

Texas Adult Education and Literacy End-of-Year Report

Program Year 2019–2020

Executive Summary

Each year, the US Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) requires state agencies that implement adult education and literacy programs under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) to submit a narrative report detailing:

- the use of State Leadership funds;
- the manner in which the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) program performance was analyzed;
- the integration of the AEL program with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) one-stop partners;
- the implementation of the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) program;
- adult education standards; and
- programs for corrections education.

Due to the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic (COVID-19) has had on AEL service delivery nationwide since March 2020, OCTAE requested that state agencies that administer the AEFLA program provide supplemental detail to address COVID-19’s impact. This report incorporates how the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) took immediate steps to support AEL programs’ transition to distance and virtual learning options. TWC [AEL Letter 06-20, issued September 11, 2020, and titled “Adult Education and Literacy Services and Reporting during the COVID-19 Pandemic Period,”](#) provides details and a timeline of events of the funding—including state leadership funds—and resources made available to grantees during the initial pandemic period.

In Program Year 2019–2020 (PY’19–’20), the 37 AEL grantees entered into the second year of contracting with TWC and continued to serve approximately 69,000 participants. Highlights of TWC AEL’s efforts to serve its customers include the following:

- Significant increases in distance learning from the previous program year, with nearly 30 percent of all AEL participants engaged in distance learning¹
- Engagement with more than 50 employers to provide workplace literacy programs statewide

¹ In AEL PY’19–’20, 29.7 percent of participants used distance learning, an increase of 20.7 percent from the previous program year.

- Continued integration with workforce systems partners and community-based organizations (CBOs) through Accelerate Texas, Literacy Texas, and other special initiatives
- Accelerate Texas and alternatives to school debt programs, such as Ability-to-Benefit, serving nearly 2,500 participants in 2020
- Almost 70 percent of AEL programs—a total of 25 across the state—providing services in correctional facilities

I. State Leadership Funds (AEFLA §223)

In Texas, TWC’s three-member Commission (Commission) approved the release of all State Leadership funds for required and permissible activities, as allowed under AEFLA.

Required Activity: WIOA §223(a)(1)(A), Alignment of AEL Activities with Other One-Stop Required Partners

As reported in the WIOA Combined State Plan for 2021–2024, TWC continued its Career Pathways Expansion (CPE) project and Accelerate Texas initiatives to support the continued development of content and models that support career pathways and to support and expand TWC’s objectives for the AEL program.

Accelerated Models

Accelerate Texas is an integrated education and training (IET) model in which AEL participants are concurrently enrolled in workforce training and AEL services. This model is designed to accelerate completion and placement into in-demand and targeted occupations. The use of dedicated funds for IET program development and implementation allowed 12 new grantees to be awarded contracts in spring 2019. One of these newly awarded grantees, Lee College, is unique from other grantees in that it provides IET services to incarcerated individuals in area correctional facilities. To date, Lee College has used these grant award funds to provide IET services to 204 participants in the following occupational trainings: Commercial Truck Driving; Horticulture; Computer and Information Sciences; Heating, Air-Conditioning, and Refrigeration Maintenance; Welding; and Carpentry. At the 2020 TWC AEL Statewide (Virtual) Fall Institute, the director of Lee College’s Adult Education program shared best practices on how to serve AEL customers in a correctional education setting and encouraged fellow AEL program administrators to locate student learners in their community correctional facilities who could prepare to reenter their communities and the workforce with financial and family support skills as well as those skills needed to start or continue a career.

In early 2019, the second round of Ability-to-Benefit grants were awarded to three community colleges to continue building alternative pipelines for students to enter postsecondary education and training while becoming eligible for financial aid; this initiative supports the alignment of AEL with postsecondary institutions in career pathways programs. Grant funds pay for costs associated with case management, workforce training, and basic skills enhancement, such as

literacy and numeracy provided in the real-world application of the occupational training.

Workforce Integration Initiative

In December 2019, the Commission approved funding \$2 million to AEL grantees to support:

- increased AEL integration with and referrals to Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) and vocational rehabilitation (VR) employment services and enrollments in postsecondary education or training services; and
- the collection of post-exit information on educational outcomes, employment, earnings, enrollment and progress in postsecondary education or training, and credential attainment.

An allowable use of these funds is to develop individualized case management and referral procedures with Boards, VR, and community-based workforce intermediaries as well as data-sharing agreements with postsecondary or training institutions.

