

Findings
and Recommendations

Coordination of
Adult Literacy Programs

December 14, 2006

Legislative Program Review
& Investigations Committee

Introduction

In Connecticut and across the country, adult literacy is a significant issue, with serious social and economic development implications. The program review committee undertook this study to determine how well literacy services for adults with academic skills below the high school level and limited English proficiency are coordinated throughout the state. The study's primary purpose was to assess: the adequacy of the current service delivery system; consistency of standards and opportunities; accountability for outcomes; and the ability of the existing service system to meet adult literacy needs now and in the future.

The problem facing Connecticut and the nation is not illiteracy in the traditional sense, or the inability to read or write at all. Instead, the challenge is low literacy levels and the lack of career competencies that adults need to succeed in the new knowledge-based economy, such as English language proficiency, computer literacy, and strong problem solving abilities.¹ As discussed in the September briefing report, the skill levels adults need to function effectively in the workforce, in the community, and as a family member, are high and will continue to rise in the future. Even now, most family-supporting jobs, particularly in Connecticut, require at least a high school diploma, with reading, writing, and math proficiencies ready for postsecondary-level training and education.

A skilled, competitive future workforce is of particular consequence in Connecticut and other northeast states, where populations are rapidly aging and not growing. (See Appendix A, which highlights information contained in the latest Office of Workforce Competitiveness report on state demographics and economics.) In the coming years, the main sources of new workers will be immigrants, disadvantaged youth, and nontraditional employees -- individuals with disabilities, elderly adults and former public assistance recipients. These are populations that tend to have limited English proficiency, and/or literacy skills below the level expected upon high school completion, or with little or no computer experience.

State-supported programs aimed at improving the basic academic and English language skills of adults are critical for maintaining a competitive, qualified workforce. Just as important, effective adult literacy services will remain a major way to improve the ability of individuals to be self-sufficient and active citizens, as well as parents who can help their children succeed in school.

There are a number of adult literacy providers and a wide range of programs in Connecticut. They include but are not limited to: mandated adult education courses available at no cost for residents of every town in the state; workplace English as a Second Language (ESL) and basic skills instruction sponsored by employers and workforce development programs; remedial math and reading classes and community education courses at community colleges;

¹ See MassINC, *New Skills for a New Economy: Adult Education's Key Role in Sustaining Economic Growth and Expanding Opportunity* (December, 2000), which describes the new literacy, language, and education credential challenges for the current American workforce.

family literacy services at community centers, Head Start programs, and public libraries; and one-on-one tutoring and basic skills instruction offered by Literacy Volunteers and other nonprofit organizations. However, the best available estimates show only a small fraction of adults in need of basic skills and English language instruction are being served.

In Connecticut, the current capacity of adult literacy programs is checked by funding levels that have stayed essentially the same over the last ten years. Competition for limited public resources contributes to unmet demand as well as fragmented service delivery.

Moreover, a mechanism to promote a systematic, strategic approach to providing services that meet identified adult literacy needs is lacking. There is no single state entity in charge of overseeing or acting as a “champion” for adult literacy services. In addition, there is no central source of good information on who needs what services, who is being served, and who is providing what services at what locations and times.

The committee found there is significant unmet need for adult basic education in the state, both for academic skills and ESL, and a lack of effective coordination among the many and varied service providers. There are gaps as well as overlaps in service delivery, inequities in access to opportunities for instruction, and barriers to collaboration and shared resources. The committee’s overall assessment of the current status of adult literacy services in Connecticut is summarized below. Program review committee proposals for addressing these problems to achieve better coordination of adult literacy programs throughout the state are discussed in detail in the following section.

Overall Assessment

In regard to adult literacy services in Connecticut, the program review committee found:

- The need for adult basic skills and ESL services far exceeds current program capacity. There is little hard data on unmet demand, but estimates developed in the September briefing report for the mandated adult education system indicate at least 181,000 more adults in Connecticut would participate if services were available. At current funding levels, the system serves about 32,000 adult learners a year.
- Significant additional resources would be required to provide basic adult education services to the approximately 500,000 adults in the state without a high school diploma or English language proficiency. New public funding in the amounts required to adequately address unmet need is unlikely. Cost-effective use of existing resources, which can be achieved through targeted investment and good coordination, is imperative for improved service delivery.
 - At present, spending per student in the adult education system, the state’s main resource for adult literacy services, averages roughly \$1,250. Total funding for adult education has held

steady at a little more than \$40 million in federal, state, and local monies in recent years.

- A goal of reducing unmet need by 10 percent over five years (50,000 total individuals) through expanded adult education services, would take more than a 30 percent increase (\$12.5 million) in the current system's annual budget. On average, total funding for adult education, adjusted for inflation, grew about 3 percent per year during the past ten years (FY 96 through FY 05).
- Access to adult literacy services varies throughout the state, but the lack of a comprehensive program inventory makes it difficult to determine the extent of gaps in service delivery. It is clear from the data available for adult education programs that opportunities to participate in that system are not equal for all state residents.
- At present, citizenship classes, adult basic education (ABE), high school completion through the General Education Development (GED) examination, and ESL programs are available to some extent to eligible adults in every community in Connecticut through the state's adult education providers. However, the Credit Diploma Program (CDP), an optional offering for high school completion, is not provided in 23 towns. The External Diploma Program (EDP), another high school credential alternative, is available in only about half of towns in the state (83).
- Many adult learners have work and/or family obligations, as well as transportation and child care issues, that complicate their participation in adult literacy programs. It is generally agreed flexible schedules that include evening and weekend classes, summer programs, and multiple locations, particularly at worksites, best meet the needs of adult learners. There are substantial differences among the state's adult education programs in terms of when and where services are provided.
 - A program review survey of the state's 47 adult education providers² showed most (72% of the 32 that supplied complete responses) offer their core programs (ABE, GED, CDP, ESL) in the evening. Fewer (44%) offer all four programs during the

² PRI staff, with the assistance of the Connecticut Association of Adult and Continuing Education (CAACE), sent a questionnaire in October 2006 to the directors of all 47 adult education program providers. The questionnaire requested information on program schedules as well as class sizes, waiting lists, enrollment policies, staffing, and services for adults with special needs. Completed surveys were received from 33 providers (a 70% response rate), who represented all types and sizes of programs, including all the large regionalized programs.

day but over 80 percent did have daytime GED and ESL classes.

- In contrast, 80 percent of the 32 surveyed program providers offer no weekend classes. More providers operate summer programs; almost half (15) offer ABE, GED and ESL classes in the summer and nearly one-third (10) also offer a summer CDP program. One-quarter of the providers (8) offer one or two types of summer programs but the remaining 28% (9) have no summer courses.
 - State Department of Education (SDE) data on adult education program provider sites for 2005, the most recent available, show nearly half of the 47 program providers in the state (22) offered instruction at 3 or fewer sites; almost one-quarter (11) operated at only one site. A little more than one-third (17) of the adult education providers had more than 3 but fewer than 10 different locations for services.
 - The larger regionalized programs, including those run by regional education service centers (RESCs), and the largest cities tend to provide services at more sites. In 2005, eight providers operated at 10 or more locations, up to a total of 30 different sites (in New Haven; the others were: Hartford--17, Vernon Regional--17, Danbury Regional--16, Education Connection--15, Norwich--14, Middletown--13, and Bridgeport--10).
- Research shows most adults who attend basic education programs make learning gains and as students receive more hours of instruction, they make greater gains.³ In Connecticut, the intensity and duration of instructional hours available to students varies among adult education providers.
 - According to education department staff, the majority of adult education programs provide less than six hours of instruction per week. The typical program offers classes, usually two hours long, two nights per week over a 12 to 13 week long semester, and runs two semesters a year.
 - However, some programs provide daytime classes five days a week and have evening classes on three to four nights. A few providers operate on a trimester schedule or have 16-week semesters, and others are beginning to offer “bridge” semesters, or short (e.g., two-week) sessions between the fall and spring semesters or during the summer.

³ See, for example, *Rising to the Literacy Challenge: Building Adult Education Systems in New England*, Jobs for the Future for the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, March 2003, and *New Skills for a New Economy*, MassInc. (previously cited).

