



State Council for Adult Literacy Education Services

**SCALES Meeting
Wednesday, February 26, 2014
10:00 am**

**Department of Labor and Workforce Development
Auditorium
Trenton, New Jersey**

MINUTES

I. Welcome and Approval of Minutes

Lansing Davis, staff to the Council, called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m. because Hal Beder, Acting Chairperson, was stuck in traffic. After the members reviewed the minutes for the October 24, 2013 meeting a motion to approve them was made and seconded. Terri Hughes asked to amend the minutes to indicate that she represents the Department of Human Services, not Corrections. The minutes as amended were approved. The agenda was reviewed and then roundtable introductions were done.

II. Departments Updates

Department of Education (DOE)

Larry Breeden indicated that high school equivalency testing will begin soon under the new system. DOE sent Memorandum of Agreements to the 30 centers that did GED testing; 27 have been signed; 14 have been approved; and the remaining ones are expected to be signed soon. Testing will start next week at Bergen County Tech. DOE is considering allowing for-profit and non-profits to be tests centers, which would expand access. Rutgers University has a continuing education program that offers an online high school diploma through an agency that is accredited in Texas. Through this program, students can earn a diploma along with an occupational related certificate, such as food service worker, daycare aide, and security guard. Rutgers is interested in working with DOE to offer a similar program in the NJ. They are also interested in becoming a high school equivalency test center as are public libraries.

Acting Chair Hal Beder, who arrived at the beginning of the update, emphasized the importance of collaboration between state departments, especially DOE and Labor and Workforce Development (LWD) – the former responsible for high school credentialing, the latter for instructional programs, though these distinctions seem to be blurring. Dr. Beder opened the floor for comments and questions. It was noted that Talent Networks can help identify the emergent skills needs of their respective industry sectors which can be used to build career pathway and create appropriate occupational certificates. Mr. Breeden agreed to invite a representative from Rutgers to talk about their high school occupational certificate program.

Mr. Breeden indicated that test centers will determine which test(s) they offered. It is hoped that each test will be widely accessible throughout the state to accommodate learner preference and that information about availability broadly disseminated. A list of testing centers and the tests offered is on DOE's website. DOE will develop a public information strategy about the test options and availability. Test vendors will also market their tests. Because each test is aligned with common core standards, curriculum should prepare learners for all tests.

The Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD)

Howard Miller stated that LWD continues to work on the Request for Proposals (RFP) to develop a plan for the adult literacy system though he is not currently part of that initiative. Using WIA Title II professional development/leadership funds, Mr. Miller's unit issued a Notice for Grant Opportunity (NGO) for literacy innovative initiatives and 36 proposals were received. The expectation is that about 10 will be funded with a maximum of \$150,000 for any one grant.

He indicated that his unit has begun working with WIA Title II programs to strengthen the level of connectivity through creating a shared understanding of the goals and benchmarks of the program and addressing their common issues and concerns. In January, the unit held its first meeting with program directors to lay a commitment foundation and the next meeting will be Tuesday March 4, 2014. The unit is also drafting the WIA Title II NGO for PY 2014. Once the state literacy plan is developed it will provide direction for implementation of future grants.

Mr. Miller responded to a number of questions about the literacy innovation grant. He indicated that recipients of the grant will be expected to share what they learned; and strategies for further dissemination will be developed. Though the grant was designed as a one year program and funding is limited, there is the possibility of expanding beyond that time frame. The SCALES literacy report is one of the criteria for judging the innovation proposals. Once the literacy plan is in place, it will guide how funds are targeted.

It was indicated that to achieve systemic change more funding, planning and time are needed than allowed for through this one year grant program. Mr. Miller noted grantees are expected to leverage other resources. Both the innovation grant initiative and the WIA Title II NGO for the upcoming PY 2014 can be vehicles for incremental change. One positive change in the NGO is that the leadership money is more transparent and more clearly focused on leadership activities.

Another comment was that to create a culture of innovation, there needs to be the highest level of accountability, transparency, and flexibility. Some ideas will lead to breakthroughs and move the system forward, while others will not.

Recipients of the innovation grants will be listed on the LWD website. It was suggested that SCALES page on the SETC website link to the list of grantees page on LWD's website.

State Employment and Training Commission (SETC)

Michele Boronkas indicated that the SETC established a taskforce to look at soft skills and to make policy recommendations. The New Jersey Business and Industry Association (NJBIA) is helping to drive the work of the taskforce, which has representative from employers, education, State government, and training providers.

The literacy plan RFP is in the Deputy Commissioners Office and there is a commitment to issue it in the near future.

The importance of computer skills in the job search and on the job, as well as the use of social media, was highlighted as essential skills. It was pointed out that Workforce Learning Links provide basic computer skills training, but budget cuts have limited what they can do.

New Jersey State Library

Peggy Cadigan stated that the libraries throughout New Jersey provide basic computer skills training and teach people how to use social media. Libraries are linked to One-Stops, providing a local access point to the workforce development system. The Long Branch Library has a virtual career center that provides services to jobseekers.

III. Revitalizing SCALES

Hal Beder indicated that he arranged a conference call with members that serviced on the advisory group for the SCALES report, "Investing in New Jersey's Adult Learners," to make suggestions about how to revitalize the Council. The group came up with 7 recommended strategies to strengthen SCALES and better help it fulfill its mission.

