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Draft State Plan for Adult Education and Literacy

Background:

Following the passage of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014, a new State Plan authored by the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) is required for adult education and literacy (AEL) services. In Vermont, there are three core partners under WIOA including specified programs overseen by the Vermont Department of Labor (DOL), the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) within the Vermont Agency of Human Services, and AEL within the Vermont AOE. The entire State Plan will be a Unified State Plan covering Strategic Planning Elements and Operational Planning Elements for the Workforce Development System in which AEL is a partner, and Title-specific sections. The final Unified State Plan will be submitted by the Governor's office by March 3, 2016 after a 30 day public comment period, and it will be in effect for four program years starting July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2020.

What follows here is a draft of the Title-specific section of the Unified State Plan pertaining specifically to AEL. It will be available here until December 15, 2015. Vermont AOE welcomes your comments and insights so that Vermont AOE may improve the document.

DRAFT VI. Program-Specific Requirements for Core Programs

Adult Education and Literacy Programs

The purpose of AEL programs under AEFLA (WIOA Title II) is to assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency; to assist adults who are parents or family members to obtain the education and skills that are necessary to becoming full partners in the educational development of their children and lead to sustainable improvements in the economic opportunities for their families; assist adults in attaining a secondary school diploma and in the transition to postsecondary education and training, including through career pathways; and assist immigrants and other individuals who are English language learners in improving their reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension skills in English, math, and acquiring an understanding of the American system of government and citizenship.

AEL programs accomplish these purposes by providing high-quality instruction and education services, and through the mechanism of cultivating and maintaining strong partnerships with other workforce development programs as a core partner within WIOA as well as with other required partners at the One-Stop Centers, otherwise known in Vermont as Career Resource Centers or American Job Centers.

By definition an eligible learner is at least 16 years old; not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school; and is basic skills deficient, does not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and has not achieved an equivalent level of education; or is an English

language learner. An individual with a high school diploma who is basic skills deficient is eligible.

Vermont Vision for AEL within WIOA

AEL is a strong and valued partner in the workforce development system at the state and regional levels. AEL is a component of the education system in Vermont, providing personalized, flexible pathways to secondary school graduation, working with eligible adult learners from the most basic skill levels and up. AEL works with its education and workforce development system partners to help adult learners by assisting adults to obtain high school diplomas or equivalent, while assisting in the transition to postsecondary education and training through career pathways. AEL provides education in the context of regionally-relevant employment opportunities, meaning where possible basic skills instruction that is integrated with occupational skills training as supplied by partners in the workforce development system. This results in good jobs, not just any jobs.

At the state and regional levels, AEL addresses barriers to entry, success, and completion in career pathways for adult learners who are nontraditional and may be considered difficult to serve. Some strategies include but are not limited to the following:

- Put our basic skills assessment expertise and structure to use for the purpose of establishing with our partners in the workforce development system minimum skills levels for entry and success in specific industry trainings, credentials, certificates; provide instruction to eligible learners as needed to bolster basic skills and transition them.
- Within the role of AEL as providers of contextualized basic skills instruction, increase students' readiness for postsecondary education and training through a career pathway without need for post-secondary level remediation courses; use strategies such as College and Career Readiness Standards-aligned instruction and programming, and evidence-based program designs such as Bridge to College.
- Explore solutions with Vocational Rehabilitation and other partners for increasing eligible learners moving forward into postsecondary and the workplace with greater understanding and formal documentation of disabilities, including learning disabilities, such that they have access to necessary accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act for the documented disability in those contexts as they progress in Career Pathways.
- Support our partners in the state and workforce development system to continue to address the issue of the expense of post-secondary education for students in Vermont.

A. Aligning of content standards

By July 1, 2016, the Vermont AOE will have aligned its content standards for adult education with State-adopted challenging academic content standards, as adopted under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The Vermont AOE has committed to the implementation of college and career readiness standards. This means the adoption of the *Common Core State Standards* for its K-12 public schools, and the [*College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education \(CCRS\)*](#). The CCRS is

an exact subset of the *Common Core State Standards* that has been winnowed and validated for applicability to adult learners by expert panels commissioned at the national level. Both documents define three “key advances” or “instructional shifts” each for the broad content areas of English language arts/ literacy and mathematics for adults functioning from the most basic level through high school completion. English language arts/literacy standards specify skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening, language, and reading foundational skills.

By virtue of the origin of the CCRS in *Common Core State Standards*, the standards are aligned.

