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# Building the Critical Links

Recommendations of the Rhode Island Governor's Adult Literacy Taskforce August 2004

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# Building the Critical Links

Recommendations of the Rhode Island Governor’s Adult Literacy Task Force August 2004

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## LETTER FROM GOVERNOR CARCIERI

***As a former teacher,** I appreciate the power of education and how it can change a person's life. Yet, many adults in our state have not had the opportunity, for whatever reason, to advance their education. Now, as Governor, I believe we have both a civic responsibility and an economic imperative to better meet the literacy needs of all our citizens.*

*Over the last decade, Rhode Island lost 93,000 jobs that were accessible to residents with less than a high school education, and gained 89,000 jobs that require at least some college education. Our economy is shifting quickly away from low-skilled jobs in industries like jewelry and textiles to high-skilled jobs in industries like medical technology, information technology, innovation services, advanced manufacturing and financial services. Unless we increase our efforts in adult education, too many of our citizens will not be able to access the jobs which can support a family, and our state will not have the skilled workforce to fill the jobs our economy is capable of creating.*

*We need to think about adult basic education not as a band-aid, but rather as a long-range strategy to promote upward mobility, engaged citizens and strong families. In the fall of 2003, I therefore convened an Adult Literacy Task Force of key state agency heads to work with a team of consultants in adult education and a broad group of stakeholders to develop an integrated quality adult education system for our state. This report and its recommendations is the result of those efforts.*

*In response, our state will begin integrating major state and federal funding streams in one agency. We will put the Adult Basic Education Division at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), and have the newly restructured board of the Human Resources Investment Council (HRIC) serve as the policy board. This combination brings together the educational expertise of RIDE together with the strong connection to the workplace and the larger workforce development system of the HRIC. Additionally, state agencies with a stake in adult education will continue to collaborate in finding innovative solutions to more effectively help all our citizens gain the education they need.*

*My administration will be implementing this new governance structure over the coming year. Working in partnership with the provider community and other stakeholders, we will move forward on other important recommendations concerning professional development, program quality and participant assessment that are highlighted in this report.*

*I would like to thank the many dedicated teachers, program directors, state agency heads, and consultants who helped to inform this work. In particular, I want to acknowledge the staff of my Policy Office and the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council who assisted in leading this effort. The Ocean State truly has begun to build the critical links to ensuring a bright future for all our citizens.*

**Donald L. Carcieri**  
**Governor of Rhode Island**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In the fall of 2003, Governor Carcieri announced the formation of the Adult Literacy Task Force to develop an integrated, quality system of adult basic education in Rhode Island. The Task Force created five Task Teams to carry out this work. The teams tackled the critical issues identified by a series of public reports on the state of Rhode Island's adult basic education system<sup>1</sup>—coordinated and integrated funding streams and system administration; articulation among programs and across systems; comprehensive professional development; consistent standards for program performance, accountability and improvement; and consistency in participant outcome measures.

Led by the Governor's Policy Office with the assistance of the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, over 60 individuals representing seven state agencies, 24 non-profits, and four economic development and policy entities worked intensely with four nationally known consultants for six months. The results of this collaborative effort include a set of recommendations for state governance, professional development, program quality, and participant assessment. These recommendations are summarized below.

- Consolidate adult basic education state level staff in one state agency, elevate the ADULT EDUCATION director's position in that agency, and create a strong board to help integrate workforce development and adult education.
- Adequately staff the state division, initially with a director, three professional staff, and clerical support, adding additional staff as the system develops and funds are available.
- Create a forum for interagency collaboration around the funding and delivery of adult basic education services; participation should include: DHS, DLT, DOC, DOH, OHE, OLIS, RIDE.
- Develop a comprehensive state-wide professional development system that features a central resource center; collaborative decision making between programs, professional staff developers, and state staff; individual staff, program, and state professional development plans based on documented needs, best practices, and state-wide standards; incentives to create a culture of professional development across the system.
- Design and implement, through a collaborative process involving programs and state staff, a program improvement process based on indicators of program quality and the outcome measures mandated by the National Reporting System (NRS). The development process includes a pilot phase for programs and state staff to determine the efficacy of the indicators, performance standards, and measurement tools.
- Adopt or adapt a common core of content standards for all programs that are flexible and reflect a broad consensus, yet specific enough to guide instruction and assessment. Align

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<sup>1</sup> Adult basic education in this document includes: beginning through advanced English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), beginning literacy, beginning through intermediate adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), and transition to college programs.

outcomes, standards, curriculum, and assessment while providing extensive professional development and support to enable all programs to understand and implement standards-based reform.

