

Massachusetts Department of Education Adult and Community Learning Services

Overview of Workforce Development Activities

In 2006, the Massachusetts Department of Education (Adult and Community Learning Services) collaborated with the state's workforce development system to build connections to benefit our students in their quest to meet their employment-related goals. Based on a survey commissioned by MA Department of Education in 2005, over 65% of students enrolled in ABE/ESOL programs are interested in getting a job or in getting a better job. We know that the correlation between educational level and the ability to get and keep a job is high, as documented by a Study* published by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University. A GED no longer guarantees access to employment with family-sustaining wages. Many ABE students work in entry-level jobs, and often hold more than one job to meet expenses. Building their basic academic skills is critical for our students to achieve their goals of gaining and retaining employment. When ABE and workforce development services are integrated or coordinated, allowing academic and occupational skills to be developed concurrently, students are likely to get ahead more quickly.

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 formalized the connection of the ABE and workforce development systems. In 2006, activities sponsored by ACLS continued and expanded the connection because this relationship is critically important for our students to improve their lives.

The vision of ACLS for workforce development is that all ABE/ESOL students can participate in the Massachusetts' workforce through success in education and/or training programs that promote their opportunities for career development. Our mission is to support ABE/ESOL programs in actualizing this vision. A Workforce Development Team comprised of ACLS staff and representatives of our key contractors (SABES, Worker Education Roundtable), and our sister state agency, the Department of Workforce Development, works to develop strategies to meet this mission. A Workforce Development Advisory Committee is convened by SABES to solicit input from ABE program directors and staff, representatives of the workforce system, businesses and industry groups, education and occupational training providers, and others.

In 2006, ACLS activities with a workforce development focus included the following:

1. Collaborating with One-Stop Career Centers: Providing funding to support the state's One-Stop Career Center (OSCC) network, and funding ABE providers to offer out-stationed ABE staff to conduct intake, assessment, and referral services in 11 of 16 career center regions (Brockton, Cape Cod, Central Mass, Franklin Hampshire, Hampden, Greater Lowell, Lower Merrimack Valley, New Bedford, North Central, North Shore, South Coastal); The Massachusetts Department of Education (ACLS) partners with Local Workforce Investment Boards to support collaboration between ABE providers and career centers (Under WIA, adult education is a mandated partner of career centers in the workforce system). Memoranda of Understanding exist between DOE and the sixteen workforce development regions. The MOU identifies the areas where our systems overlap as intake, assessment, and referral. Out-stationed ABE staff work in One-Stop Career Centers to help center customers who need basic skill development improve their prospects for employment. Out-stationing is offered in twelve of the sixteen workforce development regions.

2. Appointments of ABE Representatives to Local Workforce Investment Boards - With Chief Elected Officials in each workforce region and with local Workforce Board executive directors, ACLS works with to appoint representatives of ABE to the WIB Boards, ensuring that ABE has “a seat at the table” on local workforce development policy-making bodies. An ABE Program Director is chosen to participate on the WIB and to keep other ABE program directors in the region apprised of workforce development activities. In FY06, ACLS piloted a new meeting strategy for ABE LWIB reps. Rather than continue the statewide meetings of ABE LWIB reps, we tried piloting regional meetings of ABE LWIB reps with other ABE program directors in the SABES regions. This strategy was designed to assist the ABE LWIB representatives by providing a face-to-face opportunity to connect with other ABE program directors to inform them about regional workforce development updates. The piloting of this in the Central region was very successful, and in FY’05, we expanded it to all SABES regions.

3. Prioritizing Workforce Development Strategies in the FY 2006 to FY 2010 grant cycle: ACLS prioritized Workforce Development in the FY2005 5-year RFP to encourage ABE programs to integrate and/or coordinate services with training vendors, workforce boards, and career centers to help students to improve their readiness for employment, move up on the job, identify career paths, and/or to build their occupational skills or awareness.

A primary strategy to coordinate service delivery between the ABE and workforce development systems is that ACLS directs 12% of regional funding for ABE programs through the regional workforce system. Decisions on which programs are funded are jointly decided by a team of reviewers that includes 2 ACLS members and 2 members of the workforce system. This, along with our joint monitoring of ABE programs during the 5-year funding period, is intended to continue the collaboration that began through the joint review of ABE grant awards in each region. In FY06, the RFP prioritized integration or coordination with workforce development. Programs were encouraged to propose a) integrating services with an occupational training provider or a career center, b) coordinating services with a workforce development agency/entity, or c) integrating work readiness concepts into the ABE/ESOL classroom.

