

State Council for Adult Literacy Education Services
Wednesday, March 20, 2013
10:00 am
Department of Labor and Workforce Development
4th Floor
Trenton, New Jersey

MINUTES

I. Welcome and Introduction

The acting Chairperson Hal Beder called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m. and welcomed everyone. He indicated that now that the State Council for Adult Literacy Education Services (SCALES) has submitted the final version of the report *Investing in New Jersey's Adult Learners*, it will focus on strategies that build a policy and planning framework which is consistent with the vision articulated in the report and that leads to improving the adult literacy system.

Chairperson Beder asked attendees to introduce themselves. He then asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the January 16, 2013 meeting. The motion was made seconded and passed.

The Chair provided Aaron Fichtner, Deputy Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD), the opportunity to make introductory comments. The Deputy Commissioner stated that LWD shares SCALES concern about the importance of taking a comprehensive look at how we address adult literacy in New Jersey. A significant amount of adults could benefit from an improved literacy system. About a half million State residents do not have a high school diploma and many others who do, lack the literacy skills necessary to be successful in the labor market. For too long we have dealt with a disconnected system. LWD is excited about the work that SCALES has taken on and the Department looks forward to working with the Council to improve the system.

The Chair also asked Michele Boronkas, Executive Director, State Employment and Training Commission (SETC), to comment. Executive Director Horst echoed the Deputy Commissioner's comments about the importance of a system review, and she indicated that this is an exciting opportunity to improve literacy delivery. The SETC is working to fortify SCALES' membership by filling vacancies and ensuring that the voice of business is at the table. This is a great opportunity to take the work of the Council and translate it into action.

II. SCALES Report Update and Next Steps

Lansing Davis noted that at the January 16, 2013 SCALES meeting the Report, *Investing in New Jersey's Adult Learners*, was approved and subsequently presented to the SETC at its January 30, 2013 meeting. He mentioned that Deputy Commissioner Fichtner not only has committed to working with SCALES to improve the literacy system, but also committed resources to take the next steps in moving forward. Lansing Davis also indicated that Hal Beder, Barry Semple and he met with Deputy Commissioner Fichtner to talk about the SCALES report and to begin outlining strategies to redesign the adult literacy system. At the March 12, 2013 SETC meeting Barry Sample provided a brief update on the activities associated with literacy system improvement.

Chair Beder pointed out that Core Value # 3 in the recently developed Unified State Workforce Development Plan directly relates to literacy skills development. Deputy Commissioner Fichtner indicated that the SETC in collaboration with LWD and other State agencies developed the Unified State Workforce Development Plan which outlines four core values:

- Core Value #1 Driving Investments Based on Industry Needs
- Core Value #2 Meeting Jobseekers Where They Are
- Core Value #3 Equipping the Workforce for Employment
- Core Value #4 Increasing System Accountability

The SETC and LWD have formed workgroups around each of the core values to develop action steps for implementing the plan. Hal Beder, Howard Miller, Chief, Office of Customized and Literacy Training and Lansing Davis are members of the core value #3 workgroup. The plan mentions literacy, but the work of SCALES is envisioned being the bridge to the development of a new literacy system. If the system is going to equip people for jobs that provide sustainable wages and offer career paths, then it must ensure that individuals have solid literacy skills as a foundation for more advanced skill development. From a short term perspective, LWD is open to any suggestions on how literacy dollars should be spent within the current configured system, while continuing the long term planning to create a better system.

III. Adult Literacy Vision and its Implications

Hal Beder stated that the vision statement that was articulated in the adult literacy plan is a general guide to the direction we want to pursue and the task now is to determine the specific strategies to create a more effective system. He asked attendees to review the vision statement in the handout of the Executive Summary of the Scales report and then he facilitated a discussion around how the system might change in response to this vision.

Responses to this question elicited a number of comments including the following: Many of the individuals who come into the correctional system have low literacy skills. The challenge is to prepare these individuals for jobs in the future when they are released.

WIA Title II programs focus on reading and math advancement leading to a GED. The vision goes beyond this to postsecondary skill development and attainment of a credential at that level. This will require programs to rethink their goals and outcomes.

This vision statement requires connectivity between literacy programs, the workforce system and postsecondary. The system is currently structured to focus on siloed programs rather than the needs of individuals. It's difficult to navigate around program requirements that do not necessarily fit well with the client's needs. What is the role of the WIB and the One-Stop in helping clients and the staff that serves them navigate through the system.

There is a vacuum in the system- too much transition in staff, little system knowledge, and not sufficient consistency from one local area to the next. Though ten years was spent on the effort to consolidated programs and services into a system, much fragmentation and inconsistency still exists. Ultimately it comes down to the funding source with its rules and policies. It determines what you are allowed to do. Many of the pieces are in place, but the connections between programs' staffs may be weak.

Vocational schools need to also be better connected with the system because some adults are not ready to transition to postsecondary. The need to improve connections and coordination highlights the importance of a shared vision throughout the system. Each local program should not be expected to navigate the complexities of the system. At the State level there must be a vision and a roadmap based on that vision that can guide local programs through the maze of the system.

SCALES is positioned in both legislation and membership to make decisions in concert with the different State agencies about what the system should look like and how to get there.

