



**State Council for Adult Literacy Education Services**

**Wednesday, October 24, 2013**

**10:00 am**

**Department of Labor and Workforce Development**

**Auditorium**

**Trenton, New Jersey**

**MINUTES**

**I. Welcome and Introduction**

Hal Beder, Acting Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. Members were given the opportunity to review the minutes and then a motion to accept the minutes was approved.

**II. Literacy Plan Implementation Update**

Lansing Davis indicated that at the March 20, 2013 State Council for Adult Literacy Education Services (SCALES) meeting, Aaron Fichtner, Deputy Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD), indicated that LWD would provide funding for a consultant to develop an action blueprint and assist State and local stakeholders in the system change process. The Request for Proposal (RFP) for consultant services has not been issued yet because it is still being reviewed and modified to adhere to State requirements. We are hopeful that it will be issued soon.

LWD and the State Employment and Training Commission (SETC) are expected to manage the project with SCALES having a significant role through providing guidance to the consultants. Among the deliverables delineated in the RFP are the development of blueprint for action which provides concrete steps for realizing the vision and broad recommendations contained in the SCALES report along with the key literacy related elements contained in the Unified Workforce Investment Plan. As part of the task of developing a blueprint, the consultant will be expected to make a compelling economic argument for the value of literacy services showing the return on investment for the State and the taxpayers. The successful applicant to the RFP will be expected to reach out the national experts to identify best practices and then to provide system and local program level guidance based on this information.

Attendees were then given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments. In response to a question about pilot programs, it was indicated that the most recent draft of the RFP did not specifically mention pilot programs. However, the goal of the project still is to facilitate system redesign and the strategy to accomplish that may be through initial pilots and then full implementation or through an overall system-wide process. Either strategy will

require continuing analysis and appropriate course corrections based on the analysis. The timetable for implementation will also have to be adjusted given the project has not begun yet.

It was noted that early in the year there was a lot of optimism about system improvement, given the release of the SCALES report and commitment by LWD to fund action steps and work with the SETC to develop and implement a blueprint for changing the adult literacy system. However, the momentum seems to have halted and there is real concern about the lack of progress. Furthermore, LWD and the SETC have failed to communicate to the adult education community the status of these proposed initiatives, and SCALES members are also out of the communication loop.

Mr. Davis provided assurance that SCALES would be involved in the plan implementation project and acknowledged the need for better communication with the field. For the latter, it was agreed that an initial communication should be to make people aware of the link to the SCALES minutes on the SETC website.

Barry Sample made a motion to send a communication to the Deputy Commissioner voicing SCALES concern about the delay in the implementation strategy and the loss of momentum. The letter should also express SCALES desire to assist in any way possible to move the initiative forward. Mr. Davis noted that both he and Director Patty Moran could communicate the Council's concerns directly to the Deputy Commissioner. However, many members felt that it was important to express this concern in a formal communication. The motion was passed with two dissenting votes. Mr. Davis will draft the letter for Hal Beder's signature.

### **III. High School Equivalency Test Update**

Larry Breedan announced that Request for Quote (RFQ) for the high school equivalency test went out in September and the Department of Education (DOE) has received three responses. A team that includes staff from DOE, LWD, and Department of Corrections (DOC) are reviewing the submissions and will meet on October 30, 2013 to make their recommends. It is possible that all three tests may be recommended. Recommendations will be made to the State Board of Education in November and hopefully approved in December 2013.

Test centers will be approved through and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), and both nonprofit and for profit entities may be approved to deliver the assessment(s). Mr. Breedan plans to meeting with potential testing centers in December to discuss the new testing system. DOE will approve test centers and the centers will be able to choose which test(s) they will offer. The test centers will then be able to contract with the selected test vendors.

There is some confusion about what programs will be teaching with the new test. However, since each test is aligned with the Common Core Standards, which is where the curriculum focus should be. Test vendors are expected to provide professional development for teachers to prepare learners for their tests. Based on an initial review, the new GED test seems to incorporate more of the Common Core, than the other two tests. GED also currently has more preparation materials available for educators. Although the cost to take the GED test is greater (\$120), than the other two assessments, \$40 of that fee is returned to the State to cover the centers costs. The other tests cost less, but don't return any revenues. Mr. Breedan is proposing that centers be allowed to add up to \$50 to their testing fee to cover their costs. This proposal would have to go to the State Board to be approved.

In this scenario the cost for the test could vary based on the additional add-on dollars up to the \$50 cap.

Concern was expressed that some for-profit testing centers may market the test in a way that misleads students into thinking that they are assured of passing the test. There needs to be good controls in place to prevent this.

The issue of teacher preparation for the new tests and the common core standards was discussed. Adult literacy teachers who work in the K-12 system will get good exposure to the common core standards through their districts, but teachers who don't work in these districts may not be equally prepared to teach for the new tests. The test vendors are expected to provide teacher training, and both the websites for the common core and DOE will be additional sources of information for educators. Though vendor training and information on websites will be useful, some expressed that there needed to a plan for more systematic professional development around preparation for the new tests. This needs to be extended to the for-profit sector to ensure that their teachers are well prepared too. Title II professional development money should be used to help address teacher preparation for the new test and LWD and DOE should work together to design a professional development system to meet educators needs.