These recommendations provide a strong foundation for the development of an exemplary adult literacy system throughout the state. Given the scope of this work, the Task Force strongly recommends that appropriate time and resources are provided for building a quality integrated system and that a broad range of stakeholders participate in planning, decision making, and implementation. To support implementation of these recommendations, a transition plan and timeline is included in this report.

I've lived in Rhode Island all my life. My mother's side of our family migrated down from Canada to the Woonsocket area, and most of her family worked in the textile industry. All my relatives worked hard so they could provide for their children therefore, not many of them finished high school. This legacy has been passed down to all the children in our family until recently...I have furthered my education by receiving my GED certificate in 1995, and this fall, I have enrolled in my first college class at CCRI. Thanks to the wonderful staff at the transition to college program, my family's legacy toward furthering our education will change.

I am fifty-two years old now, and like my relatives from Canada, I've worked hard all of my life. With my increased self-confidence in my ability to be successful academically, I have decided to go back to school with the intent on changing my career. The way things are going for retirement, I may have to work until I'm 80; however, instead of working in manufacturing, I think I might like using my brain instead of my back. I would like to help people in some way, maybe in social work, or in some kind of teaching capacity.

—Robert Pippins

# INTRODUCTION

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In January 2004, the Governor’s Adult Literacy Task Force created five Task Teams to carry out the work articulated in the Task Force Action Plan for an integrated, quality system of adult basic education in Rhode Island. This document is a set of recommendations to the Governor from those Task Teams. The teams were organized around five critical issues as follows:

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Task Team 1 – **Budget**

Task Team 2 – **System Objectives, Elements & Governance**

Task Team 3 – **Professional Development**

Task Team 4 – **Program Quality**

Task Team 5 – **Participant Assessment**

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The Task Force created these five Task Teams to more efficiently complete the work laid out in its work-plan, with the understanding that the work of each group must be well integrated within the Rhode Island adult basic education system. Learner assessment, program quality and professional development, in particular, are areas that are inextricably entwined in a quality education system. Curricula and instruction must be aligned with accepted learning standards and appropriate assessments, and supported by effective and comprehensive program components, professional development, and system infrastructure. The underlying connection between all the teams’ work is the common system-wide goal that:

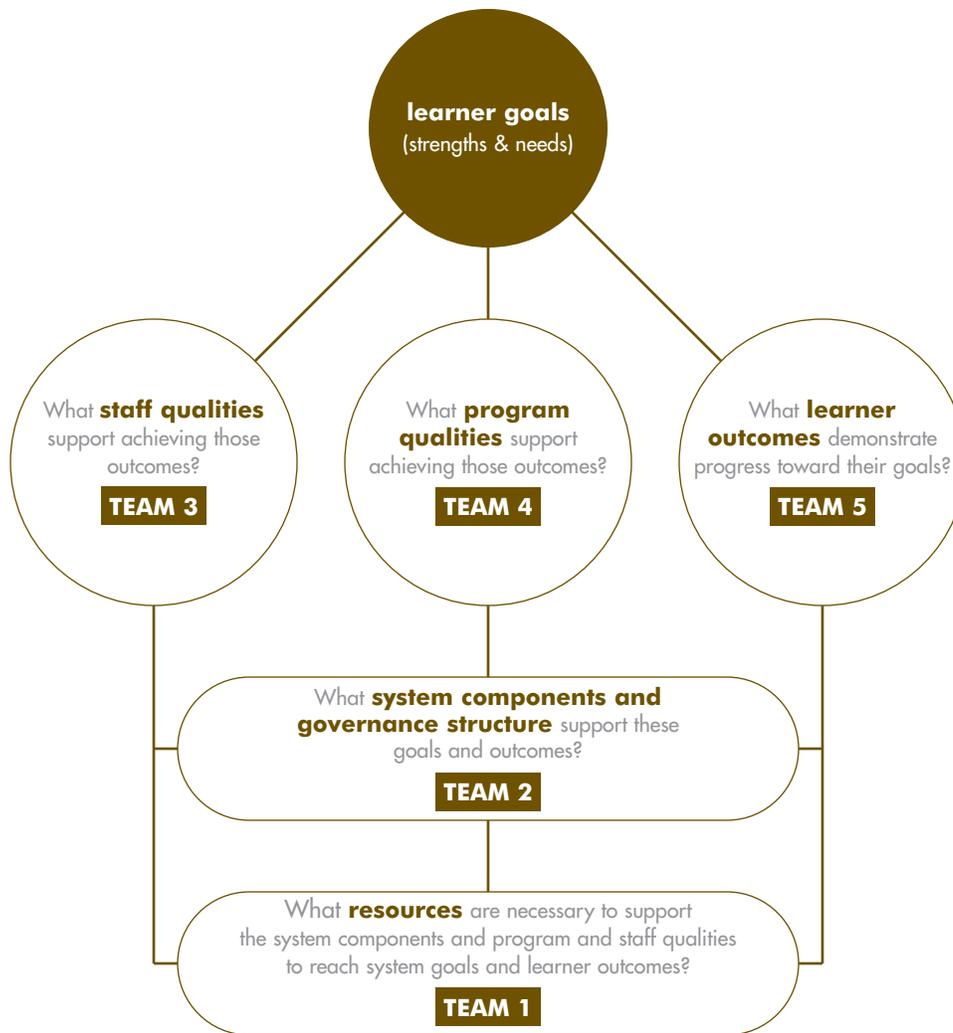
*From any adult basic education or literacy starting point adult learners can access education and support services and over time have the opportunity to achieve their short and long term educational and personal goals as workers, parents and family members, citizens and community members, and lifelong learners.*

[from Goals, and Objectives in Appendix B]

Therefore, the work of the teams began with a logic model approach focused on articulating immediate, intermediate, and long-term student goals and outcomes that would be common across Task Teams and across the variety of long-term goals of adult basic education programs and students—employment, citizenship, higher education, family literacy, health literacy. This relationship of the primacy of learner goals and outcomes to the work of the Task Teams is illustrated in Figure 1 on page 6.

The work of the five Task Teams included over 60 individuals representing seven state agencies, 24 non-profit organizations, four statewide economic development and policy entities, and four nationally known consultants. Much has been accomplished toward establishing a quality integrated adult basic education and workforce development system across Rhode Island. A timeline and plan to continue the momentum built over the last six months and transition to the newly established adult basic education division is included in this report to the Governor.

This document contains the recommendations from four of the five Task Teams. Team 1 (Budget) began



**FIGURE 1. Primary Relationship Among Task Teams**

its work in Fall 2004 to develop a FY 06 budget for adult basic education and are preparing a case statement to submit to the Governor. (The case statement will be published separately from this report.)

Each of the following sections begins with the charge to that Task Team. The first section includes a detailed delineation of the proposed system structure and governance, recommendations for staffing the state adult basic education division, and a strategy for interagency collaboration needed to achieve the level of effectiveness, efficiency and quality of the broader system. The remaining 3 sections begin with a brief background on the content of each team’s work and include pertinent experience and research from other states, work completed to date, and recommendations.

In addition, several documents were developed to lay a foundation for decision making. These documents are found in the Appendix and include:

- Guiding Principles for the work developed by the Task Force;
- Mission, Goals, and Objectives for Improving the Rhode Island Adult Basic Education System developed by the Task Force, members of Team 2 and additional stakeholders;
- System Components with State and Program Responsibilities, rooted in research and best practices in the field and the experience of the consultants;

An asset map created through an interview and survey process of all Rhode Island adult education providers is presented in a companion document, *Adult Basic Education in Rhode Island Survey Results*.

A Glossary of terms and list of Task Force and Task Team participants are also provided at the end of this document.

I've been taking ESL classes for two years and my experience with this program is wonderful. It has taught me so much that I don't have enough words to say thank you. It wasn't easy in the beginning, because I didn't know anything about this country or its language, but when you practice everything becomes a little easier. You find so many things to learn that you wonder if someday you are ever going to finish.