COVID-19 Response

In April 2020, a month after Texas Governor Greg Abbott declared Texas a disaster site, the Commission approved modifications to the allowable use of funds under the Workforce Integration Initiative. These modifications made additional funds available to grantees as they redesigned services and addressed the local impacts of facility closures. This modification to the use of funds allowed grantees to both purchase laptops, computers, and tablets and increase the number of licenses for distance learning and related remote education services such as mobile messaging applications. TWC required grantees to report monthly on COVID-19-related grant expenditures, and grantees have reported using these funds to purchase tablets, laptops, increased outreach for the AEL program, headphones, headsets, and licenses for implementing virtual or distance learning instruction. In October 2020, nearly 30 percent of grantees reported having implemented a technology device loaner program.

Required Activity: WIOA §223(a)(1)(B), Establishment or Operation of a Professional Development Program

Statewide Professional Development Center

TWC continued to operate its Training, Resource, and Innovation Network for Texas Professional Development (TRAIN PD), the statewide professional development (PD) center for AEL providers and other workforce system stakeholders. Through this initiative, in PY'19-'20, TWC:

- served more than 4,000 unique users who attended local and state PD events (in-person and virtual) through this program;
- organized PD into “Institutes” in areas of Literacy Instruction, Career Pathways, Program Management, Distance Learning and Technology Integration, and Stakeholder Integration Services;

- developed, planned, and implemented PD on topics of remote testing, workforce integration, learning disabilities training, and English as a second language;
- rolled out the Leadership Excellence and Instructional Leadership Excellence Academies; and
- provided PD on the Content Standards 2.0 for Training of Trainers, offering methods that instructors can use to incorporate these academic standards with contextualized activities for real-life occupational applications.

Additionally, through this initiative, TWC implemented distance learning efforts that were in place before COVID-19; these efforts supported the statewide transition to virtual and distance learning during the early weeks of COVID-19. Some of those efforts are as follows:

- Distance Learning and Technology Integration Institute: This online resource enhances the development and implementation of technology applications and supports distance learning through the expansion of the TWC AEL statewide learning management system (PD Portal) to provide online PD for staff training. AEL programs may easily locate information and resources to create a distance learning plan—a contractual requirement for all AEL programs—and access the latest approved list of Texas distance learning curricula to use in programs.
- Distance Learning Symposium: In spring 2020, the Technology and Distance Learning Symposium presented workshops from AEL programs, libraries, digital curriculum publishers, and other technology education experts on implementing technology in the adult learner classroom. Most notably, the 5th Annual 2020 Symposium was held virtually for the first time. This statewide event garnered more than 600 attendees in the PD Portal.
- Distance Learning Academy: The Distance Learning Academy is a set of learning modules required for AEL programs, incorporating distance learning guidance and best practices. Since December 2018, 1,731 administrators, instructors, and AEL staff members have completed the modules on the PD Portal.
- Distance Learning Convenings: In May 2020, TWC hosted discussions with all of the leads for distance learning. Additionally, a Distance Learning Leads Committee was created so that all grantee programs’ distance learning leads may meet on a monthly basis.

COVID-19 Response

On March 13, 2020, the same day that Governor Abbott declared a statewide disaster, TWC launched the TWC AEL pandemic resource web page for AEL providers and students on its PD Portal. This [web page](#) provided—and still provides—an organized list of resources for grantee program directors and instructors to assist and share with students during the transition, including COVID-19 resource websites, frequently asked questions and answers, information on serving

students at a distance, remote testing information, a distance learning help desk, information on distance learning curriculum providers, and free internet options. Then, on March 17, 2020, TWC hosted the first of many webinars to discuss options for communicating with students remotely, and subsequently held webinars covering a variety of remote instruction delivery platforms.

On April 14, 2020, the Commission approved \$500,000 for TRAIN PD to develop virtual learning resources in the areas of basic education, digital literacy, workforce preparation, and job search assistance. These resources will be made available to students and may serve as support material for instruction. The first videos were completed in fall 2020 and will be accessible through the PD Portal.

Professional Development Support for a Community-Based Literacy Network

Literacy Texas—an initiative funded by TWC to provide PD to instructors, tutors, and program staff serving adult learners in the nonprofit space—continued to serve the statewide literacy networks as COVID-19 posed challenges to maintaining in-person training environments. In summer 2020, Literacy Texas hosted four symposiums in which more than 100 literacy organizations were represented. Nearly 300 participants attended the annual virtual conference, which showcased expertise on engagement with adult learners during COVID-19.