- The results of an SDE preliminary analysis of the adult education system’s instructional capacity based on FY 05 data are summarized in Table I-1. The table shows the estimated average weekly intensity of classes, in terms of class hours offered, for each main program area. From these data, it can only be said some providers are offering more and some are offering less intensity than the estimated average. More analysis will be required to know about the extent of the variation in hours of instruction available to adult learners across programs.

| Table I-1. Weekly Intensity of Adult Education Classes: FY 05 | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--|---|
| Program Area | Number of Classes | Estimated Average Duration in Weeks | Estimated Average Hours Per Week |
| ABE | 618 | 16 | 8 |
| CDP | 2,655 | 15 | 4 |
| ESL | 1,044 | 14 | 7 |
| GED PREP | 535 | 15 | 7 |
| Source of Data: SDE Adult Education Unit, preliminary analysis of CARS system data, November 2006 | | | |

- One effective way adult literacy programs can expand access to services is through computer technology, such as offering “virtual” classes or distance learning and making online instruction available. A number of adult education programs, some community-based organizations, and certain public libraries are using technology to provide literacy services. Little is known about the extent of these practices across all systems involved in adult literacy.
 - About half (25) of the adult education providers in the state are involved to some degree in the system’s virtual high school at this time. Greater participation is anticipated later in the 2006-2007 school year when the state education department adds GED preparation to the virtual high school offerings.
- Disparities in funding may also be contributing to inequities in adult education services. For FY 05, adult education program spending per student among the 47 local and regional school district providers ranged from \$305 to \$3,432, not including any competitive federal grant funding that is received by some districts. (Total -- federal, state, and local -- funding per student ranged from \$343 to \$3,726.) The median, or midpoint, state and local combined spending per student by the school district program providers in FY 05 was \$1,140 (and \$1,293 including federal funds).
 - National research provides some evidence that better student outcomes are related to program factors that generally entail

higher costs, such as: quality instruction (well-trained, experienced teachers); program intensity and duration (more hours of instruction at many times and locations); and strong supports for students, such as full-time, professional counselors and help with transportation and child care.⁴

- Program review committee staff analysis of certain cost and outcome data for Connecticut adult education programs did find a moderate positive relationship between funding per learner and overall program quality.⁵
 - However, the relationship between resources, services, and results is not well understood. More study is needed to determine, for example, what spending levels are most cost-effective (e.g., what types and amounts of investment result in more comprehensive and better quality service) and how regionalized service delivery impacts efficiency and program scope and quality.
- There are also overlaps in some areas of service delivery, although like gaps, the extent is hard to assess without a comprehensive inventory of resources. One example of overlapping roles is that both the adult education system and the community colleges are providing basic skills and ESL instruction to prepare students for postsecondary level work. Both systems also provide adult basic literacy services through their customized workplace education programs.
 - While duplication is not necessary inefficient, particularly when demand for services exceeds supply, it is not clear if these providers are “playing to their strengths” and making the best use of limited literacy resources.
 - In terms of the developmental education classes provided by community colleges, there is also a financial issue for students. While adult education courses are free for eligible students, individuals must pay for remedial classes taken at community colleges and generally do not earn academic credit for them. Although financial aid may be used for developmental

⁴ See, for example, *Rising to the Literacy Challenge* (previously cited) and National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) 2006 Study Circle reading materials on student persistence (unpublished).

⁵ PRI staff examined the correlation between each program’s budget per enrolled student and a measure of overall program performance developed by SDE. The measure is a composite score based on outcome indicators in five key areas (i.e., recruitment, retention, assessment, goal setting, and student achievement) compared to state median performance. The analysis was limited to programs with total enrollments over 100 (34 of the 47 total provider programs) because high costs per student in the case of small programs could be due largely to their size. A statistically significant positive relationship ($R = .473$) was found between total spending per enrollee and the composite score for overall program performance.

education courses, students who do so will have less aid to apply to their postsecondary level credit classes.

- Good progress has been made in establishing a standardized literacy skill assessment process within the adult education and workforce investment systems. The community college system uses a different student appraisal tool, the Accuplacer test, to evaluate incoming students and make placement decisions, which complicates comparisons of skill level information. In addition, what some program providers are calling a “transition gap” is occurring because student performance standards between the secondary and postsecondary systems are not aligned.⁶
 - Both adult education providers and staff at the state one-stop career centers are required to use the nationally recognized Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS, which was discussed in detail in the September briefing report) to measure initial literacy levels of clients and to track learning progress.
 - Except for the GED test, a universal exit standard for high school completion, based on CASAS scores or other measures of literacy levels, has not been established in Connecticut.
 - A large number of students who have completed adult education high school diploma programs (as well as many graduates of regular comprehensive high schools) and students who have attained the passing score for the GED, end up being placed in developmental classes at community colleges based on their Accuplacer scores.
- There is also no consistent referral policy or process among the systems involved in adult literacy services. The regional workforce boards that oversee the one-stop centers have policies about what types of clients should be referred to adult literacy services -- adults without any high school credential, for example. Their policies, however, are informal and there is little follow up on results. Few adult education programs have developed links with their area one-stops for referring students for employment and training services.

⁶ The education department is studying the “transition gap” issue. It is working with adult education providers and the community colleges to better align curriculum as well as high school completion/postsecondary entrance standards. Initial research indicates the majority of adult education graduates have CASAS scores around 235, or in the low secondary range; it appears scores at the high secondary level, at least 246 and above, are needed to succeed in postsecondary programs. Similarly, the score required to pass the GED examination (450 overall with at least a 410 in each test area) is not representative of the level of proficiency required for a college level class. Preliminary analysis shows an overall GED score of at least 500, and some believe 550, is required for a successful transition to postsecondary education.

- Only the North Central workforce board has established a formal system for tracking referrals of one-stop center customers to adult education programs. At this time, it is not an automated process and the information is only reviewed by case managers on an individual client basis.
- Staff of the North Central workforce board expressed concern that the new federal common performance measures for federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs may act as a disincentive for even assessing the literacy needs of some one-stop customers.⁷
- It appears the only formal research done on need for literacy services and referral to adult basic education programs is a study prepared by the state education department staff for the Bridgeport one-stop center.⁸ The study found about half of the customers entering the center (53%) had reading levels at the adult secondary level and very few (8%) were functioning at the high school level in math. About 40 percent reported not having a high school diploma or GED, but few were participating in, and few were referred to, adult education programs.
- The Eastern region workforce board has established the requirement that anyone enrolled in a WIA program who does not have a high school completion credential must enroll in a program to obtain one. The board also instituted a standardized preliminary assessment and referral process for all customers (other than JFES clients, who have their own case managers and assessment process) coming into their one-stop centers that helps identify individuals in need of adult education services.

⁷ Beginning in July 2005, a new accountability process with common performance measures established by the federal government for WIA adult and youth programs and several other federal employment and training programs went into effect. As the new process is being implemented, questions have developed about several definitions and policies, such as when an individual is considered to be a program participant (and, therefore, included in the calculation of performance outcomes) and what types of education and training credentials count in meeting federal outcome definition for attaining a degree or certificate. It appears that if one-stop center staff help assess a customer's literacy and other skill levels, that individual is considered a program participant. Even if they are not eligible for WIA-funded training or education services, they must be tracked and included in the population measured for outcomes. Also, the current federal definitions of credentials includes primarily vocationally related certificates, so it seems some of the more academic credentials may not count towards positive program outcomes.

⁸ *A Profile of the Customers Entering the Bridgeport One-Stop System between June 2003 and June 2006*, prepared by Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Education Consultant, SDE, June 2006. The study examined the records of nearly 3,000 customers entering the center in the three-year period that contained complete literacy appraisal and demographic information. About 1,000 entrants profiled reported they did not have a high school diploma; 174 were attending adult education programs prior to coming the one-stop center and 209 were referred to programs from the center.

- The level of coordination of services across the three main adult literacy systems is inconsistent across the state. In some regions, good connections have developed between adult education programs, workforce boards, and community colleges, but in general, working relationships among various service providers are weak.
 - In some areas, coordination is facilitated by close or co-location. The New Haven one-stop center and adult education center occupy space in the same mall, as is the case in New London. In the Northwest workforce region, adult education classes paid for by the board are available everyday at one-stop sites. The Bridgeport one-stop center employs its own full-time adult education instructor to provide classes on-site and a teacher from Bridgeport adult education is also available on-site several days a week. The Manchester one-stop center operates in the same building as a satellite program of Vernon Regional Adult Education.
 - Vernon Regional Adult Education has also worked out an arrangement with Manchester Community College to provide GED preparation classes on its campus.
 - The Eastern workforce region has been very active in terms of adult literacy collaboration. In 2004, the board convened a working group of all regional providers of basic literacy and ESL services to develop a service network. As part of that effort, the group completed a literacy service inventory for the region.
 - The workforce board and the regional adult education programs in the Eastern region are collaborating on several special projects including: an intensive ESL/basic skills program for TFA recipients; and a program for out-of-school youth that combines intensive high school completion services with case management and occupational training/job placement assistance. The latter program has also developed a partnership with the area regional community college.

Findings and Recommendations

Academic research has shown effective coordination within a service system depends upon three main elements: 1) clearly defined roles and responsibilities; 2) centralized information; 3) and shared resources.⁹ Program review committee findings about Connecticut's adult literacy services in terms of each of these elements, along with proposals for improving coordination, are discussed in detail in this section.