Implementation of the standards is an ongoing process of professional development and program improvement led by the state office with local program engagement. In FY15, AEL providers engaged in five days of statewide training over the year to explore and understand the six instructional shifts. In FY16, AEL providers focused on the implementation of the English Language Arts/ Literacy standards via four more days of training and additional work, to support local processes of lesson and classroom materials review and revision, observation of teaching, and revamping assignments. This training and implementation process is otherwise known as “Standards in Action.” Standards-based teaching strategies were supported in FY15 through six days of statewide training and follow-up within a national training course called “Adult Numeracy Instruction Professional Development.” The Standards in Action protocols will be launched through statewide training for the mathematics standards.

B. Local activities: how funded, scope, content, organization of local activities

The Vermont AOE will run competitions for its funds under WIOA Title II using the procedures established by the State of Vermont for awarding grants or contracts, and the guidance available in the final WIOA regulations as expected to be published by the US Departments of Education and Labor in 2016. The funds will be awarded to eligible providers of services on a basis of two or more years for the purpose of establishing AEL and operating programs that provide some or all of the WIOA Title II activities as warranted by demographic data within the service area of one or more particular counties, and in so doing to function as a required and valued partner in the regional One-Stop Center (also known in Vermont as local American Job Centers or Career Resource Centers) including as a partner in the development of regionally-relevant career pathways that reflect employer engagement, with specific entrance points for lower skilled adults. There will be a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the operator of the One-Stop Centers and each of its required partners. Adult education programs will adhere to the MOU established between the One-Stop Center operator (Vermont DOL) and the Vermont AOE.

Local activities may include some or all of the following:

- AEL;
- workplace AEL activities;
- family literacy activities;
- English language acquisition (ESOL) activities;
- Integrated English literacy and civics education (IEL/CE);

- workforce preparation activities (to impart employability skills which are a combination of basic academic skills, critical thinking, digital literacy, and self-management skills); and
- integrated education and training that provides AEL activities concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific, regionally-relevant occupation or occupational cluster, and is for the purpose of educational and career advancement.

As required by WIOA Title I B, local AEL activities proposals will be reviewed by the State Workforce Investment Board for alignment to the State Plan using a procedure to be established by the State Workforce Investment Board and the Vermont AOE. Because Vermont operates as a single service area in its Workforce Investment Board structure, local proposals will be reviewed by the State Workforce Investment Board for alignment.

The Vermont AOE will use these considerations for awarding grants or contracts as described in WIOA as pertinent to the proposed scope of work:

1. the degree to which the provider would be responsive to regional needs of the workforce and serving individuals most in need of AEL activities;
2. the ability of the provider to serve individuals with disabilities, including learning disabilities;
3. past effectiveness of the provider in improving literacy of individuals especially who have low levels of literacy, and past effectiveness in meeting established performance targets;
4. the extent of alignment between proposed services and the regional strategies and goals of the workforce development system, and alignment with the services of the other one-stop partners;
5. whether the provider's program is of sufficient intensity and quality, and based on the most rigorous research available so that participants achieve substantial learning gains, and uses instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction;
6. whether the provider's activities, including reading, writing, speaking, math and English language acquisition instruction are based on best practices based on most rigorous research available and appropriate;
7. whether the provider's activities effectively use technology, services, and delivery systems, possibly to include distance education in a manner sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance;
8. whether the provider's activities provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, so that an individual acquires the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education and training programs, obtain and advance in employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;
9. whether the provider's activities are delivered by well-trained instructors and program staff who access high quality professional development opportunities, including via the Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS);

10. whether the provider's activities, for the development of career pathways, coordinate with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community and other one-stop center partners;
11. whether the provider's activities offer flexible schedules and coordination with Federal, state, and local support services that are necessary to enable individuals to attend and complete programs;
12. whether the provider maintains student records in DataWorks which has the capacity to report measurable participant outcomes and to monitor program performance.

In addition local activities will include:

- Systematic outreach and recruitment to target populations.
- Intake and enrollment procedures that welcome learners and establish a strong commitment, support, and clear expectations for each learner's AEL participation, making full use of education plans and enabling learners to make fully informed decisions regarding program options.
- Basic skills (ABE, ASE, and ESOL) instruction that is standards-based
 - provides sufficient intensity and duration for substantive skill building and engages learners in continuing participation;
 - uses varied instructional approaches in response to varied learning styles;
 - engages learners in ongoing assessment and documentation of their skill gains;
 - is provided by trained and qualified instructional staff.
- Student skill assessments and credentials through:
 - State approved standardized testing in reading, writing, mathematics, ESOL for baseline and post-assessment of skill levels;
 - formal and informal assessments used by teachers and learners during instruction for ongoing guidance and documentation of learning;
- Guidance, coaching, and support services that support student persistence and progress

C. Corrections education and other education of institutionalized individuals

The Community High School of Vermont is operated by the Vermont Department of Corrections, and as an independent school approved by the Vermont AOE, also operates under the regulations of the Vermont AOE in service of its learners at multiple sites around the state who are enrolled in the school.