COVID-19 Response

To gauge the impact that COVID-19 has had—and will continue to have—on adult learners who access resources through CBOs and nonprofit organizations, Literacy Texas is collaborating with Baylor University to conduct a statewide survey of religiously affiliated and nonprofit literacy organizations to determine the amount of volunteer time needed to operate such programs. The results of this survey will be available in early 2021.

Upcoming Statewide PD Initiatives

In July 2020, the Commission approved a State Leadership initiative for a statewide distance education PD center. This Request for Applications will be released in winter 2020, and the grant is expected to be awarded in summer 2021. The Commission also approved funds for a Career Pathways PD center, and the Request for Applications for this initiative will be released in early 2021. TWC AEL will provide an update on these PD initiatives in the PY'20-'21 end-of-year report.

Required Activities: WIOA §223(a)(1)(C), Provision of Technical Assistance, and WIOA §223(a)(1)(D), Monitoring and Evaluation

The initiatives described in this section support both the provision of technical assistance to AEL grantees and the monitoring, evaluation, and improvement of AEL programs.

TRAIN PD @ TCALL

In the WIOA Combined State Plan, TWC gave details on how it provided technical assistance to AEL grantees and providers through its subcontractor, TRAIN PD. In addition to the PD services

TWC provides statewide through TRAIN PD, as described in the Establishment or Operation of a Professional Development Program section, TWC also provides technical assistance to providers, offering support in monitoring and continuous program improvement. Each AEL grantee is assigned a PD specialist to assist in developing a continuous improvement plan for addressing the PD needs of the AEL grantee. In PY'19-'20, PD specialists began using the TWC AEL Monthly Performance Reports (MPRs) to help identify any deficient areas of a grantee's performance. PD specialists provided this technical assistance through both virtual and on-site visits to grantees, and they supported TWC AEL program specialists by attending monthly calls with grantees.

TWC has implemented two Leadership Excellence Academies for participants interested in strengthening their programs. One academy is for administrators, and the other for instructional leaders. These training programs, developed specifically for Texas by national adult education consultants and TWC's contractors through TRAIN PD, equip participants with data-proven and data-supported skills to strengthen instructional and program performance.

In February 2020, TWC held a Career Navigators Conference Day with support from TRAIN PD. This meeting, designed specifically for career navigators, included the following session topics: AEL Integration with Vocational Rehabilitation, Employer Engagement, Serving Internationally Trained Professionals, and Services for Reentry. In the last program year, TRAIN PD focused on working with English language learners (ELLs) who have degrees from their home countries and are entering AEL for English language support and career advising. A core workgroup of AEL programs volunteered to participate in a professional learning opportunity through World Education Services and Upwardly Global. This project, the Skilled Immigrant Integration Project, provided 12 hours of intensive technical assistance with national consultants and more than 20 webinars and in-person training opportunities for additional support on best practices for community integration and career pathways advising for this specialized population.

Additionally, four webinars, called Brain Waste to Brain Gain, were provided statewide to all AEL grantees using the expertise of the Texas workgroup on what service implementation looks like at the program level. The results of the state data system analysis and provider surveys indicated that there was a statewide inconsistency between what "service" meant and how "internationally trained individuals" were being defined. The effort has progressed to local data analysis at the provider level of information gathered within the Joint Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) elements to better inform programs about individuals who may benefit from enhanced services as an internationally trained professional ELL. Two areas provided a focus for PD efforts during this past year:

- recommended practices for outreach and intake for skilled professionals; and
- career advising to reconnect skilled professionals with a talent pipeline in their programs of study.

Career Pathways Expansion Project

In 2019, TWC funded a fourth iteration of a PD and peer mentoring initiative to expand the community college and education service center networks of AEL provider mentees and mentors. This CPE project initiative led by Amarillo College, called the Texas Peer Mentor Network (TX-PMN), places an emphasis on improving outcomes for adult education programs based on 10 tenets of practice considered essential for building career pathways. Additionally, TX-PMN is developing a statewide network of trainers who are trained and vetted according to standards developed through the mentor site, Amarillo College. A total of 17 AEL programs have received mentoring support through on-site training, remote conferences, and on-site visits. In 2019, five AEL programs received on-site visits, averaging four days each, that included college and AEL leadership to support integration and review of a seamless entry process for adult students. These intensive on-site visits were conducted throughout the year, building on strengths across the spectrum of student services at each institution.