The committee recommendations are designed to enable the state systems with key roles in adult literacy -- adult education, workforce investment, and regional community colleges -- to 1) better coordinate their activities and 2) collaborate more effectively with the many other entities involved in basic skills and ESL instruction. Among these potential partners are: public libraries; the K-12 education system and the state's secondary vocational schools; public and private postsecondary institutions; unions as well as businesses; and a wide variety of nonprofit, community-based organizations, including faith-based agencies.

The main purpose of the actions proposed below is to establish a state-level structure that can provide leadership, forge partnerships, and prioritize and direct the allocation of limited resources. The goal is a cost-effective service delivery system that produces literate adults, ready for the workforce, family and community obligations, and life-long learning in the 21st century.

Clear Roles and Responsibilities

Adult literacy services, as discussed in the September briefing report, are not delivered through one, cohesive system in Connecticut or other states. Multiple service providers and systems are not necessarily a problem because the large and diverse need for services requires a range of options and level of resources beyond the capacity of one state agency. At the same time, cost effective service delivery across agencies and systems requires strong coordination to ensure efficient division of labor and effective collaboration among providers with similar goals.

In Connecticut, no single organization oversees all the various adult basic skills and ESL programs available throughout the state or has responsibility for systematically assessing service delivery and outcomes. To date, state efforts to coordinate policies, programs, and resources across service systems have been piecemeal and ad hoc.

Adult literacy needs. The populations needing adult basic education are diverse, not only in terms of age and ethnicity, but in literacy levels, learning styles, employment status, and living situations. Individuals seeking services may be young drop outs who need only a few credits to complete high school diploma requirements or adults with very low literacy levels, often complicated by learning disabilities, who require significant time and support to get to a

⁹ See, for example, *Literature Review on Service Coordination and Integration in the Welfare and Workforce Development Systems*, Urban Institute, 1999; *Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination*, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2002.

high school level of proficiency. Others seeking services are not literate in English and some of those lacking English proficiency are not literate in their own languages.

Adult learners have different needs for access to services. Some are not employed and can attend programs everyday to gain the skills needed to enter the workforce or reenter in better jobs. Many others are working (e.g., 43 percent of all Connecticut adult education students) or have family obligations and can only participate when schedules are flexible and sites are convenient.

Adults with low literacy levels are also likely to have limited incomes and many face the child care and transportation issues associated with poverty. Others with special needs for literacy services include adults with disabilities and many inmates of the correctional system. Given this diversity, it is not surprising that the adult literacy service system consists of many different programs and is beyond the jurisdiction of any one agency.

Current systems. At present, three separate state systems in Connecticut share primary responsibility for adult literacy programs :

- the adult education system carried out by local school districts under the supervision of the state education department;
- the workforce investment system operated by the regional workforce boards under the direction of the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission (CETC) and the Office of Workforce Competitiveness (OWC), in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL); and
- the regional community college component of the state higher education system, which is overseen by a system chancellor and governed by a board of trustees.

Public libraries are another statewide system with a major, but generally unrecognized, role in supporting literacy. A number of libraries in the state currently operate family literacy programs and provide citizenship and ESL services to adults in their communities. Some also offer adult basic education classes and access to on-line education courses including General Education Development (GED) preparation. To date, public libraries have been underutilized partners in the state efforts to improve adult literacy levels. This is due both to budget constraints at most public libraries and the lack of state leadership in coordinating delivery of adult literacy services.

Several state agencies have indirect adult literacy roles. For example, many consider a highly skilled, literate workforce essential to strong economic development. Connecticut's state economic development agency, the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), participates in adult literacy planning and policy development mainly through its membership on CETC. Within DECD, there is one staff person assigned fulltime to workforce

development matters, including services for improving basic academic skill levels and English language proficiency of potential and incumbent employees.

A state agency with a strong interest, although no direct role in adult literacy, is the Department of Social Services (DSS). DSS is administrator of the state's welfare program -- Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) and its work component Jobs First Employment Services (JFES), which is operated by the state labor department. The goal of the JFES program is to enable individuals to become independent of welfare by the end of 21 months, to remain independent, and to meet federal rates for participation in employment or training activities. To meet employment goals, many JFES clients need to improve their basic academic skills and English language proficiency, usually within a relatively short timeframe. Recently, DSS and the JFES staff at DOL have begun new efforts to work with adult education and employment training providers to help develop, and in some cases fund, literacy services that meet the special needs of the welfare-to-work population.

The Department of Correction (DOC), with an average daily enrollment of more than 3,000 students, is the largest provider of adult education services in the state. However, it does not operate like the other programs in the system.¹⁰ All DOC educational services are provided through its own legally constituted school district (Unified School District #1) and include: adult basic education, GED preparation, English language instruction, an external diploma program, vocational educational/career certificate programs, and special education for eligible younger inmates (i.e., certain students up to age 21). It does not offer a credit diploma program due to the transient nature of its population. While DOC operates differently and serves a unique population, its concerns and goals are much the same as for other adult literacy providers -- improving basic skills and English language proficiency for better employability, more effective parenting, and successful transition, both to the community and to postsecondary education and training.

Current coordination. The September briefing report described how delivery of literacy services is integrated at the client level to some extent through the mandated partnerships at the *CTWorks* one-stop career centers. At the same time, the adult education, workforce investment, and community colleges remain separate service systems, each with its own mission, planning process, target population, automated information system, performance standards, and reporting procedures.

CETC, as the statewide workforce investment board, has statutory responsibility for coordinating and overseeing all employment and training programs. The commission has addressed some aspects of adult literacy needs as part of its broad workforce development mission. However, its main orientation is meeting the workforce needs of Connecticut businesses, not the goals of adults with low literacy levels. Similarly, the community colleges

¹⁰ The DOC school district is funded through a state General Fund appropriation within the agency budget and some federal monies. Unlike other providers overseen by SDE, it does not receive any state adult education grant funds; it is not receiving any federal adult education grant funds at this time, although it has in the past. The state portion of the annual district budget, which is used mainly for personnel costs, has been approximately \$25 million in recent years and federal grant funding has totaled about \$1.5 million a year. The district serves about 12,500 students a year, operates 18 schools within the correctional community, and in the 2004-2005 school year employed 222 professional full-time staff and 48 durational part-time employees.

board of trustees and the state board of higher education both have responsibilities for coordinating academic programs, including any basic skills instruction. Their emphasis, however, is on postsecondary level education for adults not adult basic education.

In managing all mandated adult education programs, the State Department of Education has standardized a number of administrative procedures and coordinated data collection and outcome reporting. In terms of the scope and schedule of course offerings, service eligibility and participation and exit standards, however, school districts retain considerable local autonomy over their program operations. In addition, the education department has no authority over adult basic education services provided through community colleges or workforce investment programs.

At its own initiative, the adult education unit of SDE took on the task of establishing the Statewide Workforce Coordinating Committee, an informal mechanism to coordinate the efforts of all parties involved in workforce education. In addition to developing statewide guidelines about workforce education, the group has had some success in building regional partnerships of adult education, community colleges, and other service providers for delivering customized, on-site basic education programs for incumbent workers. However, the committee has no formal status or independent funding source. Also, its present efforts are concentrated on adult literacy services related to specific employer needs.

The absence of an effective structure for broadly addressing literacy issues and coordinating efforts across systems prompted establishment of at least two community-based advocacy organizations -- the Greater Hartford Literacy Council and the Greater New Haven Literacy Coalition. Both groups have undertaken activities on a regional level to identify needs and inventory resources. They also try to raise awareness about literacy problems, particularly the special issues facing adults with low skill levels and limited English proficiency. Within each region, area program providers and stakeholders have come together voluntarily to deal with service coordination issues, such as how to make the best use of existing resources and avoid program duplication. Neither organization, however, has any formal standing or authority.

Policy and plans. *There is no official state policy with a clearly defined purpose and specific goals and objectives concerning adult literacy.* The statutory mandate for free adult education does imply a state commitment to providing all residents the opportunity to obtain basic literacy skills. Also, the state board of education adopted a policy statement on adult education in 2002 that addresses accessibility, quality, and accountability. The statement, while detailed and action-oriented, covers only activities within the board's jurisdiction (mandated adult education), not the full spectrum of adult literacy programs.

In their planning documents, the state and regional workforce investment boards recognize the importance of adult literacy programs to achieving economic goals. But these plans do not set out a comprehensive strategy for efficient and effective delivery of basic skills and ESL services to adults throughout the state.