1. Revitalize membership – Though SCALES legislation delineates various membership categories, including employers, legislators and organized labor, many of these slots are vacant or representatives are not active participants. The SETC will review the current membership, identify vacancies, and make recommendations through the Governor's Office to fill them. It was suggested that we include the Department of Health as a member or at least invite a representative to attend.
2. Establish yearly goals for SCALES
3. Create an annual report – Per legislation, SCALES is supposed to do an annual report and submit it to the legislature.
4. Establish consistent meeting schedule – Meeting should not be cancelled.
5. Solicit SETC input/guidance – This would strengthen the relationship with the SETC and help SCALES focus on key literacy policy issues that impact the overall system. It would also provide opportunities to report findings and, recommendations back to the SETC.
6. Devote an agenda item each meeting to a key policy issue as it relates to adult literacy. Where appropriate, invite guest speakers. This will provide an opportunity for learning and membership development.
7. Review/evaluate performance of literacy programs and system – LWD does this with its programs, but SCALES is responsible for an overall system review to inform policy. The National Reporting System (NRS) gives a limited but intense review of the system. SCALES should take a wider pulse of the system.
8. Measure and report out the performance in achieving the established yearly SCALES goals. This goes in tandem with recommendation 2. SCALES should measure its performance in achieving the goals it sets out for itself.

Dr. Beder opened the floor for comments. It was indicated that a top goal for SCALES (referenced recommendation 2) should be to provide input to the state plan, such as the relationship of literacy to careers and employment. Also suggested was combining recommendations 2 and 8 to read "Establish yearly goals and measures and report out the performance in achieving these goals." Point of clarification, there is the Unified State Plan which has already been established and addresses literacy, which is highlighted in Core Value 3, "Equipping the Workforce for Employment." The SCALES report and recommendations which set the stage for the proposed RFP that will result in the development of a blueprint/plan, outlining specific directions and strategies in support of the State Plan and the SCALES recommendations. SCALES should have the opportunity to review and provide input on the final draft of the RFP, and it should be the lead in overseeing the development of the blueprint.

Michele Boronkas said that she would take responsibility to reach out to Deputy Commissioner Fichtner to clarify SCALES role in this planning initiative and to check on the status of the RFP. Recommendation 3 should be revised to indicate that SCALES should submit an annual report to the SETC prior to submitting it to the legislature. There also needs to be a one page sell sheet for prospective new members outlining the benefits and outcomes of SCALES.

IV. Technology and the Education of Adult Learners

Erik Jacobson attended a meeting in Washington DC to discuss a paper issued by the US Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (Paper was circulated to attendees of this meeting.) The paper reviewed the international Survey of Adult Skills report released by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Dr. Jacobson focused on two elements of the report: a commonly assumed, though mistaken, model of the economy and problem solving in technology-rich environments.

The economic structure of jobs in the 21st century is by and large the same as it was in the 20th century. By the end of this decade, most jobs still will not require a college degree or advanced skills. Though the jobs with the greatest percentage growth will demand higher skills and credentials, two-thirds of all jobs won't. There are not enough middle-class wage level jobs to warrant a significantly greater emphasis on skills training/retraining. It is a myth that a skills gap is dragging down the US economy. Studies have shown that there are many highly qualified people who just cannot find jobs. There are about 20 million job seekers for about 3 million openings, that's a jobs gap, not a skills gap. Training will not create more jobs. If there were a scarcity of skilled workers, employers would bid wages up in competing for the limited pool. However, wages are stagnant because the supply is far greater than the demand. Economic policy should focus on initiatives that increase income, such as raising the minimum wage.

The structure of the economy is why so many people are unemployed, yet adult education is unrealistically expected to improve employment outcomes.

In response to the presentation, it was noted that there are some jobs where the demand is high and there is a consistent need for training people to fill these positions, such as nurses and certified nurse assistants (CNAs). However, a federal review indicated that the results of WIA training didn't yield better results for participants. Employers expect people to do more, multitask, for less money. The aging workforce – people are working longer – limits the number of job openings. Prior to the Reagan Administration, the predominant argument for adult education was social justice; but then it changed to a strategy to buttress the economy. The problem with the latter rationale is that education does not create jobs and the current supply of potential workers far exceeds the number of job opening. We need to reframe the argument for adult education. It is commonly believed that increasing the minimum wage will reduce jobs; yet data indicates the opposite effect.

Dr. Jacobson noted that an interesting part of the paper was the idea of problem solving in a technology rich environment. Though the definition of problem is a bit narrow, the idea of thinking about what adults can do with technology in their life is a good thing. What some states, such as California, are looking at is digital badges – certificates that indicate a certain level of digital proficiency – which can be earned prior to getting a high school diploma. These can be used to show employers that a learner has certain skills.

As the State moves forward in think about what the adult literacy system should look like, it is important to consider not only the use of technology in the delivery of services, but also the ability of learners to use technology in their everyday lives.

The point was made that even if there is a jobs gap, many of the jobs that are available have varying and evolving educational and skill requirements. It was also noted that entrepreneurial skill development may be an effective strategy to help some clients who are looking for work.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 pm.

**SCALES Meeting
Attendance Sheet
February 26, 2014**

Members and Alternates

Jean Baptiste Department of Corrections

Hal Beder, Acting Chair

Michele Boronkas, NJ State Employment
and Training Commission

Larry Breeden, NJ Department of Education

Peggy Cadigan, NJ State Library

Nancy Fisher- called in
Jewish Vocational Services

Terri Hughes, NJ Department of Human
Services

Erik Jacobson, Montclair University

Howard Miller, NJ Department of Labor and
Workforce Development

Julio Sabater, Workforce Advantage

Barry Semple, Education Consultant

Marie Viralla, Office of the Secretary of
Higher Education

Guests

Betty Mirda, Essex County One-Stop

Staff

Lansing Davis, NJ State Employment and
Training Commission