

## Adult Education and Literacy Advisory Committee Report 2022 Annual Recommendations

### Overview

In 2022, the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Advisory Committee held four virtual meetings, invited three industry experts to share innovations that may potentially enhance AEL effectiveness, and called upon members' expertise to advise the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) on matters related to AEL programs. This summary report focuses on specific goals and objectives outlined in the Adult Education and Literacy Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2021 to 2026.

The committee currently consists of five members: Steve Banta (Literacy Texas), who also serves as this year's presiding officer; Rita Hernandez (Cameron County Education Initiative); Jauneen Maldonado (Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County); and Brenda Schofield (Region 5 Education Service Center). Diana Contreras (Dollar General Corporation) resigned in August 2022 when she took an out-of-state position. Leslie Cantu (Toyotetsu Corporation) joined the committee in October 2022.

### Background

In 2022, the committee focused on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across all adult literacy platforms, including AEL-funded programs, nonprofit AEL community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-affiliated programs, libraries, and others. Together, these organizations complement each other by helping adults with a wide variety of literacy and other social service needs. The committee discussions examined how AEL initiatives could benefit by further collaboration between agencies and non-AEL organizations and how the AEL ecosystem of Texas supports employers.

The intent was to examine how AEL can better meet its strategic plan goals and objectives. The following were the three areas the committee focused on during the meetings:

- The Digital Divide—How the pandemic exacerbated an already difficult situation
- Collaboration—How collaboration between agencies and other adult literacy CBOs can better meet community and employer needs
- Innovation—How innovation can be used to expand capacity, expand services, and ensure that limited resources are used as efficiently as possible

The AEL program has made considerable progress in these three areas as indicated in the Adult Education and Literacy Strategic Plan Progress Report Fiscal Year 2022. The committee is attempting to focus on specific areas in which their experience has provided new insights into recommendations that TWC may want to pursue.

Additionally, the committee invited three outside guests to present initiatives that may inform TWC on how to leverage their program experiences to initiate similar projects.

### 2022 Recommendations

The following recommendations are the result of discussions by committee members that took place during four quarterly meetings and numerous work sessions.

### **Recommendation 1**

The committee recommends that TWC conduct a statewide Adult Literacy Needs Assessment to help inform businesses, elected officials, and public policy makers of the benefits of raising adult literacy rates. Additionally, the assessment would help TWC develop strategic initiatives to improve adult literacy rates.

### **Recommendation 2**

The committee recommends that TWC investigate how the Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) model may be used by AEL programs to design classes that better meet business needs. Additionally, the committee recommends that local employers use the TPM model to identify the industry or occupational skills needed to fill critical positions. TWC can then develop a toolkit to create a contextualized curriculum for key industry sectors that not only consider literacy, numeracy, and language skills required but also digital literacy and soft skills.

### **Recommendation 3**

The committee discussed a myriad of federal, state, and local initiatives to address both broadband access and ensure that participants have adequate technology, primarily computers or tablets, to access online resources. The committee recommends that TWC conduct a Digital Literacy and Equity Assessment to better understand the primary barriers that restrict AEL students from accessing online services and then work to eliminate those barriers through strategic partnerships with libraries, Workforce Solutions Offices, or other organizations that help with technological advances for low-skilled adults.

### **Recommendation 4**

The committee recommends that TWC examine ways to promote collaboration between agencies, CBOs, and Workforce Solutions Offices to create a “no wrong door” approach to better serve participants, avoid duplication, and provide more efficient use of scarce resources, such as:

- creating a statewide academy to educate front-line AEL, Workforce Development, and Workforce Solutions Office staff about all services available to the Texas workforce system, including those available to eligible adult learners and employers;
- creating a data system that integrates all WIOA core partners to share participant data in order to reduce duplication of services and provide better direct referrals to programs that support student outcomes; and
- requiring colocation and/or shared staff in primary Workforce Solutions Offices and AEL sites to support a two-way system approach for students to connect to both education and employment services offered by each partner.

### **Recommendation 5**

The committee advises building on the 2021 recommendation to collaborate with Texas employers on projects and partnerships that provide workforce preparation activities and vocational skills for AEL customers and to engage with and provide robust support for special populations to meet employer needs in an increasingly competitive labor market. Additionally, the committee recommends the development of a toolkit through an Employer Connect Center (similar to a Professional Development Center) to provide standardized curriculum for workplace literacy classes in key industry sectors, which may help with the development of a contextualized curriculum that includes employability and digital literacy skills.