There is also no requirement for comprehensive, strategic planning concerning all adult literacy services. SDE prepares and periodically updates the state plan for adult education to

meet federal requirements under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. CETC is responsible for developing and revising the federally required state strategic workforce development plan. Both documents address some aspects of adult literacy services, but neither can be considered a strategic guide for achieving specific, systemwide goals related to the academic skill levels and English language proficiency of adults in Connecticut.

Accountability. *Oversight of adult literacy services as an interrelated system is not assigned to any one organization and outcome data are not centralized.* At present, performance measures related to adult education, workforce investment, and community college adult literacy programs are reported in individual documents related to each system. Performance data are maintained in separate, and generally incompatible, automated information systems.

Some measures of performance related to workforce goals, such as attaining employment, and wage gains following program completion, are gathered from all employment and training programs including adult and postsecondary education by CETC. They are presented in the “report card” the commission is mandated to prepare each year for the legislature.

The legislative employment and training report card, however, provides just a partial picture of certain results related to adult literacy; it is not a full assessment of systemwide effectiveness in improving the English literacy levels of Connecticut adults. Further, the commission is working to improve the quality of some data included in the report card (e.g., figures on entry into postsecondary education or training, which are self-reported, may not be reliable) and the comparability of certain measures across systems (e.g., student transition to postsecondary programs is defined differently by adult education providers and community colleges).

Effective coordination of programs and services occurs when roles and responsibilities, including authority for systemwide strategic planning, coordination, and oversight, are clearly defined. A formal vision and mission statement can clarify the purpose of a service system, foster consensus about goals, and guide strategic planning.¹¹ A strategic plan, based on a vision statement jointly developed by all stakeholders, provides a roadmap for meeting clearly defined common goals. It precisely describes the ways to achieve them, including who is responsible and how it will be funded.

Without clearly defined goals and roles, and an effective mechanism for systemwide coordination, service delivery, funding, and responsibility for results is likely to be fragmented. The lack of strong leadership and the absence of a unifying vision, mission, and strategic plan, impedes cost-effective programming and weakens accountability. Inefficiencies and inequities in service delivery can occur while opportunities to leverage resources and improve program quality through collaborative arrangements can be missed.

¹¹ The essential elements and the benefits of a system-wide vision and mission statement and strategic planning process are discussed in detail in the program review committee report, *Economic Development Considerations in Transportation Planning*, December 2000. See pp. 70-77.

Connecticut's overall adult literacy goals, and the roles required to implement them, are not clearly defined in statute or any state policy document. There is no legislative mandate for a unified policy, comprehensive strategy, or effective leadership mechanism for improving adult literacy levels in the state. Responsibility for adult literacy is divided among all three levels of government and across a number of agencies, organizations and programs, with no center of authority for systemwide strategic planning, coordination, and oversight.

To promote effective coordination of adult literacy programs, roles and responsibilities must be clarified by taking the following steps: adopt a formal vision and mission statement; establish a strategic planning process; and create a leadership entity. **Program review committee specific recommendations regarding each step follow:**

1) Adopt a vision and mission statement that clarifies the purpose of adult literacy programs and services in Connecticut, emphasizing the goals of helping adults develop the literacy skills they need to function as productive citizens in work, family, and community environments.

No current mission of any of the agencies and systems involved in adult literacy combines the education, economic development, and social welfare goals the services are intended to address. In contrast, the mission statement of the Massachusetts Adult and Community Learning Services Division of the state education department, adopted in 1993, is to provide every adult "...with opportunities to develop literacy skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, better employment, and reach his/her potential as a family member, productive worker, and citizen." This statement recognizes the multiple goals of adult literacy services and reflects the need for a combined effort across state agencies and systems to achieve them.

Once a clear mission and vision statement is established, the state can set specific statewide goals for adult literacy to serve as benchmarks for measuring progress and to guide strategic planning. Examples of possible state goals include: reducing the number of adults without a high school diploma by 10 percent a year over the next ten years; increasing the portion of adults with literacy skills at the intermediate or higher levels to 75 percent by a certain date; providing a minimum of 150 instruction hours to at least one in every three adult education students; and ensuring every student who receives an adult education high school credential has achieved at least the minimum placement score needed for success in postsecondary education and training programs.

2) Develop a three-year strategic plan that defines roles, identifies priorities, and directs funding for an adult literacy service system in Connecticut. Among the specific areas addressed by the plan shall be the following:

- a) Leadership, support, and service delivery roles of all system components, examining in particular
 - i) governance responsibility for adult education;**
 - ii) ways to promote regionalized service delivery and partnerships; and****

- iii) **system “infrastructure” needs (resources and support for overall administration, management, research, and coordination).**
- b) **Priorities for services, including**
 - i) **intensity of available programs (quality versus quantity of instruction);**
 - ii) **access (improving outreach) and retention (improving learner persistence);**
and
 - iii) **target populations.**
 - c) **Analysis of funding requirements, identifying at a minimum**
 - i) **estimated resources needed to implement plan goals and objectives;**
 - ii) **current sources of funding and possibilities for reallocation; and**
 - iii) **potential alternative and new sources of funding sources.**
 - d) **The plan shall be developed every three years by the adult literacy leadership board recommended below. The board shall review the implementation status of the plan and make any necessary revisions annually. The board shall designate regional planning workgroups consisting of representatives of adult literacy stakeholders to assist in developing and reviewing the state strategic plan for adult literacy.**

The strategic plan for adult literacy should be a blueprint for coordinating funding and service delivery. The process should begin on a regional level with an identification of resources and needs within each area of service. Stakeholders within each region should be brought together to determine roles and form partnerships. A framework for this process is in place through the regional workforce coordination committees created as part of the SDE workforce education initiative. However, it is occurring on an ad hoc basis, with differing levels of success in each region. Under the recommendation, the process is formalized.

Furthermore, at present, there is no effective way to examine and try to resolve adult literacy issues that cut across jurisdictions and have competing purposes. The recommended strategic planning process will provide this important function. For example, the process can address four critical issue areas identified during the committee study but beyond the scope of the current review, that center on questions of adult literacy roles and priorities. These issues -- governance of adult education; instructional intensity; target populations; and resources -- are discussed in more detail in Figure II-1 at the end of this section.

3) Establish an adult literacy leadership board consisting of nine voting members appointed by the governor and the legislature. The governor shall appoint five members including the chairperson. The speaker of the House of Representatives, the president pro tempore of the Senate, and the minority leaders of the House of Representatives and the Senate shall each appoint one member.

- a) **The voting members shall be representatives of the key stakeholders in the adult literacy system including but not limited to: public and private adult literacy service providers, such as local and regional adult education programs, community colleges, volunteer literacy organizations, and community-based organizations experienced in**

adult literacy programs; public libraries; adult literacy advocates; businesses with employees in need of improved basic skills and English language proficiency; organized labor; and regional workforce investment boards.

- b) The term of office of the members shall be for four years. The board may create officers other than the chairperson as it deems necessary from among its members. All actions of the board shall require the affirmative vote of at least five voting members serving on the board, which number shall constitute a quorum.**
- c) The commissioners of correction, education, higher education, economic and community development, labor, and social services, the director of the Office of Workforce Competitiveness, and the secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, or their designees, shall serve as nonvoting, ex officio members of the board.**
- d) The board shall:
 - i) develop the vision and mission statement and strategic plan recommended above by July 1, 2008;**
 - ii) submit recommendations to the governor and legislature for sources and levels of funding to meet the goals and objectives outlined in the strategic plan each year;**
 - iii) establish performance measures for the adult literacy system and use them to track progress toward the goals and objectives outlined in the strategic plan; and**
 - iv) report to legislature and the governor each year by July 1 beginning in 2008 on progress made in developing and subsequently implementing the strategic plan, based on the established performance measures.****
- e) The board shall also be responsible for developing and maintaining centralized system information and for promoting coordination through regional planning, community partnerships for service delivery, and mechanisms for sharing resources, as discussed below.**
- f) The board may call upon state agencies and offices, including but not limited to the departments of education, higher education, labor, economic and community development, and social services, the workforce competitiveness office and the board of trustees for the community colleges for information, reports, and assistance as it may need to carry out its duties.**
- g) The board shall be scheduled to terminate five years from its effective date unless reauthorized by the General Assembly. During the year prior to automatic termination, the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee shall conduct a sunset review and report its findings and recommendations regarding continuation, modification, or termination of the board for consideration by the General Assembly during the next regular legislative session.**

This recommendation is modeled on the current state Transportation Strategy Board, which has had some success in collaborative goal setting and planning and getting the attention of policymakers on systemwide transportation issues. To a certain extent, the proposed adult literacy board is a formalized version of the statewide workforce coordinating committee, which is one of the only ways state agencies and stakeholders currently are brought together to plan and collaborate on the delivery of adult literacy services on a regional and systemwide basis.

