

Connecticut State Department of Education



Connecticut Narrative Report 2008-2009

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Introduction

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has successfully completed another year of implementing the goals outlined in its State Plan as mandated by Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Supplementing Connecticut's commitment of state and local adult education dollars with WIA Title II dollars has allowed the CSDE to expand its provider network while enhancing and supporting programs and services that are more comprehensive and cost-effective.

Seventy five organizations including school districts, volunteer programs, community and faith-based organizations and other agencies provided adult education services in Connecticut by recruiting and retaining educationally and economically disadvantaged adults. By keeping the needs of learners, families, communities and employers in the forefront, adult education programs succeeded in improving the skills of Connecticut's learners, enabling thousands to attain a secondary school diploma, helping to close the skills gap in the workplace, assisting non-English speakers to learn English, preparing residents to attain U.S. citizenship and helping families to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy.

The CSDE offers the following responses as part of its Narrative Report for Fiscal Year 2008-2009.

1. Describe successful activities, programs, and projects supported with State Leadership funds and describe the extent to which these activities, programs, and projects were successful in implementing the goals of the State Plan.

The CSDE delivers a majority of its state leadership and professional development services through the Adult Training and Development Network (ATDN). The CSDE's professional development model supports the implementation of the goals of Connecticut's State Plan and consists of Professional Development Basics and Site-based Professional Development activities.

Professional Development Basics

During fiscal year 2008-09, 1,357 practitioners attended 73 ATDN training events. An additional 33 sessions were conducted based on requests from the field and were attended by over 600 practitioners. Ninety five percent of all workshop evaluations were rated 5 or 6 on a 6-point scale for overall quality with 1 indicating poor quality and 6 indicating high quality.

Connecticut Competency System (CCS) training sessions were offered several times during the year to practitioners from both adult education and the workforce development community. The CCS is the CSDE's standards-based framework that connects curriculum, assessment and instruction and captures the progress made by learners in adult education. ATDN staff also supported the network of program facilitators – lead practitioners who ensure the high quality implementation of CCS – through regional networking sessions that provided local programs with links to best practices, opportunities for sharing and an awareness of regional/national issues. Training and recertification sessions were also offered for the CASAS Workplace Speaking Assessment. These sessions attracted over 125 attendees. ATDN also worked with the CSDE to implement the statewide meetings for program facilitators and the CCS roundtable sessions.

The Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) federal initiative continued successful implementation of its workshop series. In addition to a session that introduced the components of reading, specific sessions were offered in the areas of alphabets, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, diagnostic assessments, and differentiated instruction. STAR implementation workshops were offered and attracted more than 200

attendees. Thirty-three certificates of completion were awarded to teachers who completed the entire instructional series.

The Connecticut Adult Mathematics Institute (CAMI) provided adult education teachers with a continuum of professional development to help them recognize, assess, and remediate the areas of mathematics where their learners are having the most difficulty. CAMI provided training on establishing an understanding of CASAS mathematics content standards and their impact on curriculum and adult mathematical knowledge development. These sessions attracted over 70 attendees.

The CASAS Functional Writing Assessment training was delivered three times during 2008-09. This nine hour training is a requirement in order for programs to administer this assessment. Each provider is expected to maintain one Writing Contact Person who has completed the training. To ensure the reliable and accurate scoring of writing assessment results, ATDN offered three training sessions on inter-rater reliability. Additionally, three recertification sessions were also offered to enable local scorers of writing assessments to work toward renewing their certification. A session was offered to review both scoring and interpreting students' writing samples. These sessions attracted over 180 attendees.

ATDN's Scoring Service, for the CASAS Functional Writing Assessment, scored 2,258 standardized pre-post writing samples on behalf of local adult education programs. Intensive and ongoing training ensured the maintenance of the scoring service's accuracy.

An asynchronous writing lab for online writing practice and feedback was designed as a supplemental reinforcement for learners enrolled in local adult education centers for intermediate/advanced ESL classes and intermediate adult basic education and GED preparation classes. The system offers students the opportunity to practice writing and receive online feedback from Connecticut certified teachers. These teachers are also certified scorers in the CASAS Functional Writing Assessment rubric and are familiar with teaching writing for the GED test.