The people, who give the students their support every day with patience, love, and respect, make us to be better, to believe that we can learn and can go out and confront the world without fear or doubt...Now I can read, write, and speak and I leave behind the fear of being myself.

—**Johanna Sanchez**

# SYSTEM ELEMENTS, OBJECTIVES, & GOVERNANCE

## I. Charge to Team 2

The following were the tasks charged to the System Elements, Objectives, and Governance Task Team by the Task Force:

- Define key objectives of the system, drawing on the Guiding Principles document adopted by the Governor’s Adult Literacy Task Force.
- Define characteristics and components of a quality adult basic education statewide system, in accordance with system objectives, best practices, and research.
- Examine current system for gaps—Which programs serve what levels and does each level lead seamlessly to entry into the next? [See companion document, *Survey Results*]
- Determine state’s future role in system coordination – administration, full-scale governance/ combining funding streams, and/or strategic change using the system to achieve the state’s policy goals.
- Decide where to locate the coordination of the system, what form it should take, and what staff it requires.

Led by Jeff Grybowski, the Governor’s Policy Director, and Kip Bergstrom, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, eighteen team members representing a wide range of stakeholders began meeting in March 2004. An additional fifteen stakeholders were recruited to provide feedback. The Team was assisted by Janet Durfee-Hidalgo from the Governor’s Policy Office, facilitator Alan Brickman, adult basic education specialist David Rosen, project manager Judy Titzel, and staff assistant Sasha Warner-Berry.

## II. Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this section address structuring the state’s adult basic education system, with the analysis and rationale for the recommendations. Included are recommendations for the administrative “location” within state government, structures for governance and leadership, the initial staffing configuration and anticipated use of consultants, and the role of the host agency.

These recommendations are built on five core elements that must be present in order to build and implement a quality adult basic education system in Rhode Island. These elements are a significant departure from the current structure of adult education in the state. They are:

- **Consolidated state-level function:** Staffing for the state role in managing and coordinating the adult education system should be consolidated in a single department of state government. [Currently there are 3 FTEs located in two different state agencies and 2 contract employees located in 2 additional organizations.]

- **High profile, stature, and authority of Director:** The adult education Director’s position should be a high level administrator reporting directly to the Commissioner. The Director must have experience and demonstrated leadership in adult basic education with programmatic, administrative, policy, advocacy, and resource development skills and expertise, and should be hired via a national search.
- **Adequately staffed and resourced Division:** The adult education division should be sufficiently staffed for the full range of functions that comprise the state role in overseeing adult education, and among the staff there should be a complete array of programmatic and administrative skills and expertise necessary to develop and sustain an effective adult education system [See Appendix C]. Further, the funding and resources for the division’s organizational infrastructure should be sufficient to support a highly effective system.
- **Leadership from a strong Board:** The adult education division should have a strong and high level policy board that acts as a champion for adult education, provides leadership with regard to fundraising and resource development for adult education, provides flexibility for the growing needs of the system, and serves as a vehicle for communication and coordination between education and workforce development services and constituencies.
- **Interagency collaboration and integration:** There should be a greater degree of state-level interagency collaboration that supports integration of funding streams, increased access to support services for adult learners, seamless transitions and alignment of standards across systems, and innovative and holistic models of service delivery.

In order to implement a quality state-wide adult basic education system to meet the mission, goals and objectives adopted by the Task Force, Team 2 has carefully considered alternatives for the location within state government, governance structure, staffing and roles of the state division of adult basic education and host agency, and mechanisms for interagency collaborations. These recommendations are presented in the following sections.

#### A. LOCATION WITHIN STATE GOVERNMENT

While most states locate their adult basic education administration in their state department of education, some states have chosen the department of labor or higher education to house their state adult education. To explore all such options, the team articulated the role of the host agency, developed a list of criteria to use in evaluating potential locations, and reviewed and discussed a number of location and structural options. Through a thoughtful group process of exploring the mission of each state agency and the advantages, risks, and potential risk management strategies for each location, Team 2 arrived at recommendations.