Howard Miller indicated that to address these issues, we need a state plan. In the absence of a state plan, leadership money is used for training and professional development in the following two ways:

1. Large scale training (to ensure efficiency) is done through his office.
2. Within each Title II grant, the consortium is allocated specific money to support training and professional development based on local needs.

This training can support common core and college readiness standards. However, SCALES still embraces the EFF standards. Most of the consortia are embedded with school districts or colleges, who indicate that they are already getting training through their systems. That only leaves maybe a very small group of nonprofits that are not getting access to training. Most providers have access to training and with the Title II money there are additional resources to address current stated professional development needs. Though Title II was moved from DOE to LWD in 2003, it is still very much embedded in the educational system. However, there are also many small adult literacy programs throughout the state that are not connected to Title II, school districts, or colleges. They don't have access to the training and professional development initiatives funded through Title II or other initiatives that the larger programs do.

Mr. Miller noted that his office is responsible for three literacy programs, not just Title II. He also indicated that though for-profits are eligible for Title II funding, it's highly unlikely given New Jersey's consortium structure that they will provide services under this program. The application format and the applicants for grants have remained roughly the same as it was when the programs were within DOE. Grants are multi-year and awarded to one consortium per county.

#### **IV. Preliminary 2013 Outcomes for Literacy**

Howard Miller provided handouts on adult literacy program data. Three of the handouts came from the LACES database which is used to collect outcome data for Title II programs. This data is the basis for the information that is reported to the US Department of Education through its National Reporting System (NRS). The data is preliminary but will be finalized for a year-end report. The first data table shows participation information by educational functioning levels. The second Table shows the four core outcomes, while the third lists secondary outcomes. The State is below in two of the core outcome measures (Entered Employment and Entered Postsecondary) and above in the other two (Obtained a GED or Secondary Diploma and Retained Employment). Under performing on two of the outcome measures may be in large part an artifact of input errors rather than actual program performance.

The NRS data led to a discussion about policy and planning questions such as: Should programs focus on providing more intensity (more instructional hours per learner) or serving greater numbers of learners, though with less hours? What is the cost per student implications for each of these approaches?

The reported dropout rate in the handouts raised the question of what should programs do to maintain learners to achieve better outcomes. SCALES should review best practices both within and outside the state for reducing dropout rates. We should zero-in on retention as an issue. We need a data driven system that focuses on quality outcomes. Starting in January 2014, Mr. Miller will convene Title II directors meetings to address key program issues. He will provide them with program data to identify problems and spurred discussion around solutions. However, to make significant changes the State needs to develop a literacy strategic plan.

The last two handouts that Mr. Miller provided showed data from the other two literacy programs that his office manages. One focuses on the Workforce Learning Links which are funded through the Supplemental Workforce Funds which LWD uses to support these literacy programs in each local workforce area. The handout shows how these programs perform based on some of the NRS outcome measures.

The final handout is for Literacy 4 Jersey, a one year trial program which is a redirection of customized training grant dollars and it is intended to supplement the counties that have lost literacy dollars for their Workforce Learning Link system. Mr. Miller indicated that for three or four years prior to his arrival, the fund for basic skills collected about \$3½ million annually that was distributed to the workforce system. About a year ago that fund was cut to \$1.6 million and has kept the same cuts for this year. Because the Link system took such drastic cuts and the customized training dollars could not be given to the county, the funds were used to deliver services that would be “Link-Like” and have the greatest impact.

The program identified vendors that were committed to collecting referral from the One-Stop system, providing literacy services that were provided in the One-Stop and would be accountable to the One-Stop. This final handout shows outcomes for organizations who received a contract. Most of the programs are computerized instruction for basic skills leading to one of four attainment goals: obtaining a job, receiving an industry recognized credential, making an educational gain and entering additional occupational skills training, and obtaining a GED or entering postsecondary education. Most of the programs are under

contract through the end of this year. The program is open both to the employed and unemployed. People enter the programs to receive basic skill and the performance they have to obtain is one of the four benchmarks. Vendors receive a portion of their payment for enrolling participants, another portion after 50 hours of instruction and final payment only when the participant achieves one of the benchmarks.

After the presentation attendees discussed the use of data systems like LACES as a program management tool, performance contracting, the goal of each literacy program, serving TANF customers, and hours of instruction to achieve quality outcomes.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 pm.

### Attendance

Larry Breeden for Marie Barry- Department of Education

Hal Beder- Retired

Lansing Davis- State Employment and Training Commission

Hugh DeHaven Jean Baptiste for Department of Corrections

Nancy Fisher- Jewish Vocational Services

Betsy Garlatti- Office of the Secretary of Higher Education

Terri Hughes- Department of Human Services

Julio Sabater- Workforce Advantage USA

Barry Semple- Retired

Patricia Moran- Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Howard Miller- Department of Labor and Workforce Development