Writing Matters in Connecticut connects assessment to instruction by utilizing research-based writing instruction and teaching methodologies appropriate for adult learners. Two workshops were offered: a workshop on strategies for low-level learners and writing instruction with adults, linking assessment and instruction. These sessions provided teachers with instructional strategies to strengthen learners' writing skills and abilities to express themselves. These sessions attracted about 25 attendees.

ESL teachers were provided multiple professional development opportunities. An all day professional development event ESL Day provided an opportunity specifically designed for ESL and English Literacy/Civics teachers. The morning session *Multiple Intelligences in the ESOL Classroom* introduced participants to multiple intelligences (MI) theory and its effective application for enhancing learning in the ESL classroom. Participants reviewed and experienced EL/Civics lessons that integrated MI. The afternoon session *The New Citizenship Test: What Do Our Students Need to Know?* provided an overview of the revised naturalization exam. In addition to this event, specialized workshops included *Orientation for new ESL Teachers*, *Pronunciation Strategies for the ESL Classroom*, *ESL Second Language Acquisition* and *Preparing the Citizenship Applicant* were offered. These sessions attracted over 150 attendees.

ATDN continued its partnership with the CSDE to support a workforce development capacity building initiative. In addition to the three day Workforce Education Model training, sessions were offered in *Workplace Assessment and Evaluation*, *Workplace Curriculum and Instruction* and *Workforce Teacher Orientation*. *Adult Education at Work* users' group meetings and *Adult Education at Work* Directors' meetings were also held on three occasions each to facilitate the sharing of best practices among local providers. These events attracted over 100 attendees.

The Seventeenth Annual Learning Disabilities Conference attracted over 300 attendees. Breakout sessions focused on such topics as autism, learning differences, transitions, art and music therapy, and scientifically based reading research and strategies.

ATDN continued to provide training and technical assistance for the high quality implementation and statewide coordination of the National External Diploma Program (NEDP). Workshops included two three-day sessions on basic advisor/assessor training, refresher advisor/assessor training and administrative policies and practices. The training sessions attracted approximately 200 attendees.

ATDN is now utilizing *Go to Meeting* web conferencing to augment and supplement face to face professional development and technical assistance.

Extensive technical assistance through visitations, telephone conferences, email exchanges, regional forums, and follow-up meetings was provided by ATDN. Adult education staff from several providers conducted workshops at the annual state adult education conference organized by the Connecticut Association of Adult and Continuing Education (CAACE) in March. The providers highlighted their grant activities for the year.

Site-based Professional Development Activities

The CSDE's site-based professional development initiative provided resources to 12 adult education providers in order to impact student achievement by improving the professional capabilities of teachers. The results have been gratifying as they have served as an indicator of local leadership and creative thinking. Some examples of site-based professional development activities included:

- Training in goal setting, classroom management, time management and student development and personal planning;
- Modifying assessment/instruction/curriculum to improve student performance;
- Developing a professional learning community that focused on curriculum and student achievement;
- Utilizing instructional technology in the classroom;
- Engaging a local reading specialist experienced in special education and adult education, to work with team leaders in coaching, monitoring and initiating interdisciplinary activities; and
- Improving students' listening in a functional language context through a professional learning community model.

2. Describe any significant findings from the eligible agency's evaluation of the effectiveness of the adult education and literacy activities based on the core indicators of performance.

Learning Gains

In 10 of 11 NRS levels, the percent of learners who completed a National Reporting System (NRS) educational functioning level in 2008-09 achieved at least 95 percent of the negotiated target for that level. In depth analyses of the data over the past three years reveal the following:

- Seven of 11 NRS levels reflect growth, ranging from one to nine percent, in the percent of learners with pre- and post-test scores who complete the level (Table 4B). These improvements are testament to several long-term critical efforts including: the sustained statewide professional development efforts that promote evidence-based instruction; the focus on rigorous and relevant instruction through the consistent implementation of standards-based education; and the commitment of local program administrators and teachers to faithfully implement these policies and practices.

