

Adult Education and Literacy Advisory Committee Report 2023 Annual Recommendations

Overview

In 2023, the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Advisory Committee held four virtual meetings, invited several industry experts to share innovations that could potentially assist AEL program 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 Fiscal Year 2021 to 2026 Adult Education and Literacy Strategic Plan.

The committee currently consists of five members: **Steve Banta** (Literacy Texas) who also served as this year's presiding officer, **Jauneen Maldonado** (Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County), **Leslie Cantu** (Toyotetsu Corporation), **Kristina Hartman** (Superintendent, Windham School District), **Dr. Ben Stafford**, (Lamar College, Community College/Higher Education), and **Cindy Fisher**, (Texas Broadband Development Office).

Background to the Committee Recommendations

In 2023, the committee sought out "best practices" around the state designed to address the adult literacy crisis. The committee's focus included Texas Opportunity Youth, a program that serves 16- to 24-year-olds not in school or in dead-end jobs. There are 500,000 of these individuals across Texas, 100,000 of whom have not completed high school.

Members were introduced to a unique collaboration across Workforce Solutions Tarrant County, Tarrant County Adult Education, and Goodwill Industries. These agencies partnered to serve the diverse needs of adult students, improving the probability for successful outcomes.

In addition, manufacturers shared their program, Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME), which identifies individuals for training to become advanced manufacturing technicians. There are six sponsoring companies in Texas with four chapters.

Perhaps the most ambitious program was initiated by Workforce Solutions Alamo. They developed sector-based partnerships, including K-12, adult basic education, community colleges, universities, community-based organizations (CBO), human resources organizations, organized labor, Workforce Boards, and economic development. The partnerships resulted in a community-wide program that provides talent pipeline management and "No Wrong Door" when individuals need social services, regardless of the source for those services.

In addition, the TWC AEL Advisory Committee members shared how AEL funding is fundamental to the success of the widely diverse constituencies they represent. If there is one theme that developed over the year of discussions, it is that the most successful AEL programs go out of their way to collaborate with partners to better serve students with complementary services. These programs meet the students where they are and help them overcome barriers to improving literacy.

With this in mind, the Advisory Committee examined the 2022 recommendations and further refined them to more clearly express where the TWC AEL program can provide the most benefit to low literacy adults in Texas.

2023 Recommendation I

Continue to build on the 2022 recommendation to collaborate with Texas employers on projects and partnerships that provide pre-employment vocational and employability skills opportunities for AEL customers and engage with and provide robust support for special populations to meet employer needs in an increasingly competitive labor market.

This collaboration includes investigating how the talent pipeline management (TPM) model can be used by AEL programs to structure classes that more closely align with businesses in their region. Utilize local employers to work through the TPM process and establish industry or occupational skills needed to fill those critical positions. TWC can then develop a toolkit to create contextualized curriculum for key industry sectors that not only consider literacy, numeracy and language skills required, but also soft and digital literacy skills.

Part of the process to work with employers would be to create an “Employer Connect Center” (like a professional development center) to provide standardized curriculum for workplace literacy classes in key industry sectors. This center could assist with the development of contextualized curriculum that could include employability and digital literacy skills to meet employer needs.

The committee also recommends the expansion of integrated education and training to promote career pathways, contextualized lessons, and workforce readiness.

2023 Recommendation II

The committee recommends that TWC examine ways to promote collaboration across agencies, jail/prison-based programs, CBOs, and Workforce Solutions offices and create a “No Wrong Door” approach to better serve participants, avoid duplication, support continuity of services, and provide more efficient use of scarce resources. Examples include:

- Create a statewide “Academy” to educate front line AEL, Workforce Development, and Workforce Solutions office staff about all services available to workforce system participants, including eligible adult learners and employers.
- Create a data system that integrates all WIOA core partners to share participant data to reduce duplication of services and provide better direct referrals to programs that support student outcomes.
- Require co-location 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.
- Develop engaging programs and provide professional development on effective strategies for teachers, specifically targeted for younger learners (16-24) who are especially difficult to keep in programs long enough to achieve desired outcomes.
- Define a referral process for students leaving the corrections/prison/jail environment to connect with CBOs pre-reentry and facilitate enrollment and transfer of records.