The committee believes a new entity with coordinating authority and focused on adult literacy issues is the best way to provide leadership in this critical area. A body with only broad advisory status is unlikely to have same impact on service delivery as a board that can develop policy and recommend funding priorities. Further, a group comprised of those with the most interest and understanding of adult literacy issues, and outside of state government, is more likely to develop a plan and policies that have broad support and reflect a consensus about priorities.

Centralized Information

There is no central information source for all adult literacy services to assist statewide planning and collaboration. The outcome data public programs are required to collect are not compiled in a single source to aid evaluation of results by providers, funders, and policymakers and determine the status of adult literacy in Connecticut.

At present, to inventory the adult literacy services available in the state it is necessary to contact agencies involved in each component system. At minimum, this includes: the state education department; the state labor department and OWC; the regional workforce investment boards; and the community colleges and the higher education department.

Even with this effort, data on what private sector providers (businesses, community- and faith-based nonprofits, labor organizations and advocacy groups) are doing is, for the most part, unknown. Furthermore, in a number of cases, individual service providers must be contacted to identify funding levels, obtain figures on demand and participation, and determine the types and amounts of services are provided.

There is no centralized information on waiting lists for services and in most case, no requirement that providers maintain that data. Estimates of need and demand for services is based almost exclusively on census data or Connecticut-specific projections based on results from the 1992 National Survey of Adult Literacy. An assessment of the literacy levels of all Connecticut adults has never been conducted.

According to results from the PRI survey of adult education program directors, about two-thirds of the programs that responded (22) maintain some type of formal waiting list; about half of those with lists (15) and one without a formal list reported having learners waiting for class openings as of November 2006. All but one had students waiting for ESL services and three-quarters (12) had waiting lists for basic skills and high school completion courses.

An inventory that learners, providers, advocates, and case managers could use to find out about current services throughout the state including when and where they are offered is not available. Partial directories have been prepared by the regional literacy councils but have not been routinely updated, which limits their usefulness to individuals trying to find specific services. The Connecticut “Infoline” on-line directory and community referral service, which is a partnership of local United Ways and the state, has listings for some adult literacy services within its education category but it is not a comprehensive inventory. An online, interactive database of adult literacy services in Massachusetts was put in place by the state education department in March 2006. It provides users with easily accessible, detailed information on public and private programs throughout that state.

For the most part, data about specific adult literacy programs and services are maintained in separate, incompatible automated information systems operated by each major component of the system. Data are not linked so individuals can be tracked across systems to find out learner success rates or what services seem to work best with what types of adults.

Comparisons of adult literacy program information across systems, particularly learner outcomes, are also made difficult by inconsistencies in how data are defined and reported. For example, the way the performance indicator “entered postsecondary education or training” is measured differs between community colleges and adult education programs. The colleges count all incoming students enrolled in their academic credit programs as entering postsecondary education. In accordance with federal reporting requirements, when evaluating performance of adult education and other WIA-funded programs, only the individuals who indicated a goal of postsecondary education/training and achieve it are counted. Even though other adult education graduates (with different goals, such as improved skills or employment) may be attending college or participating in advanced vocational training, they are not included in the relevant outcome measure. This is one of several recognized weaknesses in the federal accountability process, which are currently under review at the national and state levels.

Various federal privacy law requirements and administering agency policies also restrict access to each system’s data, even for research purposes. At present, to ensure privacy, it is labor department policy not to provide wage data on individual basis -- although aggregated information is available in a variety of formats -- to other state agencies such as the education department or entities like workforce boards and adult education providers that are trying to evaluate program results. Federal privacy requirements also have prevented research staff in the community colleges and the SDE adult education unit from sharing student records in order to track transition success.

There is great need for program evaluation and research but little capacity for that function within any of the systems involved in adult literacy. Existing staff resources are devoted primarily to the analysis required to meet federal and state funding provisions. Little attention can be given to: 1) better understanding the experiences of learners (e.g., the time to complete programs, the extent of repeated courses, the factors that contribute to learning gains, persistence, and program completion); and 2) identifying programs and practices that have the best results (e.g., the impact of class size, teacher qualifications, duration and intensity of instruction, on student performance). The state education department has developed a good

information system with accurate, reliable data that is accessible to all providers as well as the adult education consultants. However, neither state nor local staff have much time to review and use it use for evaluating costs, activities, or outcomes to improve program performance or to identify best practices.

In coordinated systems, good quality data on programs and services are centrally collected to provide comprehensive information to administrators, policymakers, and users. Centralized data increase awareness of who's doing what, what is available and what is not, so gaps, overlaps, and opportunities for collaboration can be identified. It promotes better planning and strengthens accountability by allowing outcomes to be monitored and compared. Greater efficiency and customer satisfaction are also possible through better matching of programs and services to learner needs.

The unknown inventory of adult literacy services impedes planning and contributes to inefficiencies and unmet need. Program providers and policymakers don't have all of the information they need to assess effectiveness of services and identify ways to improve outcomes or increase efficiency. The lack of system wide performance data makes it difficult to pinpoint responsibility for results or know if adult literacy policies and programs are having their intended impact.

At present, there is no mechanism or authority for developing and maintaining information on adult literacy services in a central location or for resolving privacy issues to permit data sharing for research purposes. Virtually no staff resources at the state level are allocated to these system management functions.

The program review committee recommends that under the direction of the adult literacy leadership board:

- a) a statewide automated inventory of adult literacy services that can be accessed by the public online, and includes a description of the type of service, the time and place it is offered, and any eligibility requirements or fees, be established and maintained;**
- b) all adult literacy service providers be required to maintain waiting lists and report that information in accordance with standards developed by the board; and**
- c) state agencies with automated information systems containing data related to adult literacy services work together to overcome the restrictions that impede the sharing of program data for research purposes and develop ways of using their systems to track individual progress and service outcomes.**
- d) The committee also recommends a state "report card" on the status of adult literacy in Connecticut be prepared and presented as part of the board's annual report recommended earlier. The adult literacy report card should include, for each major component of the adult literacy system (e.g., adult education, family literacy, workplace literacy, developmental education): a description of funding levels and**

sources; numbers and demographics of the individuals served, and performance measures for key adult literacy outcomes such as learning gains, program/credential completion, success in employment or postsecondary education/training, and indicators of community participation (e.g., attain citizenship, voting, attending parent-teacher conferences, etc.).

- e) **The program review committee further recommends at least two full-time education consultant positions be added to the adult education unit of the State Department of Education to provide sufficient capacity to collect and analyze information on available services and program outcomes and to carry out research on adult education program effectiveness and best practices. As part of its strategic planning responsibilities, the leadership board should also determine whether additional staffing is needed at the state level by other systems with adult literacy responsibilities, including public libraries, to carry out these functions.**

As noted in the September briefing report, professional staffing for the SDE adult education unit was reduced by half (from 10 to 5 education consultant positions) about four years ago. The unit director position also was eliminated and management responsibilities for all adult education functions were transferred to the head of a newly combined division for early childhood, career and adult education.

At this time, only four consultant positions are filled, while the adult education unit's responsibilities continue to expand. According to the division head, the unit is able to carry out its funding and basic compliance activities but has little or no capacity for technical assistance and local development, data management, or new initiatives. It is his opinion at least a seven-member unit is needed to carry out current duties and better serve the needs of the system's approximately 33,000 students and more than 70 program providers.

Additional staff recommended for the education department and for other agencies, as determined necessary, will be critical resources for supporting the strategic planning, system oversight, and statewide policy development activities of the adult literacy leadership board. Expanded resources within the agencies responsible for adult literacy services would be in lieu of providing staff for these functions directly to the board.

Shared Resources

Overall, it is clear that collaborative approaches are the most cost-effective way to deliver quality services to the adult literary target population. There is general consensus that integrating adult basic education with job training in a work context is the most effective way of improving literacy levels of incumbent workers. Similarly, studies have shown family literacy programs, which blend adult and early childhood education with parenting skills training and other supports, can be highly successful in raising the literacy levels of both parent and child. As noted earlier, undereducated, unemployed, and underemployed adult learners have diverse and multiple needs that require a wide range of instructional options and support services and more resources than are currently available.

Among the benefits of collaboration to adult literacy program providers is the ability to: 1) optimize limited resources by sharing staff, facilities, administrative support, and, ideally, funding; and 2) provide better quality and a broader scope of services through effective program coordination. *Strong working relationships among adult literacy stakeholders within a region - employers, adult education providers, local schools, community colleges and other higher education institutions, workforce boards, job training providers, organized labor -- make shared resources and coordinated service delivery possible.*

In several regions of the state, informal partnerships have developed among area program providers to deliver integrated workplace education services to employees of local businesses. In some areas, adult education providers, workforce boards, local community action agencies and in some cases, a region's community college, are working together to pool funding and other resources to operate programs designed to improve the job prospects of JFES clients with limited literacy and other employment barriers.