4. Workplace Education Programs: ACLS funds and supports workplace education partnerships by funding workplace education planning and implementation grants on a yearly basis. The MA Department of Education funds ABE providers to offer workplace education programs at worksites across Massachusetts. All Workplace Education Programs must result from successful planning grants. The planning process allows providers to confer with the business/organization and union (if appropriate), and to assess the needs of workers for basic skill development classes and the readiness of the employer to support that effort. Implementation grants fund ABE/ESOL classes that are held at or near the workplace and that have curricula contextualized with industry/workplace content. Businesses represent a variety of industry sectors, including manufacturing, education, retail distribution, hospitality, health/elder care, maintenance, and food service. In 2006, ACLS made a commitment to issue the Workplace Education RFP on a yearly basis.

5. Professional Development/State Leadership Activities – ACLS provides professional development opportunities by funding and working with SABES, the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education, and the MA Worker Education Roundtable to support ABE programs in areas related to workforce development. ACLS funds SABES and the Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable to address workforce development and workplace education by providing professional development opportunities for ABE practitioners. Each SABES center has staff dedicated to this priority area. Workshops and other activities were offered in 2006 to assist programs understand and be ready to implement services integrated or coordinated with the

workforce development system. SABES staff coordinated meetings to acquaint ACLS program directors and staff at One-Stop Career Centers to facilitate development of better understanding of career center services and stronger relationships with career center staff.

SABES develop the capacity of programs to engage in the workforce development coordination by offering workshops on targeted topics (Integrating Job Readiness in the ABE/ESOL curriculum), convening meetings with ABE program staff and workforce development staff, and by offering technical assistance to specific programs. A new guide book and training was developed this year to further the ability of ABE programs to meet students' needs: Integrating Career Development in ABE/ESOL the Classroom.”

The Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable provides workshops and technical assistance to better enable ABE providers to engage in effective delivery of workplace education programs and to inform labor organizations and businesses with a stronger understanding of how to identify if workers require basic skills instruction in order to improve their performance on the job, and how to deliver effective workplace education programs.

The Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education delivers a yearly conference for adult basic education teachers, counselors, directors, and other staff. Each year, a strand exists that focuses on workforce development. ACLS offers a strand each year with one session that highlights promising practices from among our funded initiatives.

6. Interagency Pilot Projects and Policy Groups: From 2002 to 2006, ACLS participated in the development of pilot projects through interagency collaboration (and funding) with the Department of Workforce Development, Commonwealth Corporation, the Division of Career Services, and the Department of Transitional Services. Building Essential Skills through Training (BEST) offered two separate design models: one targeted to incumbent workers to build their basic academic and occupational skills; the other (BEST: Older Youth) targeted the vulnerable older youth population, from ages 18 to 24, with innovative projects to improve participants' basic academic skills, develop occupational skills and career awareness, and to assist them acquire jobs in the occupational field that the project addressed. Collaboration in each project relied the involvement of business, unions (if appropriate), career centers, and education and training providers. Similar grants were offered through the Bay State Works initiative, and currently through the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund, industry sector initiative proposals are being solicited. A highly successful industry sector initiative is the extended Care Career Ladder Initiative (ECCLI) that funded skills improvement/career ladder strategies in the nursing home and home health organization networks. In 2006, a round of ECCLI funding highlighted ESOL instruction, and modeled technical assistance sessions on the ACLS workplace education model.

Reach Higher and Pathways to Success by 21 are newer statewide policy initiatives managed by Commonwealth Corporation in which ACLS is active. Reach Higher includes representatives of ACLS in its advisory team. Reach Higher aims to improve access to community colleges for incumbent workers, and to develop more certificate programs in high growth industry areas at the community colleges. The goal of Pathways to Success by 21 is to improve opportunities for vulnerable youth aged 16 to 21 to access education, counseling, job training, and employment.

7. A Statewide Conference “Chasing the American Dream: helping ABE/ESOL Students Succeed in Employment and Education” – over 200 ABE and workforce development professionals convened to focus on the process of assisting students with their “next steps”. The keynote address by former Vice-President of the Jobs for the Future Jerry Rubin highlighted the

current initiative at JFF entitled “Breaking Through: Helping Low-Skilled Adults Enter and Succeed in College and Careers” that addresses the clear lack of success that students are experiencing in post-secondary education: failure to complete or indeed to be retained in such programs is undermining the ability of workforce to compete in a global economy. His address highlighted the importance of our doing a better job in connecting the educational attainment in our programs to the skills needed to compete successfully at the post-secondary level. Conference workshop sessions highlighted best practices from the field in developing workforce connections, and information on facilitating next steps for students..

The link between education and employment is often so critical to the motivation of ABE and ESOL students to succeed. To help students meet the goals they set for themselves, the Department of Education is committed to supporting them by continuing to develop strategic approaches to link the ABE and workforce development systems.

* Sum, Andrew, Khatiwada, Ishtar, Palme, Sheila. (2004) *Recent Trends in Levels of Distribution and Adequacy of the Annual Earnings of Massachusetts Workers: Implications for the Boston Workforce Development Initiative*. Northeastern University. pages 9-14

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