It serves all persons under the custody of the Commissioner of Corrections, including those who are incarcerated, on parole or on probation. Three distinct populations within the Vermont Department of Corrections receive Corrections Education services:

1. Those individuals, regardless of educational level, who do not have academic, social or technical skills that will allow them to successfully participate in the community upon release,

2. Persons who have not completed secondary education which supports the right of every Vermonter to an education regardless of their age, and
3. All persons who are under the age of 23 and have not received their diploma.

WIOA Title II funds are for serving eligible students who are not enrolled in a school. WIOA Title II Programs for Corrections Education and other Institutionalized Individuals must be prioritized for individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the educational program.

AEL services are available to adults in the Corrections system who have been released on parole. Referrals are routinely made as learners transition from Community High School of Vermont (DOC) to the community. A referral protocol has been established between the Vermont AOE and the staff of the Community High School of Vermont describing how institutionalized persons (engaged in Probation and Parole) but not enrolled in the Community High School of Vermont who are seeking adult basic education or adult secondary education should be referred to the local AEL provider organization. At that point of engagement with the local adult education provider, the students are eligible for the range of services afforded any adult learner.

D. Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program

Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IEL/CE) is defined as “education services provided to English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, that enables such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States. Such services shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation, and may include workforce training.”

IEL/CE funds are allocated to States by the federal government using a model that takes into account need for services that references adult English language learner demographics for a state and immigration patterns. It is anticipated that the Vermont AOE will receive the established minimum as it historically has, \$60,000 per year; this amount is to be distributed in one or more grants or contracts to provide IEL/CE services through an open competition for funding.

The Vermont AOE will request formal proposals from local service providers eligible for funding under WIOA Title II to provide the services of IEL/CE with a priority focus on serving communities with significant concentrations of adult English language learners, and operating in partnership with established programs so as to supplement and not supplant existing efforts while accomplishing the purpose of IEL/CE.

IEL/CE programs will be delivered in combination with integrated education and training activities. They will prepare adults who are English language learners for and place such adults in unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic

self-sufficiency. They will integrate with the local WFDS and its functions including engaging employers at the local One-Stop center as an adult education partner in order to carry out the activities of the program.

IEL/CE will not be provided in every county or community through this funding source. The RFP will be shaped by an in-state demographic data analysis, environmental scan of existing programs and funding sources outside of WIOA Title II, and ability to work with partners to accomplish the purposes of IEL/CE, as demonstrated in the funding competition.

In consideration of proposals for Integrated English Language and Civics Education funds, the Vermont AOE will consider:

- whether the local area has a demonstrated need for additional English language acquisition programs and civics education programs;
- whether the program makes use of highly trained instructors including those who hold degrees, credentials, or coursework in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

In addition to these considerations for funding are those that are common to all AEL providers as pertinent to the proposed scope of work to provide IEL/CE:

1. past effectiveness of the provider in improving literacy of individuals especially who have low levels of literacy, and past effectiveness in meeting established performance targets (also in line with the anticipated details in the final WIOA regulations);
2. the extent of alignment between proposed services and the regional strategies and goals of the workforce development system, and alignment with the services of the other one-stop partners;
3. whether the provider's program is of sufficient intensity and quality, and based on the most rigorous research available so that participants achieve substantial learning gains, and uses instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction;
4. whether the provider's activities, including reading, writing, speaking, and English language acquisition instruction are based on best practices based on most rigorous research available and appropriate;
5. whether the provider's activities effectively use technology, services, and delivery systems, possibly to include distance education in a manner sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance;
6. whether the provider's activities provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, so that an individual acquires the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education and training programs, obtain and advance in employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;
7. whether the provider's activities are delivered by well-trained instructors and program staff who access high quality professional development opportunities, including via the Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS);

8. whether the provider's activities, for the development of career pathways, coordinate with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community and other one-stop center partners;
9. whether the provider's activities offer flexible schedules and coordination with Federal, state, and local support services that are necessary to enable individuals to attend and complete programs;
10. whether the provider maintains student records in DataWorks which has the capacity to report measurable participant outcomes and to monitor program performance.