Public-private partnerships between local libraries and Literacy Volunteer (LV) agencies have a long history throughout the state. By combining resources -- the libraries' space and administrative supports and the tutors trained by Literacy Volunteers -- both organizations are able to expand their capacity to serve their clients without increased cost. As noted in the September briefing report, LV agencies in their capacity as "cooperating eligible entities (CEEs)" with adult education programs also have allowed those providers to substantially increase access and service quality in a very cost-effective manner. At the same time, the LV agencies benefit from their relationship with the adult education system; they gain opportunities for professional development, administrative and financial support, and space, which is a problem for many literacy service providers.

Public libraries are a particularly valuable partner for adult literacy programs since they are a low cost way to increase access to services. Many libraries, especially ones in urban areas, are open at night and on weekends, which are the best times for adult learners. They are located in almost every town in the state and the larger libraries often have several neighborhood branches. Most have computers and other technology available for public use and professional staff trained to support adult literacy. Libraries also tend to be a "neutral" environment for those adults with negative educational experiences, which can help encourage participation in literacy programs.

However, several factors present impediments to successful collaboration among adult literacy providers. These include: fragmented and inflexible funding sources; inadequate resources for adult literacy services overall; and a lack of resources dedicated to building and maintaining partnerships for coordinated service delivery.

The separate funding streams of each major system impose restrictions that make it difficult to share resources. For example, most federal WIA monies are directed to certain eligible groups (youth, dislocated workers, welfare-to-work clients) and cannot be used for other purposes. Community colleges have very little funding flexibility. Their academic courses including developmental education classes entail tuition costs and fees while noncredit

community education courses including basic skills, ESL, and customized workplace education all operate on cost-recovery basis.

The largest and most stable source of funding for adult literacy services appears to be the federal, state, and local money allocated to adult education. As discussed in the September briefing report, the total annual budget for adult education programs throughout the state in the past few years is just over \$40 million; almost half comes from local government and in some communities, the local share ranges up to 100 percent of program costs. While local funding reduces the state's cost burden and provides some budget stability, it can make programs parochial and inhibit outreach.

Pooling of resources among adult literacy providers has occurred, but only on a small scale. It generally happens when the money comes from outside the traditional funding streams, such as through federal bonus grants (e.g., through WIA and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, programs), special appropriations, or philanthropic foundation grants. Overcoming funding "silos" is a major challenge since much of money for adult literacy services comes through federal grants that are beyond state control.

The adult education system has achieved a substantial degree of regionalized service delivery. The regional programs and large providers that act like regional programs typically can offer more instructional options at more sites and more times than single district programs. Economies of scale allow them to have better administrative support and information technology, full-time counselors, and dedicated space for offices and classrooms. In the past, the education department offered bonuses to districts that developed regional adult education programs. Despite the many benefits of regionalized service delivery, no additional funding is currently provided for adult education programs that serve multiple districts.

- Workforce board and adult education staff in the Eastern part of the state attribute much of that region's success in developing partnerships to deliver literacy, employment, and social services to their highly regionalized adult education programs. While the Eastern workforce investment region encompasses 41 towns, they are all served by four adult education providers and only one, Groton, serves a single school district. EastConn, a regional education service center (RESC), a regional adult education program (Vernon), and two large district providers (Norwich and New London) serve all the remaining towns in the region.
- Another benefit to regionalized adult education services is having fewer individual providers for the state education department to manage and monitor. A small total number of programs could permit staff to concentrate more effort on assessing performance and providing technical assistance; less time could be spent on separate compliance reviews and reports, as well as travel for field visits and meetings. At present, most of the 47 adult education providers (28) serve a single municipality, including the state's three largest cities (Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven). The other 19 providers, which include two RESCs, serve from one to 16 cooperating districts.

The only firm data on funding levels for adult literacy programs are from the adult education system, which is, by far, the largest single resource for adult basic skills and ESL services. It appears none of the systems involved in adult literacy in the state have adequate funding to meet current demand or expand service levels. Competition for limited funding can inhibit resource sharing among providers. Fragmented funding sources confuses accountability for literacy results.

- As noted above, with its \$40 million annual budget, the adult education system is the state's major adult literacy resource. Despite the large need, adult education programs have been "flat-funded" in recent years and state financial support has declined when adjusted for inflation. Adult education programs are in competition with the K-12 system in their districts and are generally a lower priority. To support their mandated classes, a number of programs use revenues they raise through their enrichment courses.
- While it is likely there are other resources being used to support family literacy programs, the only readily identifiable public funding is the federal money the state receives for the Even Start program. At this time, less than \$2 million is available for the whole program and only a portion is used for adult literacy services.
- Within the regional workforce investment boards (WIBs), basic skills and ESL instruction competes for training funds with vocational and occupational training, the main mission of workforce development programs. Based on interviews with directors, the resources available to the boards for providing adult literacy services outside of the adult education system are minimal.
 - In the current fiscal year, the five boards estimate a total of about \$3.4 million is allocated to services for improving basic skills and English language proficiency.
 - Individual board funding for adult literacy programs ranged from around \$300,000 to just over \$1 million. The primary sources are: JFES and WIA program monies; and the newly established TANF Job Reorganization Program account within the labor department budget. Smaller amounts of funding for adult literacy services come to the boards through the DOL incumbent worker training program and some private grants.
- Since the late 1970s, the state Department of Labor has funded customized job/incumbent worker training, which can include services to improve the literacy skills of currently employed adults and, in some cases, job seekers. Over time, total program funding has been about \$1 million per year although the budget peaked at \$4 million in FY 03. Since that year, however, annual

state funding has dropped to about \$500,000, which the department has supplemented in some cases with some small amounts of federal (WIA reserve) funding. It is not known what portion of incumbent worker training funds are used for basic skills and ESL services.

- The federal Trade Adjustment Assistance Act (TAA) administered by the state labor department is another source of funding for adult literacy services. The program provides job training and education assistance to workers who are unemployed because of national trade policies. The amount of TAA funding used for adult literacy isn't known but DOL reports that between July 1, 2004 and June 30, 2006, 221 program participants were referred for adult basic education services (158 for ESL and 73 for ABE/GED).
 - In the current fiscal year, DOL is administering two new programs that are aimed, in part, at improving the literacy skills of adults -- the TANF Jobs Reorganization program, noted earlier, and the 21st Century Job Skills program. Neither one provides substantial amounts of money for adult literacy services, but they are flexible funding sources and appear to encourage service delivery partnerships.¹²
- An estimate of the resources used by community colleges to provide basic academic and ESL courses to adults through its developmental and community education programs could not be developed within the timeframe of the committee study. These services receive little direct funding from the college budgets since they are primarily financed with student tuition and fees paid by other users (e.g., businesses and state and nonprofit agencies that purchase customized training classes).
 - There is virtually no information readily available about other public or any private sources of funding for adult literacy. Through the committee study, PRI staff did become aware of a variety of small, often privately funded, adult literacy programs and initiatives operating throughout the state.
 - For example, the Connecticut Humanities Council (CHC) is funding a nationally recognized family literacy initiative called “Motherread/Fatherread” that serves primarily low income parents with limited reading skills and works in collaboration with local social service and adult education agencies.

¹² In the current budget, the legislature appropriated a total of \$6.5 million for the TANF Jobs Reorganization account. About \$3 million was allocated for workplace education and other basic skills and ESL instruction that is connected with vocational and occupational skills training. The current appropriation for the 21st Century Job Skills program is \$1 million, with 5% set aside for administrative costs. Allocation of the funds had not been finalized at the time this report was prepared; however, \$150,000 may be directed to pilot projects involving collaborative workforce education services provided by adult education programs and community colleges.

- An ESL and literacy tutoring program for children and adults called “New Haven Reads” operates in New Haven with funding from several sources including a Yale alumni group, United Way, CHC, and a private foundation.
- Over the years, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving has supported a number adult literacy projects in the greater Hartford area through its grants to nonprofit agencies. Earlier this year, the foundation engaged World Education, Inc., a nationally recognized adult literacy research organization, to review services and needs in the area. World Education is scheduled to submit its final report, which will include suggestions on the best ways to channel foundation funding to support effective adult literacy programs, to the foundation’s board of directors in December 2006.
- It is likely there are many small or specialized community- and faith-based programs and private organizations that could become valuable partners in local adult literacy service delivery networks with the help of a leadership agency.

