

Adult Education and Literacy Advisory Committee

**SUMMARY REPORT 2020
DECEMBER 2020**

Committee Recommendations

Overview

The year 2020 has definitely brought its share of challenges! To adapt to the changing times, the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Advisory Committee held two virtual meetings, scheduled informational presentations by industry professionals, and called upon members' expertise to effectively advise the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) on matters related to AEL programs. This summary report includes milestones accomplished in AEL that focus on the integration, promotion, and value of AEL resources.

The nine-member committee consists of representatives from across the state and from both the public and private sectors: David Barron (Gulf Coast Carpenters and Millwrights Training Trust Fund), Traci Berry (Goodwill Central Texas–Austin), Paul Fletcher (Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area), Diana Contreras (Dollar General Corporation), Tiffany Johnson (Victoria College), Samuel Keeler (Tyson Foods), Mignon Lawson (Abilene ISD), Mary Jo Ochoa-Hernandez (Socorro ISD), and Donald Tracy (Austin Community College).

Background Information

In 2020, the committee decided to focus on the previous year's recommendations that were submitted to TWC's three-member Commission (Commission). The 2019 recommendations were as follows:

- Develop a statewide brand to promote AEL
- Engage employers by integrating AEL services into workforce opportunities such as apprenticeships, internships, and workplace literacy
- Enhance the services delivered to special populations in Texas by incorporating AEL resources with TWC program initiatives

The meetings focused on different perspectives on each topic, including employer, workforce development, and AEL provider points of view. The COVID-19 pandemic caused logistical and programmatic challenges for the committee's members and was addressed at the virtual meetings to identify opportunities related to the recommendations. Best practices were showcased, and areas needing further collaboration were identified. The committee recommends that TWC continue working to promote AEL services as an integral part of the economic development of Texas and as a resource that, when integrated with other TWC programs, can successfully contribute to educational and employment outcomes.

Statewide Brand to Promote AEL

The presentations made at the summer and fall meetings identified unique partnerships throughout the state where local workforce development areas (workforce areas) promoted and integrated AEL services.

In the Rural Capital workforce area, the workforce development and AEL programs have worked together since 2016. A service model has been developed with common core values focused on self-sufficient employment for their population. Locations, services, enrollment, and performance are shared within systems. The integration and braided funding of each system is showcased in the successful referrals, completion of integrated education and training programs, and coordination of support services to customers. This is a prime example of how agencies can work together when services are promoted and follow-through occurs.

2020 Recommendation: The committee continues to recommend the promotion and marketing of AEL efforts to increase the public awareness of AEL opportunities and of partnerships that can be formed with AEL. The committee looks forward to the recent marketing initiative announced by TWC's AEL program, which is collaborating with TWC's External Relations Division to promote AEL as a resource during the COVID-19 pandemic, aligning with the Coalition on Adult Basic Education's "Move Ahead with Adult Ed" national adult literacy campaign.

Engagement of Employers for Workforce Opportunities

Information gathered during the committee's meetings demonstrated room for improvement in engaging employers with AEL integration. Employers are developing workforce opportunities with programs that are visible in their communities, but this is not consistent throughout the state.

A presentation by Gulf Coast Carpenters and Millwrights identified an opportunity to integrate AEL services as preparatory pipelines to apprenticeship programs. AEL could provide educational and pre-vocational services to prepare applicants to meet the standards in apprenticeship aptitude and/or entrance exams. Apprenticeship programs provide a clear pathway to employment and can be supported by AEL services.

2020 Recommendation: The committee continues to recommend the establishment and support of collaborative projects with AEL that lead to employment through hands-on training and maintaining a ready supply of skilled workers. Further support is needed to engage employers and to encourage them to improve the preemployment and soft skills of applicants and incumbent workers through customized courses. In particular, the committee encourages the support of pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships within AEL programs, which have the flexibility and experience of serving a variety of customers. By providing the ability to offer state-funded apprenticeship programs through employer and workforce development partnerships, AEL services will be expanded and result in the enhancement of local economies.

Enhance Service Delivery to Special Populations in Texas

Services provided to special populations were showcased in several presentations to the committee. Some presentations showed how initiatives funded by TWC this year provided the opportunity to collaborate with partners to eliminate duplication of services. Additionally, other presentations and knowledge shared by committee members identified a need to work with employers to effectively serve special populations identified by the Commission.

- A partnership in the Borderplex workforce development area presented a prime example of how collaborating with program experts can directly contribute to the success of opportunity youth. Instead of duplicating efforts in high school equivalency, transition, and workforce training services, AEL and workforce development implemented the Youth Job Skills Initiative through multiagency collaboration. This milestone was achieved by marketing AEL, coordinating with regional partners, and customizing services to fit the needs of this priority population.
- During presentations regarding internationally trained professionals (ITPs), a disconnect was identified between AEL programs and employer needs. The programmatic presentation showed the intensive research and services provided to ITP students in AEL programs. The services are customized by each grant recipient and would benefit from state support to establish employability requirements, skill and knowledge frameworks for industry clusters, and initiatives for the evaluation of foreign degree transcripts. The ITP presentation made by Dollar General Corporation exposed a new perspective not currently addressed by AEL services. There is an opportunity to align the services already available with the need that employers have to employ and retain ITP workers.

2020 Recommendation: The committee recommends the continued support of multiagency coordination, elimination of duplication, and braided funding as it relates to services to special populations among all TWC programs.

Additional Recommendations from the Committee

The committee's additional recommendations are as follows:

- Identification and promotion of models for partnering with local faith-based, community-based, and nonprofit organizations to support students in AEL programs.
- Identification and sharing of best practices for bridging these gaps, as digital access and literacy have come to the fore as significant barriers to success for AEL students.