- The median hours attended by learners in both ABE and ESL has increased by about four percent over the past three years. The explicit evaluation of learner persistence as a separate performance standard within the state accountability framework, coupled with the expectation within the federal grant priorities to offer a minimum of 75 hours of instruction per semester, appear to be yielding incremental improvements in learner persistence in the fiscal year.
- Though the ABE High Intermediate and Low Adult Secondary levels reflect modest improvements (see Table 4B), it remains difficult to procure a meaningful post-test from learners at this level. These two levels continue to reflect the lowest percent of learners with matched pre- and post-assessments (i.e. less than 60 percent). Moreover, because a majority of learners with math abilities in the upper range of this level are able to pass the GED tests, there is limited incentive for these learners to take a post-test and demonstrate progress on the NRS levels.
- In addition to not procuring sufficient, quality post-tests, another factor that continues to depress performance at the ABE High Intermediate and the Low Adult Secondary levels is the NRS policy that attainment of a high school diploma – a significant learner achievement – cannot be reported as a success at those levels. In 2008-09, of the 2,815 learners who are reported as not completing either of those two NRS levels, 720 learners attained a secondary school diploma. If diploma attainment were allowed as an achievement by the NRS, the success rate will be 44 percent (as opposed to 28 percent) at the ABE High Intermediate level and 59 percent (as opposed to 31 percent) at the Low Adult Secondary level.

Follow up Measures

Over the past three years, performance on the “Entered Employment” measure has remained relatively stable (56 to 57 percent) while the “Retained Employment” measure declined in 2008-09 to a low performance of 67 percent, down from 69 percent in 2007-08. The “Entered Postsecondary Education or Training” measure also declined substantially in 2008-09 to its lowest level (55 percent) in the past three years, down from 63 percent in 2007-08. Contrary to these outcomes, the 2008-09 performance level on the “Earned a Diploma” measure (57 percent) was the highest achieved during this three-year period, up from 54 percent in 2007-08.

It appears that in these tough economic times, students are choosing to delay making the financial commitment necessary to pursue postsecondary opportunities and are instead focusing on procuring employment or persisting in adult education to achieve their high school diploma.

3. Describe how the eligible agency has supported the integration of activities sponsored under Title II with other adult education, career development, and employment and training activities. Include a description of how the eligible agency is being represented on the Local Workforce Investment Boards, adult education’s involvement on the State Workforce Investment Board, the provision of core and other services through the one-stop system and an estimate of the Title II funds being used to support activities and services through the one-stop delivery system.

WIA Title II funds enable the CSDE to effectively supplement the state mandated adult education system. Adult education providers were able to offer more comprehensive and cost-effective services to its citizens and expand their network to offer more locally responsive programming by competing for federal funds in various priority areas. Collaborative relationships have been developed between the CSDE, local adult education providers, other state agencies and the workforce development system to greatly expand educational, support and training services to the target populations in the state. CSDE staff and local practitioners also work closely with regional literacy councils to strengthen the connections between CSDE funded adult education programs and other literacy related programs in the community.

WIA Title II Grants

The goal of the CSDE's Program Improvement Project (PIP) competitive grant process for FY 2008-09 was to provide funding opportunities for adult education providers to offer programs and services for adults who lack the level of basic skills and literacy necessary for effective citizenship and productive employment and to build a comprehensive continuum of lifelong learning. Forty-two providers received comprehensive grants in eight priority areas: Preparing for the Twenty-first Century Workforce, Family Literacy, Nontraditional Adult Education Services, Expansion of the National External Diploma Program, Transition to Post-secondary Education and Training, EL/Civics, Workplace Education, and the Connecticut Adult Virtual High School. All priority areas required program designs that were comprehensive and systematic in order to improve the learning experience; reach a greater number of students; increase a district's/agency's outreach and collaboration capacity; promote diversity in the delivery of instruction; and increase learning gains. Grantees coordinated their services with their WIBs and one-stop centers.