There is no statewide policy directive or significant fiscal incentive in place to foster regional planning and service delivery partnerships for adult literacy services. Except for state’s one-stop career center system, the collaboration among adult literacy programs that occurs now is generally informal and voluntary. While there are financial benefits for small school districts to become cooperators with large adult education programs, the state does not provide funding specifically to support collaborative delivery of any adult literacy services at present. Furthermore, successful collaboration requires its own resources -- someone must be assigned to manage the partnership process. Research indicates it is not so important where management role is placed, but that someone with strong organizational and communication skills oversee the process.

Combining efforts and funds allows a system to build program capacity, increase service intensity, and improve access. Effective coordination, which must include a comprehensive strategic planning process, can promote sharing of resources particularly if priorities, roles, and funding are determined through collaborative process that builds trust.

With few strong incentives to pool resources and various barriers to sharing funding, effective collaboration is unlikely. Funding levels are inadequate to meet current need or expand programs. Few resources are allocated to support collaboration and there is no guiding policy encouraging partnerships and shared resources for service delivery.

The program review committee recommends that the board, through its strategic planning process:

- 1) establish that collaboration and community partnerships are the preferred way of delivering adult literacy services and identify ways to modify program requirements to promote shared funding and funding flexibility; and**
- 2) develop funding policies that provide a) incentives for community partnerships of adult literacy providers and regionalized service delivery and b) financial support for regional collaboration and community planning.**

In addition, it is recommended that the legislature, with the advice of the adult literacy leadership board, establish a new funding source for adult education and other adult literacy program providers that provides state bonus grants for good performance outcomes, including but not limited to, effective collaboration and coordinated funding and service delivery. The board should also develop a policy for providing multi-year funding to programs with records of good performance.

Figure II-1. Adult Literacy: Key Strategic Planning Issues

ADULT EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

While the lead agency for adult education programs in the majority of states is the education department, community college systems have this responsibility in about a dozen states. Proponents of combining basic, college preparation, and postsecondary education services for adult learners within one system believe it can result in: a) stronger focus on the educational needs of adults, which differ from those of the traditional K-12 student population; b) better coordination of the limited resources available for adult learners; and c) facilitate transitions to college-level work and careers.

Placing adult education and community college programs in the same system can remove obstacles to tracking student outcomes and promote integrated information. In general, community colleges operate on schedules better suited to adult learner needs.

In Connecticut, regional community colleges offer daytime, evening, and summer programming, many have child care available on-site and offer counseling and job placement services, and most have locations in urban areas, where much of the target population lives and that are accessible by public transportation.

On the other hand, having adult education within local school systems strengthens connections with the community

and links with family literacy programs. It also allows for cost-effective sharing of educational infrastructure -- facilities, technology and other support resources.

Also, there is no evidence that merely placing adult education services with a community college or other higher education system improves the transition experiences of students. Efforts must still be made to actually integrate educational services and resources and align curricula.

Furthermore, moving governance of adult education into the community college system would require resolution of two major issues: how to add authority to grant high school diplomas to the community college mission; and how to replace the significant amount of financial support local school districts give to adult education under the current structure.

In examining more fully the potential benefits to governance changes, the strategic planning process can clarify the roles of the adult education and community colleges systems. At a minimum, it can determine the most effective division of labor for providing basic adult education and developmental education. It can also continue and expand on current efforts to better align the curriculum and standards of each system.

INSTRUCTIONAL INTENSITY

As discussed earlier, research shows intensity of instruction is the critical factor for helping adults learners make literacy gains. It appears a minimum of 100 to 150 hours of instruction is needed for most students to make significant progress (e.g., complete a literacy level as measured by the National Reporting System).

On average, Connecticut adult education participants receive 85 hours of instruction in a year; the mean for all ESL students is 65 hours. According to state education department estimates, about 31 percent of the participants in adult basic education programs attend 100 hours or more of instruction during a fiscal year while about 18 percent of ESL students achieve that level of participation.

Adults with low literacy skills, especially very limited English language proficiency, need a significant amount of service provided in a variety of forms (e.g., classroom instruction, learning laboratory time, tutoring, on-line), often in combination with counseling, and even diagnostic evaluations, to progress and succeed. As an example, many adult education experts believe individuals with literacy skills well below the high school level (e.g., those with a 5th or 6th grade reading level) need at least 200 hours of instruction to make

the academic gains they need to be prepared to take the GED examination.

Some adult literacy service providers, in recognition of this issue, have developed ways to offer more intensive services, particularly for adults who need to make large literacy gains quickly (e.g., JFES clients or incumbent workers with limited English proficiency). However, in trying to serve as many individuals as possible, adult literacy programs often are unable to provide the quality of instruction most learners require to make substantial progress in reasonable amounts of time.

In a number of cases, the cap on state appropriations for adult education grants has meant cut backs on instructional intensity; many programs have reported reductions in the number of community locations and the times classes are offered. Few, if any, programs have the funding levels needed to significantly expand or improve their adult literacy services.

According to the PRI survey results, it is not uncommon for programs to increase class sizes, frequently beyond the number believed best for instructional quality, to accommodate demand. About half of the programs responding to the survey (16) reported class sizes were increased to accommodate demand; 81 percent increased the sizes of adult basic skills and secondary completion classes and 69 percent increased ESL class sizes. In nearly half of the programs (15), actual average class size exceeded their goal for average class size.

The adult literacy strategic plan needs to systematically examine the issue of intensity and identify what resources are required to offer the levels and quality of instruction most students need to succeed. Without increases in funding for adult literacy services, a reallocation of resources to achieve instructional intensity will need to be considered; it is likely quality could be improved but fewer students may be served.

Efforts also must be undertaken to better understand what program providers can do to retain students and promote learner persistence, or continued participation in some form of instruction (e.g., classroom, online, self-study), until their literacy goals are reached.

TARGET POPULATIONS

Adult literacy services are aimed at populations with a wide range of needs that require a variety of options and supports. The special needs of different types of learners and the resources required to address them have not been systematically examined.

The recommended strategic planning process provides the state with an opportunity to take a comprehensive look at the adult literacy target population and set priorities for service delivery and funding. Issues related to four groups with special needs are highlighted below.

Out-of-school youth. At present, about 20 percent of adult education participants are students age 16 to 18 years, most of whom have chosen not to be served within the K-12 system. In many cases, an adult education program is serving as an alternative high school for a student who is not succeeding in the regular secondary system. The majority are enrolled in credit diploma programs, the most expensive adult education service.

SDE research also shows out-of-school youth present many challenges to the system. As a group, they have high turnover and attrition rates, low academic ability, and significant emotional and behavioral issues.

The number of 16-18 year old students entering the adult education system has been increasing at a faster rate than other age groups in recent years, and individuals are coming in at a younger age and with fewer high school credits earned. Many of these students have significant educational needs, but the adult education system has fewer resources than the comprehensive public school system to support them. Furthermore, adult education students under age 21 are not eligible for special education services, even if they received them while attending regular K-12 system schools.

Providing adult education opportunities to the out-of-school youth population can be viewed as diverting already limited literacy resources from older adult learners, who unlike the out-of-school youth have no other option for free secondary school completion services. At the same time, these students are not receiving

the same supports they would in a comprehensive high school, which can be significant if they were receiving special education services.

Finally, while it can be beneficial to the younger students to be in an environment with serious, mature learners, some believe their presence reduces participation by older adults. The adult literacy strategic plan should examine ways of minimizing the participation of 16-18 year old students in the adult education system.

Welfare-to-work clients. Jobs First Employment Service (JFES), or Connecticut's welfare-to-work, program clients represent another group of adult education students with special needs. Many have limited English proficiency and/or low literacy levels, sometimes even if they have a high school credential. These are two serious barriers to employability.

Research developed through the committee's concurrent review of the impact of Connecticut's welfare reform initiative shows that over half of the TFA recipients included in that study's client sample had literacy levels below the secondary level for reading; eight in ten had math skills at the basic or below basic levels of literacy.

In general, JFES clients are a target population given priority for training and education services. However, the time constraints and work participation requirements of the welfare-to-work program appear to interfere with effective participation in literacy

improvement programs. In addition, JFES clients may be unable to find openings in adult education classes they need at the times they can attend due to the restricted capacities of most programs.

Programs that combine intensive literacy services with vocational training in a workplace context have been found particularly successful for improving the employment opportunities of low-wage workers. Workplace education can be particularly effective for low-income working parents. The strategic plan should closely examine these types of intensive programs and develop a statewide approach for better meeting the adult literacy needs of the JFES population.

Individuals with disabilities. At this time, there are no good estimates on the literacy needs of adults with disabilities, including learning disabilities. Good information on what, if any, special adult literacy services are available for this population is also lacking. The recommended strategic planning process can begin to address these deficiencies.