The role of the host agency is to provide the following:

- Accountability
- Administrative capacity (fiscal, HR, tech, etc.)
- Chain of command to Governor

- Content knowledge/expertise
- Flexibility (within bureaucracy) to do the work creatively
- Fiscal management - experience with federal grants
- Interagency linkages (including with DHS, DLT, DOC, OHE, DOH, OLIS, RIDE, etc. )
- Support & advocacy for full range of adult basic education providers & purposes

While the Task Force recognizes the final decision on location and governance of the adult basic education division lies with the Governor, by unanimous vote the Task Force recommends locating the adult basic education division within the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and appointing the newly constituted Human Resource Investment Council (HRIC) Board as the policy board of adult education as well. The combination of RIDE and HRIC/HLT takes advantage of the education content expertise of RIDE and the employer and workforce development focus and expertise of HRIC. This structure has the unique advantage of joining workforce development and adult basic education, leading to a truly integrated and comprehensive education and training system of services for adults.

Further advantages, risks, and strategies for risk management for locating adult basic education administration in RIDE are detailed in the box below:

### **Advantages of Locating in Rhode Island Department of Education**

- Expertise in full range of content (i.e. assessment, professional development, performance measures), education reform, and system infrastructure, and understanding of adult learners
- Goals of adult education system support goals of RIDE (Research shows that the level of parental education has a significant impact on the successful education of children.)
- Adult basic education is an integral part of the education continuum
- Experience/ability in integrating multiple funding streams and working with broad range of providers (e.g. family literacy, workforce preparation, beginning literacy and learning disabilities, etc.)
- Experience managing RFP process
- Minimal overhead for new structure

### **Risks**

- Core mission is focused on building quality in the K-12 system, potentially dwarfing adult education
- Weak connections to employers and workforce development

### **Risk Management**

- Elevate Director position to report directly to Commissioner, add staff and strong board
- Populate the board with business leaders who are committed to the importance of adult education

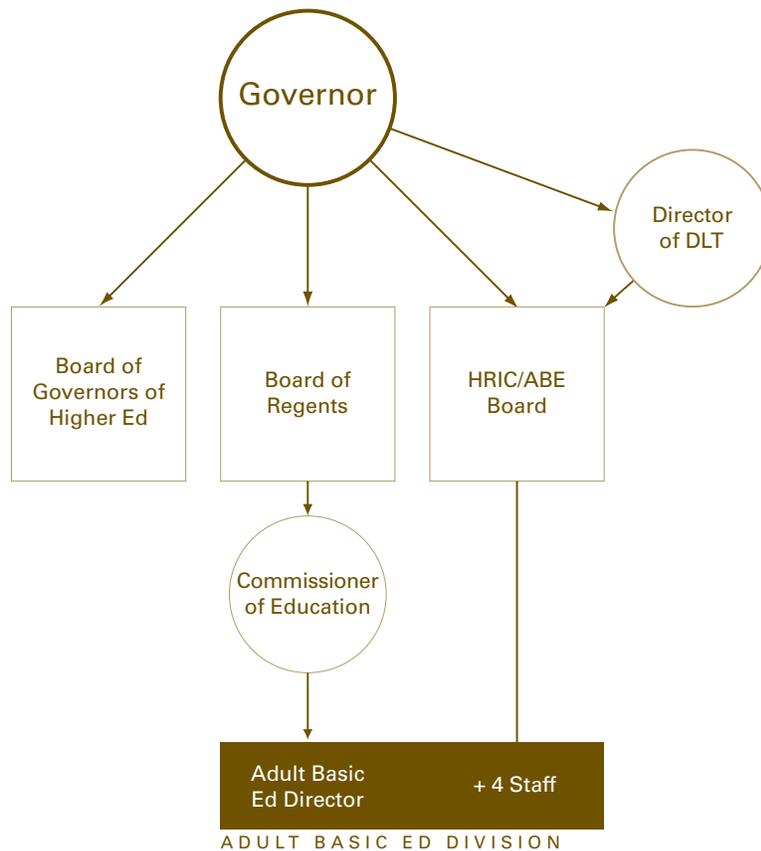
## B. GOVERNANCE

Strong leadership is addressed through the position of the adult education director in the host agency and through a high-level policy board committed to adult basic education. The director will report directly to the Commissioner of Education. The position will require demonstrated leadership experience in adult basic education.