E. State Leadership activities

State Leadership activity requirements are well-defined in WIOA Title II Section 223. The funds are intended to be used to develop or enhance the adult education system in Vermont. The Vermont AOE will be responsible to use the modest funds allotted to carry out the *required* State Leadership activities as follows:

- Align AEL activities with other core partners and one-stop partners, to implement the strategy identified in the vision for the workforce development system in Vermont, as described in an earlier chapter within this Unified State Plan. Achieving this alignment will require communication and working in concert with our partners at the Vermont DOL and the Vermont DVR at the state level in light of our common strategic vision for the workforce development system. In particular, the workforce development system goal of "seamless coordination amongst the workforce development system partners" will require joint cross-training of One-Stop Center staff for common intake and joint referral processes, with the AEL contribution to this effort considered a State Leadership activity. This will include support for cross-core-program efforts on the development of career pathways that provide access to employment and training services for individuals in AEL activities; and support for promoting an understanding in the field of the development and use of Integrated Education and Training models in partnership with employers; and support for implementing evidence-based program models that facilitate learners' successful transitions to post-secondary education.
- Provide high quality professional development programs to improve instruction, including instruction incorporating the essential components of reading instruction as such components relate to adults through an evidence-based reading training such as Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) or similar; instruction related to the specific needs of adult learners as determined by a needs assessment of the field; and dissemination of information about models and promising practices related to such professional development programs.
- Provide technical assistance to AEL providers including
 - Dissemination of instructional and programmatic practices based on the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available and appropriate, in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition programs (ESOL), distance education, and staff training;
 - Support for the role of adult education providers as one-stop partners to provide access to employment, education, and training services;

- Assistance in the use of technology, including for staff training, to adult education providers, especially the use of technology to improve system efficiencies.
- Monitor and evaluate the quality of and the improvement in AEL activities and disseminate information about models and proven or promising practices within Vermont and beyond.

The Vermont AOE will be responsible to carry out *permissible* State Leadership activities as follows so long as funding permits:

- Maintaining active membership in the New England Literacy Resource Center, as well as active partnership in the Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) in order to foster collaboration amongst other agencies and minimize duplication of effort.
- Disseminating models and content for integrated education and training and career pathways.
- The provision of assistance to AEL providers in meeting the State-adjusted levels of performance, commonly known as performance targets, via technical assistance, desk monitoring, ongoing communication, site visits and targeted professional development and program improvement activities.
- Continuing our work on standards implementation, including the use of aligned and approved assessments when available, so that students are prepared for college and careers as a result of their participation in AEL.

F. Assessing Quality. The Vermont AOE will assess the quality of providers of AEL activities under Title II in the following ways:

In partnership with adult education providers, the Vermont AOE will continue to collect data from its adult education providers pertaining to student demographics, outcomes, and program performance in a relational, web-based database. The Vermont AOE will track and report follow-up performance measures relating to employment and post-secondary entrance through data sharing agreements with the core partners. Of notable importance to us is increasing the number of low skilled students served in AEL activities in Vermont, and helping students achieve measurable skill gains particularly at the lower skill levels.

Historically, skill gains for adult education students with skills at the secondary school level in Vermont have compared favorably to those in other states. In contrast, skill gains for students at the lower skill levels have not been favorable as compared to other states.

Vermont is developing a State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), which will eventually house the AEL database (DataWorks). Existing elements will be modified and/or added to as needed in order to meet the needs under WIOA and the Unified State Plan.

To be accountable for the public investment in the learners that we serve, to communicate our efforts more transparently, and to be able to acknowledge our strengths and successes, the Vermont AOE will establish a particular, simplified report. (The full range of other reports will continue to be available in real time to programs.) It will be made available in real time to adult

education providers, and local results will be posted semiannually to the VT AOE's website. In plain language it will show the number of students served, the distribution of levels and skill gains, results against the common performance indicators, and other basic information determined to be relevant to assessing quality.

Based on this common public reference Vermont AOE will establish on-going and regular (quarterly) communication about program performance with adult education providers with achieving target levels of performance as a primary goal. The annual performance targets are anticipated to be set in a climate of realistic continuous program improvement. Program performance that is on target will be acknowledged and celebrated. Program performance that does not meet targets will receive the timely attention of the Vermont AOE. A program improvement plan will be established in collaboration with the local provider. Targeted technical assistance, further training and support in relation to these plans of improvement will be delivered to the program. High quality professional development opportunities as required within State Leadership activities are to be aligned with areas of program need based on their performance. Past performance will be taken into account in awarding funds as required through AEFLA funding competitions run by the Vermont AOE.