Given this discussion the word “integrated” should be added to the vision after the first comma to read: *In keeping with the Equipped for the Future model, an integrated adult literacy system will...* Integrating the system will not be easy. It will require a cultural change, getting people who are not use to working together to do so. That is also true of the overall workforce system, not just adult education, because programs tend to be more comfortable within their silos rather than functioning as an integrated whole. The unified State Plan is about a number of state agencies working together to change the culture and the system. Large system change does not happen overnight which is why the core values work is important; it focuses on identifying those incremental change benchmarks that indicate if we are moving in the right direction or need to make course corrections.

The goal of the literacy system is to transition learners to something else, rather than just improving test scores or getting a GED. Maybe the Title II NGO should include requiring activities to facilitate transition such as involving learners in career awareness programs. However, unless a program offers sufficient instructional hour per week, adding new goals such as career awareness activities will only dilute the offering. On the other hand, expanding hours require reducing the number of students served and/or increasing funding. The report addresses intensity of services and recommends at least one program in each of the workforce areas offer students access to twenty or more instructional hours per week.

Throughout this discussion two types of interventions have been addressed: near term strategies and visionary strategies. Near term strategies address how to make the system more effective and efficient within the current confines. These issues include reviewing the following:

- is the current cost per based on instructional levels sufficient to achieve the desired outcomes;
- are there populations that should be targeted;
- are there optimal intensity of service levels;
- are there opportunities to integrate technology to provide distance learning enhancements to current instructional programs; and,
- are there things that can be done to better educate local providers on what currently exist in the system to address individual customer needs – local areas need to create a product list.

Long term strategies address changing the system, a re-visioning strategy based on the vision template articulated in the SCALES report. The literacy skills needed for the 21st century needs to be defined in an operational context. The literacy RFP that is being developed should include this as a task. The intensity of instruction is also a long term issue, in that the overall visioning activities should address if the evolving focus should be to provide more instructional hours to achieve greater gains per learner served at the risk of

serving less students. It is also imperative that the business/economic case for literacy be made, that is, what is the return on investment for literacy funding. The cost vs. the benefit to the state and taxpayers needs to be shown.

This is a broad system, not just the federal funded WIA Title II programs, but includes the adult programs at the county vocational schools, CBO's, libraries, corrections institutions, schools, county colleges, and other providers. At the state and local levels solid connections need to be built with all these entities to maximize resources and better serve customers' needs.

Decisions are too often reactive, rather than proactive. They are not thoughtful decisions with a vision in mind.

IV. High School Equivalency Test Update

Larry Breeden indicated that at the recent State Board of Education meeting there was a proposal to remove all reference to GED in the administrative code and replacing it with adult education assessment. There is also a proposal to make changes to the 30 college credit program (another option to earn a high school diploma) to better reflect the skills embedded in the Common Core.

There is an RFQ (Request for Qualifications), which may be released this summer, to determine which tests will be used to measure high school equivalency for earning a New Jersey State diploma. The RFQ will specify that a test vendor who wants to apply will have to have a computer based test with a paper option and the test must be aligned with Common Core standards. Once received by the Department of Education, applications will be reviewed for approval. Any approved tests can be used to earn a diploma and approved testing centers can contract with any or all test vendors to offer equivalency test(s). At least three test vendors are anticipated to apply: Pearson GED, McGraw Hill, and Educational Testing Service (ETS). The cost will vary with Pearson being about \$120, and ETS and McGraw Hill in the \$50 plus range. The latter two may also have additional administrative fees that will increase the cost to the \$70 range.

Teachers will need professional development to focus instruction on the new test and the underlying Common Core skills. Teacher evaluations will also need to change to focus on student outcomes as they relate to these new standards. College teacher preparation programs are being changed to include a focus on the Common Core. Student instructional programs will have to be redesigned to align with the Common Core, as well. All test centers will need training for each of the test they offer. The resources for these training/professional development initiatives will need to be identified. The test vendors will provide some training also. However, it is important to stress that teachers should teach to the standards not to a particular test. Teachers should go beyond teaching discrete content to broader skill development.

V. Suggestions for Near-Term

Barry Semple indicated that there is growing consensus for an adult literacy education system redesign which is expressed in the SCALES report with particular attention to the vision and the Unified State Plan as alluded to in core value #3 (Equipping the Workforce for Employment). Much of today's discussion has focused on this big change and also some near term fixes.

Two areas to have near term impact on literacy delivery are through the WIA Title II NGO and the WIB Literacy Committees. SCALES should look at these areas to identify what short term fixes can be made. The NGO provides specific policy direction and operation expectations for providers. WIB Literacy committees periodically are required to develop planning documents that guide local literacy systems. These committees also meet numerous times a year, during which there is the opportunity to address the small fixes and more immediate tweaks to make in their literacy systems.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 pm.

**State Literacy for Adult Literacy Education Services
Attendees March 20, 2013**

Hal Beder- Professor Emeritus, Rutgers University
Jean Baptiste- Department of Correction
Michele Boronkas- State Employment and Training Commission
Larry Breeden- Department of Education
Lansing Davis- State Employment and Training Commission
Hugh DeHaven- Department of Corrections
Aaron Fichtner- Department of Labor and Workforce Development
Nancy Fisher- Jewish Vocational Services
Terri Hughes- Department of Human Services
Erik Jacobson- Montclair State University
Howard Miller- Department of Labor and Workforce Development
Victoria Rosch- New Jersey State Library
Julio Sabater- Universal Communications
Dana Schaed- Monmouth County Vocational School District
Barry Semple- Education Consultant