During the Texas Association for Literacy and Adult Education (TALAE) conference, held in spring 2020, the CPE project mentees and mentors presented a series of breakout sessions focused on career advancement models in Texas. One session focused on a technique called “Conversation Stacking and Intrusive Advising” and taught career navigators how to have productive conversations with students. Attendees learned how to help students refocus their concerns in situations, such as the current COVID-19 environment, while finding resolutions and creating accountability in the journey to completion. Another session highlighted general characteristics of the differing generational cohorts and provided instructional and retention strategies.

In PY’19–’20, an external consultant conducted an evaluation of TX-PMN in order to identify methods through which institutions may effectively deploy career pathways models. This evaluation found that collaboration and coordination between AEL and other departments in educational institutions, and support from institutional leadership, are key elements to creating integrated pathways and institutional policies that support a “single door” approach to serving all students.

Upcoming Technical Assistance and Evaluative Initiative

In July 2020, the Commission approved funding for a Quality Performance Enhancement Initiative to support continued performance improvement and operational effectiveness statewide. This Request For Proposals will be released in winter 2020.

Permissible Activities under WIOA §223(a)(2)

Through these state leadership activities in PY’19–’20, TWC supported grantees in reaching TWC’s performance objectives during the onset of COVID-19.

Math Assistance Call Center (COVID-19 Response)

In April 2020, to expand service delivery options in response to COVID-19, the Commission funded a second iteration distance learning call center. This updated initiative, the Math

Assistance Call Center (MACC), launched statewide in October 2020. Math tutoring services through the MACC are provided in several languages, seven days a week, and a live video chat supports this timely math tutoring for AEL participants preparing for a Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency (TxCHSE) test in math.

II. Performance Data Analysis

Process on Data

TWC focuses strongly on data for improving programs. TWC AEL program specialists are assigned to AEL's 37 grantees and provide technical assistance daily, weekly, monthly, and as needed. Specialists conduct analysis of available grantee data from the statewide data management system (TEAMS) to recommend methods for improving program outcomes and/or highlight program effectiveness. Regularly scheduled calls with grantees focus on data reported in TEAMS and analyzed to ensure data entry accuracy, quality review of IET programs, timely posttesting, and identification of any inconsistencies between the data and the grantee's qualitative input about program administration. Also analyzed are monthly performance data reports, created by TWC's Department of Operational Insight (DOI), outlining progress toward AEFLA and state performance outcomes and TWC set enrollment targets.

Performance Targets (Federal Negotiated and State Performance)

In PY'19-'20, TWC AEL met performance for the following federally negotiated outcomes:

- Credential achievement was 38.92 percent
- Employed or enrolled in 2nd quarter after exit was 34.24 percent
- Employed or enrolled in 2nd–4th quarters was 84.33 percent

TWC AEL did not meet the measurable skills gains performance measure, as compared to the previous program year, due to the impact that COVID-19 had on the grantees' abilities to test participants.

COVID-19 Response

Beginning in mid-March 2020, TWC AEL sent out weekly, then biweekly, surveys to grantees to track the ability of grantees to transition to remote service delivery options. By April 1, 2020, nearly 50 percent of participants were reported as having moved to online AEL services. TWC AEL provided technical assistance to grantees during this period to address the placement of incoming AEL customers into an educational functioning level (EFL)—as provided by OCTAE's guidance. TWC AEL staff created a tracking tool for AEL grantees to track individuals who were unable to be tested on an NRS-approved testing instrument while test vendors developed methods to proctor tests remotely. In June 2020, grantees reported having enrolled 442 individuals with a provisional EFL. During this time, TWC AEL staff worked to enhance TEAMS to allow the tracking of participants with a non-NRS test and placement in a provisional EFL.

III. Integration with One-Stop Partners

TWC AEL grantees served as the one-stop providers for grants awarded July 1, 2018; these contracts were renewed July 1, 2019, for PY'19-'20. Contracts require AEL grantees to cooperate with the Boards in creating a memorandum of understanding that includes an infrastructure cost agreement.

Contracts also require grantees to implement a comprehensive intake process for identifying any support services needs that an individual might have and to create referrals to other workforce system partners as appropriate. TEAMS allows grantees to provide details on career services, including outreach, intake, orientation, initial assessment, and referral to other programs.