Overall, providers receiving WIA Title II grants demonstrated strong learner outcomes on the core indicators of performance. Some notable accomplishments included:

- Workforce preparation grantees integrated career readiness activities including career portfolios, resume workshops, computer proficiency checklists, skill certification courses, and community service experiences into their adult education programming.
- Workplace programs provided adult education instruction in ESL, ABE, GED and NEDP to employees from different industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, agriculture, entertainment, education, and food services. Many programs solicited feedback from employers and prepared comprehensive reports on the effectiveness of their interventions.
- Grants funded within the priority of transition to post-secondary education/training helped adult education programs bridge the "transition gap" by raising standards/expectations, partnering with higher education institutions, aligning curricula, awarding dual credit, coaching learners about their postsecondary options, and targeting instructional strategies to help them transition successfully to post-secondary education/training programs. Transition programs also featured written agreements between the adult education provider and its post-secondary partner(s), and a solid referral and support process.
- The Connecticut Adult Virtual High School facilitated greater coordination among adult education programs and increased access to learning opportunities by offering high quality mentored online courses to learners statewide: 1,221 enrollments were evidenced in the Adult High School Credit Diploma Program (AHSCDP) credit-bearing courses; 345 were enrolled in the online GED preparation course; and over 800 were enrolled in the Orientation to Online Learning. A new credit-bearing course titled Career E-Portfolio was also developed and delivered.
- Expansion of the National External Diploma Program (NEDP) enabled providers to offer another high school completion option for their adult learners and/or expand the program further into their region. This expansion increased the number of NEDP sites in Connecticut from 14 to 25 while expanding four existing programs. Diplomas earned through NEDP increased from 235 in 2007-08 to 277 in 2008-09.
- The non-traditional adult education services grants promoted quality and increased accessibility to adult education programs for learners in halfway houses and in work release programs needing ABE/GED instruction.
- Family literacy projects integrated parent literacy training leading to economic self-sufficiency, age-appropriate education for children, training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher and full partner in the education of their children and interactive literacy activities between parents and children. Funds were used to support the adult education components in

order to provide basic skills, English as a second language (ESL) and/or secondary school completion instruction in an integrated learning environment. Programs were required to use a curriculum that incorporated computer literacy into the subject matter, provided access to career and employment information and assisted participants in the development of individual career portfolios. In addition, programs provided support services and formal collaboration with family learning and support providers.

Some family literacy projects aligned their efforts with Even Start, which historically has proven to be an effective method for increasing family literacy skills. Even Start has served as a successful model for other family literacy initiatives. Of the 39 Even Start adults enrolled and exited in the AHSCDP or GED program, 23 (59 percent) received a high school diploma or equivalency. Of the 18 pre-kindergarten children enrolled in the program for four months or longer, 14 (78 percent) identified 10 or more alphabet letters on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) letter recognition sub assessment.

Related to this work has been the continued support of a Family Learning Curriculum Connections project that encourages family engagement in children's learning by strengthening school-family partnerships and building unique collaborations between adult education programs and elementary schools. The project specifically targeted families of children in the early elementary grades and resulted in take-home activities that were aligned with the Connecticut Reading and Language Arts standards and CASAS competencies.

Utilizing data from the adult education management information system, the CSDE created a Results Based Accountability template for the Connecticut legislature that continues to demonstrate the successes of the mothers of young children who are participating in adult education programs. The template supports existing research, which indicates that mothers who improve their literacy skills or attain their high school diploma through adult education are better able to ensure that their children are healthy and fully successful in school by age nine.

Some programs also supplemented their WIA grants with funding from other foundations to provide instruction in critical competencies such as health education and financial literacy.

Collaborations with Workforce Investment Boards (WIB), One-Stop Centers, the Connecticut Department of Labor and the Department of Social Services

As part of an ongoing collaboration, the CSDE has continued to ensure that its needs assessment process aligns with the service delivery goals and objectives of each Workforce Investment Board (WIB) as a means of enhancing adult education service delivery strategies. The Commissioner of Education is a member of the Governor's Connecticut Employment and Training Commission (CETC). CSDE staff members served on all five local workforce investment boards, Youth Councils and subcommittees.

