL) programs throughout the state for PY 2020 compared to 25 from PY 2019. The majority of these programs are located at the One-Stop Career Centers (OSCCs). Through a combined training approach and computer-based instruction, the WLLs provide services that include basic computer literacy including typing, financial literacy, job search and employability skills, ELA instruction, and HSE preparation and testing. This effort has allowed New Jersey to expand its literacy services to provide interactive training services that allow participants to address individual employment-related issues at their own pace.

The WLLs can assist individuals to raise their basic skill levels, obtain employment, enter occupational training, and attain their high school diplomas by passing their HSE exams using computer labs in OSCCs throughout the state. For PY 2020, the state’s 24 WLL facilities helped approximately 1,055 individuals which was a decrease of 533 individuals compared to PY 2019 due to the ongoing pandemic. WLLs had actively offered virtual/online literacy services and training to their participants in order to continue to provide learning opportunities during these uncertain times.

**Integration with One-Stop Career Center (OSCC) Partners**

NJ DOL OAL continues to work with OSCC leadership to determine client needs and create professional development to assist counselors in OSCCs to better understand the Title II program and help co-enroll students. Needs were identified through a survey created in alignment with the Workforce Modernization study in which counselors were asked about areas of frustration, challenges, and best practices when referring clients to Title II and Title IV programs. The State Director for Adult Education and the Director of DVR began to hold briefings on how we can work together to ensure clients are not being lost in the referral process and these talks will continue in the new program year.

* In PY 2020 NJ DOL OAL staff provided additional training on the LACES database to NJ DOL Office of Research Information staff and the internal data validation unit; this information serves also to be public facing since it is shared in a yearly public dashboard on performance, barriers, and populations served.

Regarding oversight and delegation of the required one-stop requirements with core partners, the NJ DOL delegates responsibilities to local providers and workforce board directors. The Division of Career Services (DCS) at DOL encompasses WIOA Title II and all other WIOA Titles and as such, DCS leadership establishes the IFA/MOU procedure. All files are electronically received by local areas and reviewed internally by DOL and OAL staff. The Title II State Director and DCS leadership are working together on guidance for locals on further clarification of one-stop responsibilities. Title II directors and local areas have attended training provided by DOL on calculation of infrastructure costs and continue to follow US DOL and US ED guidance.

Career Services are provided in the local one-stop and intake participant orientation, testing using CASAS approved assessments and referrals to Title II. Career services are tracked by Title II providers, recorded and ultimately, a quarterly match is conducted using information collected at the one-stop in the America’s One Stop Operating System (AOSOS) and it is compared to Title II files pulled from the LACES database to better determine the career services provided, clients served, and required participant data.

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

NJ DOL continues to offer competitive IELCE program funding. A new competition for Title II 243, 225, and 231 funds was held in Spring of 2021.

* The Department awarded a total of 17 NJ Title II providers 243 funding.
* The Notice of Grant Opportunity required eligible providers to demonstrate strong plans that aligned with the needs of the local area and WDB local plans;
* The IET monitoring tool is used to observe every Title II agency utilizing 243 dollars for the IELCE program. Spending and direct instruction are observed virtually (and in-person when possible).
* All providers funded with 243 dollars must provide annual forms which outline the curricula, training plan and placement for IET/IELCE students.
* Title II program directors and staff continue to share best practices and challenges via a structured monthly forum with Regional Coordinators. This new forum was started in 2020 and continues virtually.
* NJ DOL is progressing towards program goals of ensuring that IELCE program activities are integrated with the local workforce development system by way of a required MOU which details the collaboration and pathway for literacy activities between the One-stop, WDB, and Title II lead agencies/partners.
* To that end, all Title II providers applying for funding during the competition period were required to collaborate with the local WDB and document the collaboration via an IET planning form as part of their application. NJ DOL OAL staff shared labor market information to all as a tool to help in planning.

NJ OAL has worked with the DOL Office of Research Information to provide real-time data of in-demand jobs for all areas of the state that currently house Title II services. The continued role of Title II is to work with the local WDB to understand local plans/alignment to the greater workforce system and develop career pathways that fit with the labor market information and lead to sustainable career pathways. With that, the State Director of Adult Ed. Of working with the State Council for Adult Literacy Education Services and the NJ Community College Consortium to braid funding and co-plan a stronger career trajectory into unsubsidized employment.

**Adult Education Standards**

New Jersey continues to utilize the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards for Title II adult education. NJ DOL adult literacy regional coordinators regularly review grantee/partner curricula and monitor instruction to ensure the CCR Standards are being effectively met. Regional coordinators continue to work to develop professional development initiatives in order revisit standards-based training in the coming year.

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

Prisons and jails throughout the State continued to be restricted due to COVID-19 policies and related closures. NJ Department of Corrections (NJ DOC) is a Title II provider awarded through the competition for AEFLA funds. NJ OAL staff works to ensure all policies are implemented and that NJ DOC staff are included in trainings and professional development and are monitored accordingly.

* The NJ DOC provides mandatory education to inmates who do not have a high school diploma or a high school equivalency (HSE) degree. Under the State Facilities Education Act (SFEA) of 1979 (N.J.S.A. 18A:7B1 et seq.), all inmates under the age of 20, as well as those under age 21 with an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), are provided traditional high school coursework. Students earn credits from their home school districts toward the fulfillment of their high school diplomas. Similarly, inmates who are over the age of 21 who do not have a high school diploma or HSE and have 18 months or more remaining on their sentence before a mandatory release date are eligible for mandatory education programming to obtain a HSE (N.J.S.A. 30:4-92.1 (P.L. 2009, c.330). Within the 2015 release cohort, there were a total of 351 inmates who participated in mandatory education programming during their stay of incarceration (https://njdoc.gov/pdf/offender\_statistics/2015\_Release\_Recidivism\_Report.pdf.)
* It is important to note that educational services were never suspended during statewide Covid closures. Inmates enrolled in education received individualized, paper-based independent work designed and graded by their regular teachers.
* Paper-based distance education was provided on a continual basis.
* The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting closures continue to expose a general lack of technology and connectivity in State prisons (and elsewhere) which presents a constant challenge. Students do not have access to mobile devices or internet connectivity. The State Director for Adult Ed. continues to discuss this in a number of workgroups.
* NJ DOC uses a return to DOC custody (i.e., a reincarceration) within three years as a measure of recidivism. For the 2015 release cohort, the reincarceration rate was 30.4%. Said another way, 30.4% of persons released in 2015 returned to DOC custody within three years.

**Conclusion**

New Jersey is placing increased emphasis on the development and continuous improvement of a seamless system of adult education that ensures ease in student transition from education to sustainable career pathways. The NJ DOL OAL is committed to ensuring full support and innovation for every Title II funded program and is working to break down silos and barriers by way of multi-faceted approaches which involve discussions across multiple agencies, implementation of new technology and professional training to better serve our Title II population.