The adult basic education board members will be business and education leaders and strong champions for adult education. The role of the board is to:

- Develop funds for system capacity building (not in direct competition with individual providers)
- Advocate/champion adult education (with Governor, legislators, businesses, general public)
- Obtain 501(c)(3) status to be more strategically placed to receive and allocate private/foundation funding
- Facilitate process to develop and approve system strategic plan
- Provide mechanism for more effective linkages between workforce development and adult basic education

The following diagram outlines the recommended location and governance configuration.



**FIGURE 2.** Recommended Location and Governance Configuration

### C. STAFFING

To build a coherent adult basic education system that will meet the objectives articulated by the Task Force, Team 2 recommends that the adult education division be initially staffed with a director, three professional staff members, and clerical support. A critical first step in building the division will be to conduct a national search to hire a director. The chart below identifies current staffing and funding sources and what start-up staffing is being proposed as part of the governance recommendations. As the system develops, it is anticipated that additional staff will be necessary.

<b>Current State Staffing for Adult Education</b>		<b>Proposed Start-up State Staffing for Adult Education System</b>	
<b>GED:</b>	1 FTE, located at RIDE, funded by JDF <sup>1</sup>	<b>Director:</b>	1 FTE
<b>Adult Basic:</b>	1 FTE, located at RIDE, funded by WIA Title II	<b>Professional:</b>	3 FTEs (including GED management)
<b>Workplace:</b>	1 FTE, located at HRIC, funded by JDF (currently open position)	<b>Support Staff:</b>	1 FTE
<b>Resource Center:</b>	1 contracted person, located at Brown U., funded through RIDE using WIA Title II leadership dollars	<b>Contractual:</b>	2 existing contracts with Brown and Workforce Literacy Collaborative funded through Title II and JDF respectively through FY05 <sup>2</sup>
<b>Collaborative:</b>	1 contracted person, located at Workforce Literacy Collaborative, funded by JDF		
<hr/>		<hr/>	
<b>Total Current:</b>	<b>3 FTEs 2 Contractual</b>	<b>Total Recommended:</b>	<b>5 FTEs 2 Contractual</b>

<sup>1</sup> Job Development Fund

<sup>2</sup> Recommendations are to (a) incorporate the Workforce Literacy Collaborative into the adult education state staff function over time and (b) continue state-wide professional development entity as contractual, selected through a competitive bid process. (Please see Professional Development System recommendations.)

Recommendations for the roles and responsibilities of the Director and staff in the newly formed adult basic education division are as follows:

### **Policy & Planning**

- Develop statewide strategic plan (including technology plan, assessment of needs and assets, process for evaluations of programs and system, state-wide professional development plan, etc.) that includes input from a range of stakeholders and reflects mission, vision, goals, and objectives of the system. [A five-year plan for WIA Title II will be submitted to the US DOE by April 05, pending WIA reauthorization by congress.] Submitting a unified plan with workforce development is highly recommended.
- Determine policy for allocating multi-year funds, in accordance with the system's mission and vision, and allocate funding competitively and efficiently to meet the objectives of the system.
- Implement a fund development and PR strategy for system improvement and expansion
- Promote collaboration between and among all state and private agencies with a stake (or potential stake) in adult education.

### **Service Provision Continuum**

- Ensure that adult basic and ESOL education services are seamless from beginning literacy through transition to college and articulated with employment ladders, higher education, apprenticeships and job/career training.
- Support community-level planning among providers and support services (academic, vocational, and personal counseling; transportation; childcare; etc.) and ensure services are equitably and geographically distributed according to adult education needs.
- Support and facilitate state-wide coalitions, networking, sharing and dialog between program directors, teachers, counselors, other provider staff, and volunteers, and between providers, next steps (employers, post-secondary institutions, job training/ apprenticeship programs, etc.), funders and policy makers.

### **Program Quality & Accountability**

- Develop and update program quality outcome measures and performance standards, with significant stakeholder input; consistently monitor and evaluate programs against transparent and measurable program quality outcomes; use results for accountability and to support program improvement.
- Develop and update consistent learner assessment processes across the state system, with input from administrators, teachers, students and other stakeholders.
- Establish and maintain statewide technology infrastructure (MIS) for student tracking, outcome reporting, performance accountability, and improvement.

- Collect, compile, analyze, use and report program level data across the state and support a culture of systematic data collection, analysis and use for program and system improvement.