Career navigators, a required role for each grantee, serve as liaisons between Workforce Solutions Offices and other workforce system partners. In February 2020, TWC AEL facilitated an all-day meeting for career navigators on best practices for serving AEL customers, including how to further integrate with VR.

In PY'19-'20, TWC AEL hosted a weekly webinar series, Workforce Wednesday, to provide grantees a platform on best practices for integrating with other workforce system partners. Topics in this series included employability skills, methods for finding jobs, resources for job-seeking students, apprenticeship programs, the transition of ELLs to postsecondary education, and more.

The statewide average for AEL participant coenrollment in other Board programs is 7.46 percent. Career services included are support services, preemployment activities, job search services, employment experience, assessment and planning, and case management.

IV. Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program (AEFLA §243)

IELCE Competition

During the grant competition period in 2017, TWC combined the competition for Section 231 and Section 243 IELCE services, requiring the IELCE model of all funded grantees across the state. There was not a separate competition for IELCE program funds. All 37 AEL grantees provide IELCE, as is required under current contracts.

IELCE in Combination with IET Requirements

In PY'19-'20, all 37 grantees were required to implement IELCE programs. As reported in Table 3 of the NRS report, 13,574 participants were served using Section 243 funds. To further support the provision of IELCE in combination with IET, TWC AEL policy requires that grantees provide all participants with a class syllabus that includes all courses delivered in the program of study, including IET courses. Grantees are required to enter the names of participants who receive Integrated EL Civics services in combination with IET into the statewide data system and use a specific code for tracking these participants. Additionally, policy requires that grantees implementing IELCE services submit a survey to TWC AEL that details information on

how the program is meeting IET in combination with the civics requirement. This survey has been updated to capture information on the impact of COVID-19.

Grantees are required to work with their Boards to identify and understand labor market information, support participants with supplemental services to remove barriers from achieving their educational goals, and identify career opportunities.

Key Program Challenges

As noted in last year's narrative report, a key challenge to implementing the IELCE model is that the English proficiency of ELLs in Texas varies. Some grantees may serve populations whose proficiency is low, while others serve proficient learners. To better support ELLs in Texas and those with degrees from other countries, TWC has begun updating the content standards to include civics competencies into all curricula, as described in the next section.

COVID-19 Impact

In spring 2020, TWC AEL surveyed grantees on service delivery changes for IET programs. Nearly 43 percent of survey respondents noted that the biggest challenge when implementing IETs was that there are few trainings available for remote instruction. While the majority of AEL programs were able to continue AEL and workforce preparation activities, only a few were able to provide workforce training.

V. Adult Education Standards

TWC requires that all AEL programs develop coursework that aligns with the statewide AEL academic content standards, which provide AEL instructors with a clear foundation for teaching rigorous academic areas such as mathematics, English language arts, and English as a second language for adult learners in the 21st century.

In fall 2020, TWC began planning the next phase of content standards enhancement, the Standards 3.0 project, which adds Family Literacy and Civics Education benchmarks to Standards 2.0. TWC will develop training on implementing these benchmarks in the adult education classroom and, through TRAIN PD, will hold virtual or in-person regional training events in late spring 2021.

VI. Programs for Corrections Education and the Education of Other Institutionalized Individuals

Individuals who have been incarcerated or have other criminal histories face challenges regarding benefitting from AEL services and finding employment.

In PY'19-'20, 2,293 participants indicated that they had been incarcerated or had other criminal histories; 1,740 participants were served with corrections funding, and 491 (28.22 percent) of

those attained an MSG.² TWC will continue to develop methods for tracking these participants to determine the recidivism rate of AEL participants.

Additionally, 290 participants were served in IET models designed for justice-involved participants nearing release or under community supervision.

In the adult cohort data from 2015—the most recent year of data available for statewide recidivism rate—the rate of recidivism for Texas was 38.8 percent (n=22,593). The 2014 and 2013 adult cohorts were 38.3 percent (n=22,018) and 39.2 percent (n=23,125), respectively.³

² These numbers were reported on Table 6: Participant Status and Program Enrollment, of the NRS End-of-Year Report, and Table 10: Outcome Achievement for Adults in Correctional Education Programs, of the NRS End-of-Year Report.

³ Appendix B of Statewide Criminal and Juvenile Justice Recidivism and Revocation Rates, January 2019 Legislative Budget Board Report, http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/documents/publications/policy_report/4914_recidivism_revocation_rates_jan2019.pdf