As part of the committee study, PRI staff developed some information about the services adult education programs have in place for students with disabilities. In accordance with federal and state laws, all adult education programs make their services accessible to persons with disabilities and make reasonable

accommodations to instructional programs to meet student needs.¹³

The state education department provides training, technical assistance and materials to adult education provider staff on: disability and learning disability awareness; screening and assessment; instructional strategies; and the federal Americans with Disabilities Act and other legislation concerning disabilities. SDE also recommends that each adult education provider designate a staff person to serve as a disability coordinator and most, if not all, have.

There is no firm data on the incidence of learning disabilities among the adult education population. However, teachers and administrators working in the system believe a high proportion of students would be helped by better screening for special learning needs as well as more counseling and instructional options for individuals found to have learning disabilities.

There is little capacity in any adult education program, and no legal obligation, for identifying and diagnosing disabilities and special learning needs. Program directors did point out to PRI staff that it is not uncommon for their teachers to have some background and

¹³ Adult education programs are subject to federal laws concerning persons with disabilities, specifically Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Section 504). They are not required to comply with provisions of the federal special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

training in special education; some programs have retired certified special education teachers on staff. According to PRI survey results, almost 40% of program providers (12 of the 31 who responded to the question), also have developed courses for and target services to adult learners with special needs.

Inmates. As described above, the DOC inmate population has significant literacy needs and the department has developed an extensive adult education program to address them.¹⁴ However, like other adult education programs, the demand for services exceeds the agency's capacity to provide them. DOC maintains a waiting list that typically includes about 300 inmates. Additional funding to add services seems unlikely since the state appropriation for the DOC education program now is larger than total amount allocated to the state adult education grant for local providers.

The department provides transition assistance to its student to help prepare them to return to community and link them with employment opportunities after they leave the correctional system. Hard research is limited but informal analysis by DOC indicates good education and transition services are key to reducing recidivism.

The recommended strategic planning process offers the opportunity to identify cost-effective ways of expanding adult education

¹⁴ DOC estimates about 35% of its inmate population lacks a high school completion credential. The typical United District #1 student functions at a 6th grade literacy level and is about 28 years old.

services for inmates. The plan can also examine what additional steps could be taken to provide inmates participating in the DOC education program with the skills to they need to successfully reintegrate into the community.

RESOURCES

Funding for adult literacy services in Connecticut comes from a variety of a public, private, and philanthropic sources, as the program review committee study demonstrates. However, there is not a central, comprehensive source of reliable information on available resources. The recommended strategic planning process is a way to continue to identify funding sources as well as centrally collect and analyze data about adult literacy resources.

It is especially important for the plan to examine further the impact of local school district funding of state mandated adult education programs. As discussed earlier, adult education must compete with K-12 system spending mandates; funding levels depend largely on support from the local superintendent, school board, and taxpayers. Towns must provide the opportunity for free mandated adult education programs (i.e., basic education, secondary school completion, ESL, and citizenship) but beyond the statutory standards for an adult high school diploma, there are very few state requirements about the quantity or quality of adult education services offered.

In theory, since the state adult education grant to towns is paid as percentage reimbursement of expenditures, the more a school district spends, the more state aid it will receive. However, with the sliding scale reimbursement (0 - 65%), there is no incentive for towns at low levels to expand their programs.

Directors also have become reluctant to request any increased funding to "grow" their programs because their local governments might end up having to take on a greater share of expenses due to the continuing cap on the state appropriations for adult education grants. To expand, and in some cases just maintain, mandated adult education programs, some directors find creative ways to finance services (using revenue from enrichment classes and fundraising events) and seek grants from private sources.

The existing state grant formula and funding level is not a way to promote either program stability or access to learning opportunities. In addition, the current funding mechanism and statutory eligibility requirements do not encourage outreach. By law, towns only must provide adult education to residents of their school district. There is no requirement to allow nonresidents to participate although SDE encourages programs to accept out-of-district students without charge if they have spaces available.

Based on PRI survey results, most providers allow nonresidents to attend classes if there is room but some strictly limit

participation to their local residents. Fourteen of the 33 providers that responded to the question reported that nonresidents are welcome to participate at no charge if class space is available. Another three allow participation but charge the nonresident's town. Seven providers stated nonresidents are not allowed to participate in their mandated adult education programs at all and the remaining nine providers applied a variety of restrictions on participation (e.g., allow nonresidents to attend GED but not CDP classes if there is room, or allow individuals who work but do not live within the district to participate).

Data developed by SDE indicates there is not a lot of "migration" among the adult education student population. It is estimated that in any year, about 3 to 4 percent of all students are enrolled in two provider programs; only about 9 to 10 percent of the students who return to an adult education in a subsequent year go to provider different than the one they originally used. The recommended strategic plan should examine ways to revise the state adult education grant to promote access to services and make the best use of overall system capacity.

The strategic planning process can also consider possible alternatives for funding adult education. For example, it has been suggested that adult education programs could be funded in a manner similar to charter schools. This approach could eliminate the need for local funding and significantly increase the resources available for adult education services while providing accountability and greater stability.

An adult education charter school has been operating with considerable success in the District of Columbia since 1998. If the strategic planning process finds this option worth pursuing, a similar initiative could be undertaken in Connecticut on a pilot basis.

It has also been suggested that adult education could be operated like the federal WIA-funded intensive training services, with individual accounts and vouchers. Implementing such a system would take considerable restructuring of current services and systems, but could, in the future, offer more direct accountability and increase access. It is an idea the strategic planning process could explore.

Potential sources for additional funding also need to be explored through the strategic planning process, particularly if any significant expansion of services is to occur. One possible new source to consider is an incumbent worker training fund, possibly financed through an employer tax.

As noted earlier in this section, Connecticut funds incumbent worker training, which sometimes includes adult literacy services, primarily through a state appropriation. At present, state funding totals \$500,000, although in the past about \$1,000,000 a year was appropriated for incumbent worker/customized job training within the labor department.

According to a recent U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, about half of the states in the country fund worker training programs with employer tax revenues.¹⁵ At least 10 of the 23 states included in the GAO study reported their employer tax-funded programs were used to provide basic skills training (math, GED preparation, ESL, etc.).

Among the states with employer-financed programs are Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island; as of 2002, the training portions of their program budgets totaled \$21.7 million, \$11.8 million, and \$3.0 million, respectively. The portion allocated to adult basic skills and ESL training was not identified by the GAO study.

¹⁵ U.S. GAO, *Workforce Training: Almost Half of States Fund Employment Placement and Training through Employer Taxes and most Coordinate with Federally Funded Programs* (GAO-04-282), February 2004.

APPENDIX A

Workforce Challenges Facing Connecticut Highlights from “Connecticut Demographics and Economics” by the Office of Workforce Competitiveness (OWC)¹

“The global transition to knowledge economy raises levels of skills needed in workplace ... a strong foundation in math, science, literacy skills and technology is critical.” (p. 5)

“Connecticut’s economy must be fueled by innovation and skilled talent to remain competitive and will depend heavily on ...”

- research and development, venture capital, technology transfer and commercialization
- skills upgrading for existing workers, especially older workers staying on the job longer
- increased numbers of graduates in math, science, technology and engineering fields (p. 66).

According to OWC, the combination of Connecticut’s economic and demographic profiles, in light of the worldwide movement from an industrial economy to an information-based economy, present a significant challenges to generating and retaining the skilled workforce the state needs to be competitive. Among the most significant concerns are: no population growth; barely any workforce growth, with most increases due to immigration; an aging population; a net loss of young, entry-level workers (college-age up to age 34); and the fact much of tomorrow’s available workforce will come from areas of high poverty. Poverty remains a critical factor affecting academic achievement. Low graduation rates among minority students and significantly lower student performance on state tests in urban districts mean many individuals in state’s “talent pipeline” will be unprepared for and lack the minimum skills levels needed in a knowledge-based economy.

A Demographic Snapshot

- Connecticut ranks:
 - 45th in total population growth
 - 10th in the percentage of residents age 65 and older
 - 18th in projected population growth to 2025, with a 0.0% expected growth rate over the period
 - 7th oldest state in the nation, with a median age 38.5 in 2003 and projected to reach 40 by 2008
 - 14th in the percentage of the population made up of immigrants and 12th in projected increase through 2025
 - 4th in exportation of college-bound students, and a “net exporter” of college students
 - 23rd in projected high school graduates over the period 2002-2018
- By 2010, those over age 45 will represent 40 percent of Connecticut’s workforce.
- There are more individuals over 62 than there are teenagers in Connecticut and twice as many households without school-aged children as those with.
- The 20-34 age cohort in Connecticut declined at roughly twice the national average between 1990 and 2000 (over 20% compared to 12%).
- Student in poor communities, compared to the statewide average, are:
 - 17 times more likely to drop out of high school; and
 - 9 times less likely to pass the 10th grade Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT).

¹ See “Demographics and Economics in Connecticut,” a PowerPoint presentation prepared by OWC, March 2006