### **Program & Staff Development / Support**

- Provide technical assistance, professional development, tools, and other resources to:
  - Support program planning and development,
  - Enable programs to be accountable and improve, based on program quality standards
  - Enable all staff to reach quality staff standards.

There is also an expectation that consultant expertise will be necessary, particularly in the Transition Phase, as the recommendations from the other Task Teams—Learner Assessment, Professional Development, Program Quality—are further developed and implemented over the next year. This would include, for example, consultants to design and operationalize a MIS for adult education in conjunction with the state Chief Information Officer, assessment and metrics expertise, and a continuation of the design and implementation of a comprehensive professional development system.

I enrolled in GED classes for many reasons. I want to go to college. I want to succeed in life, and, in my opinion, you cannot be a powerful and successful business woman without knowledge. I want to do better for my son than those before me. My first step is to begin where I first failed – with my education.

When I first enrolled in the GED class I was afraid (as odd as that may sound). I feared what I thrived to obtain. I expected the work would be difficult – my teeth clenched, my heart pounded for fear of either being rejected or teased due to my lack of knowledge. However, now that fear is gone. I am able to work at my own pace without criticism from my peers. I am now happy to be in school knowing that, in the long run, things will get better as long as I take it one step at a time.

—Abby Ortiz

## D. STATE-LEVEL INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

Members of Team 2 and the Task Force understand the critical importance, as well as the hurdles, of interagency collaboration at the state level around the delivery of adult basic education services. At least five federal funding streams may be used for adult education services and five state agencies (DHS, RIDE, DLT, DOC, and OLIS) all administer federal grants for adult education purposes. In addition to a strong adult education state division, an interagency forum is necessary to support a coherent, integrated adult basic education system. The goals for interagency collaborations are summarized below.

### 1. Ensuring Quality of Services

- More consistency in quality of services
- More attention to longer term outcomes

### 2. Effective Use of Resources

- Funds available for adult basic education services integrated at the state level (Current MOU between RIDE and DHS to provide educational services for TANF recipients is an effective model.)
- Funds distributed equitably across geographies and in response to relative need, including specific populations such as learners with learning disabilities
- More consistency and stability of funding for providers
- Less local program management overhead

### 3. Articulation of Systems

- Common, comprehensive standards to align participant outcomes across a broader system
- Seamless referral system
- Facilitation of community planning for coordination of services

### 4. Innovative Solutions to Interdependent Needs

- Integration of school reform, neighborhood development, adult basic education, workforce development
- Collaborative response to early intervention/prevention (e.g. HS dropouts)

To achieve these goals, the Task Force strongly recommends that an interagency team be formed, similar to the Adult Literacy Task Force in composition, with the addition of DOC, DOH, and OLIS and a continuing presence of the Governor's Policy Office. The team would be co-chaired by RIDE and DLT and modeled after the Children's Cabinet. Clear roles of and relationship between the Interagency Team and the HRIC Board would need to be developed.

## I. Charge to Team 3

The following were the tasks charged to the Professional Development Team by the Task Force:

- Define universal set of minimum expectations of instructors. What makes a qualified adult basic education instructor? How will we determine if an instructor is qualified? What do instructors need to know to begin teaching? What ongoing training do they need?
- Determine an appropriate combination of part-time, full-time, paid, and volunteer instructors in a quality system that meet the objectives of the system defined by Team 2.
- Determine how many qualified instructors are already working in the RI system and how many more we need; determine what successful instructor training already exists.
- Design professional development models that include all system staff (administrators, counselors, volunteers, etc.) and program types (family literacy, workplace, corrections, distance learning, etc.), and creates a culture of professional development that will ensure sustainable, ongoing, well-supported professional development programs that meet the objectives of the system defined by Team 2.

## II. Research and Experience From Other States

### A. CHARACTERISTICS OF A QUALIFIED INSTRUCTOR

Teacher and administrator qualifications have been part of the ongoing discussion of professionalizing the field of adult basic education for many years. The difficult question is how to balance demands for more rigorous qualifications with the critical need to simultaneously pay professional wages and benefits in a woefully under-funded field dependent on soft money. In this climate, many states, as well as a private research group (Pelavin/AIR), have developed adult education instructor and administrator competencies, yet few states require formal certification of their adult education staff. The first task of this work group was, therefore, to research competency lists from other states, and how these competencies are used in various state adult basic education systems.