In fiscal year 2008-09, the CSDE provided direct and equitable distribution of financial support to all one-stop centers in the amount of \$236,577. The employment outcomes achieved by adult education learners are reported alongside those from higher education and employment and training programs, thus providing greater visibility and credibility on the impact of adult education.

Memoranda of Understanding are in place with each area WIB regarding the roles and responsibilities of adult education as its partner. The CSDE continues to provide staff at all the one-stop centers with the training, technical assistance and assessment materials necessary to utilize CASAS appraisals and computer-based CASAS testing to gauge customers' literacy skills during the intake process.

The CSDE continues to work closely with the Connecticut Department of Labor and members of the WIBs to assist them in responding to the *common reporting measures* required for youth in WIA programs. Both education and labor continue to speak with one voice when it comes to competency-based curriculum and instruction, standardized assessment and reporting.

The CSDE remains committed to strengthening connections between the adult education, the social service and workforce systems. The Design Group continued its long-standing interagency efforts, with representatives from the Connecticut Departments of Labor, Social Services and Education; workforce investment boards; and one-stop center directors that focused on the delivery of Jobs First Employment Services (JFES). Teachers of adult education learners who are participating in the JFES program provided attendance verification information to the respective JFES staff. Additionally, the CSDE was integrally involved in identifying changes to help improve the client flow process. This process included examining adult education activities through on-line learning via the Connecticut Adult Virtual High School.

Workforce Coordinating Committee

The CSDE continued to convene a statewide Workforce Coordinating Committee (WCC) bringing together adult education directors; community colleges; workforce investment boards (WIBs); the Connecticut Business and Industry Association; the Departments of Economic and Community Development, Labor and Social Services; and the Office for Workforce Competitiveness to foster coordinated user-friendly systems that respond to employer needs within each WIB region of Connecticut.

The activities of the Workforce Coordinating Committee were supported at the regional level by coordinating groups convened by each of the five workforce investment boards. The regional meetings provide a forum for exploring collaborative opportunities, refining the service delivery referral process, developing a smooth continuum between the adult education and community college systems, sharing training opportunities and building relationships among workforce development stakeholders. Regional groups are able to respond to employer needs efficiently and effectively because of these established partnerships.

Investment and implementation of statewide workforce development efforts have been enhanced by the strong partnerships supported by the WCC and the regional coordinating groups. Some important alignments include the Connecticut Community College's SMART and SOAR grants and the Workforce Investment Board's STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) initiative. These efforts are creating educational and occupational opportunities for low wage and low skilled workers, many of whom are adult education students, while piloting and institutionalizing collaborative workforce development models and forging innovative partnerships.

Federal Incentive Dollars

- **Incumbent Worker Basic Skills**

The utilization of a portion of the federal incentive dollars that came to Connecticut for meeting its performance goals were earmarked to advance the mission of the WCC to provide a continuum of workforce development services for incumbent workers and their employers by connecting basic skills education with occupational skills training through increased partnerships between adult education programs and community colleges. These funding opportunities have provided demand-driven education and training resources for businesses and their current employees. Specifically, these funds facilitate the development and integration of basic skills education and adult secondary completion programs that link participants to technical skills training for specific businesses. Particular emphasis has been placed on providing more intensive instructional interventions for low-wage low-skilled incumbent workers.

- **Developing Tomorrow's Professionals (DTP)**

With federal incentive dollars, the CSDE continued its support of the Developing Tomorrow's Professionals (DTP) program. Designed to address the assumptions of public education, including the removal of barriers, leading to educational engagement and achievement, the DTP has dramatically expanded its scope, serving black and Hispanic young men, ages 15-19. Participants also include adult education learners who are 16 years of age or older and have dropped out of high school. The construct of the DTP includes wrap-around mentoring (each young man has both an academic and a professional mentor); training in education skill-sets; critical reading, writing and thinking; etiquette; leadership; and fatherhood. The long term goal of the DTP is matriculation to, and graduation from, a four-year college/university for each young man of color.

Young Adult Learner (YAL) Initiative

In 2008-09, the CSDE completed its third and final year of the Young Adult Learner (YAL) initiative utilizing \$500,000 in funding from a state legislative grant. Over 300 young adult learners within the AHSCDP from nine school districts were provided unique services and supports that included challenging academic classes; academic support/mentoring; workforce education/preparation; post-secondary education opportunities; experiential-based learning and working opportunities' social development skills; guidance/counseling and other student support services such as child care and transportation. Successes were noted in the following areas:

1. Support: The utilization of counselors and mentors/coaches proved to be an invaluable component of the YAL projects. Staff members were available and accessible to students beyond the normal workday to assist and support their academic and personal needs. Child care, the availability of nutritional meals and bus passes for school were other key elements.
2. Collaboration: All YAL programs had access to Workforce Investment Board (WIB) services. Services included co-enrollment in the out-of-school youth program, tuition set-aside for YAL participants and access to other services provided by the WIBs such as Individual Training Accounts. Additionally, all YAL programs had arrangements with one stop centers for organized student tours, participant visits and usage of the core one stop center services.
3. Curriculum and Instruction: Personalized learning remained a vital aspect of instruction. Students became active partners in the decision-making process for curriculum and courses were designed with multiple entry points to accommodate students' changing needs. Programs expanded online credit offerings via the Connecticut Adult Virtual High School enabling students increased opportunities to complete graduation requirements.

4. Describe successful activities and services supported with EL/Civics funds, including the number of programs receiving EL/Civics grants and an estimate of the number of adult learners served.

The State Department of Education distributed English Literacy/Civics Education (EL/Civics) funds to twenty-five adult education providers throughout Connecticut through a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process. Grantees utilized these funds to improve literacy skills including speaking, reading, writing and numeracy for immigrants and other limited English proficient populations and to provide contextualized instruction in civics education, which included the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation and U.S. history and government.

The continued influx of immigrants to Connecticut correlates with an increase in the number of individuals seeking English language instruction. Since many programs are challenged by the sheer number of students needing these services, having access to EL/Civics Education dollars assures that additional students can be served and waiting lists reduced.

This past program year, more than 3,000 individuals were involved in EL/Civics activities. Some adult education program staff worked with early childhood centers to help students access programs designed for early academic intervention. Other programs integrated STAR reading strategies in the ESL classroom. In some locations, sessions were offered that promoted reading to participants' children under the age of five as well as tutoring help if parents needed additional resources for their children. A summary of additional program activities and outcomes directly related to the use of these funds included the following:

- demonstrated increases in learners' mean gains in program year-end reports;
- increased competence in idiomatic speech that improved communication with children's schools and other community agencies;
- acquired knowledge of the American education system with special focus on addressing needs of families new to the U.S. school system;
- focused instruction on numeracy, health and financial literacy;
- provided transition services, career exploration and job shadowing opportunities;
- increased participation in distance learning activities that impacted competence in the workplace;
- utilized multi-media approaches to increase students' literacy attainment;
- incorporated cross cultural perspectives, civic responsibility, democracy topics and independent projects; and
- created opportunities for experiential learning within the local community.

State Leadership dollars were used to support training and technical assistance for EL/Civics grantees in a variety of areas including grant management, program implementation and curriculum development. Special workshops on the new citizenship test and Census 2010 were offered statewide. EL/Civics best practices were integrated in a number of half and full day sessions for ESL teachers.

Annual Narrative Report Summary

During fiscal year 2008-09, Connecticut expended \$44,623,221 in state, local and federal funds to serve 27,859 individuals for an average per pupil cost of \$1,602. By augmenting state and local dollars with federal dollars, Connecticut has successfully assisted adults in achieving their educational goals, obtaining or advancing in their jobs, entering post-secondary education and participating more fully as family and community members. The CSDE will continue to work closely with other organizations to ensure coordination of effort, increased accountability and program access for those individuals in need of adult education services in Connecticut.