Most states organized their instructor competencies into categories covering the following general areas:

- Adult theory/understanding the adult learner (including diversity)
- Adult education teaching methods and strategies
- Learner assessment and evaluation
- Subject matter knowledge

- Ongoing professional development
- Community interactions

These categories were kept in mind when drafting Rhode Island adult education teacher competencies.

There is some agreement across states on what competencies good teachers possess, but a variety of ways that these lists of competencies are used to ensure quality instruction. Developing a formal certification process and the professional development system necessary to support it is time consuming, requiring significant resources and a simultaneous effort to build professional salaries, benefits, and working conditions into the system. There are still just a handful of colleges and universities across the country that offer degrees in adult basic or literacy education and no national guidelines for adult education teacher certification. In this context of limited resources, states that have developed competencies use them to guide individual professional development plans, design professional development offerings, structure professional portfolios, offer incentives, or designate master teachers.

## B. STAFFING NEEDS

Determining an appropriate combination of part-time, full-time and volunteer staff for a quality system is a complex question beyond the scope of this work group. There is no rigorous research in adult education to describe an ideal teacher-to-student ratio. Experience tells us that smaller classes (4 to 6 learners) are best for very low level adult education and ESOL students and those with learning disabilities. Trained volunteers are an important asset to both classroom instructors as well as providing one-on-one tutoring for individuals that, for whatever reason, can not commit to a classroom based program. We do know intensity of instruction effects outcomes, with 100 - 150 hours being one estimate of the instructional time required to advance one literacy level. Due to complex work and family schedules of adult students, programs can range from 2 to 20 hours per week. Thus, a complex set of variables impacts the staffing issue—the type of students served by a program, their literacy levels on entry, and the intensity of instruction provided to them. Unfortunately there is little research to inform decisions on the staffing combinations that result in the best student outcomes.

By far the most significant part of the equation is funding. Adult education teachers may make from \$13 to over \$20 an hour, often without benefits or planning time. Most are part time, piecing together hours from several agencies to make a living, with little or no release time for professional development. Many leave the profession after a few years because of the working conditions and wages. The historically low level of federal and state support for adult basic education relative to need forces programs to make impossible choices between paying teachers enough to ensure continuity of a competent teacher corps, serving learners with enough intensity to make a real impact, and providing services to more than 5-10% of adult learners in need of services.

### C. CURRENT INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF IN RHODE ISLAND

Data from the Rhode Island Adult Education Provider Survey, conducted in early spring 2004, reveal the status of the state's adult education teaching staff. Forty-five programs serving about 11,000 students responded to the survey.

	Full Time	Part Time	Volunteer	TOTAL
Instructional Staff	99	305	662	1,066

Roughly a quarter of all teachers who are paid are full time, according to their agencies. (Programs were not asked to define the number of hours that constitutes 'full time'.) This percentage is actually higher than most states, but may be partially explained by the fact that 20% of these full-time instructors work in one organization, the adult corrections education system. Over 60% of the instructional staff in the state are volunteers. Over 300 of the volunteers listed in the survey are one-on-one tutors from volunteer tutoring programs such as Literacy Volunteers.

There are no universal requirements for hiring adult education teachers in Rhode Island. Fifteen programs responding to the survey (about 1/3) said their teachers must have a bachelor's degree. Six additional programs require both a BA/BS and a teaching certificate. The majority of these programs are local education agencies (LEAs) and corrections education which are required to comply with teachers' union hiring and wage agreements. No program responding requires a degree higher than bachelors. Over 20 programs did not answer the survey question about requirements for teachers.

Of 47 adult basic education agencies that responded to the Provider Survey, there are:

- 18 community-based organizations (CBOs)
- 5 local education agencies (LEAs)
- 7 volunteer organizations
- 6 non-profits (including 2 ARCs)
- 4 Child Opportunity Zones (COZs)
- 3 libraries
- 2 colleges/universities
- 1 community college
- 1 corrections facility

## D. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM MODELS

The work group's consultant, Cassie Drennon, initially researched design processes for six very different state-wide professional development (PD) systems and presented her findings to the group. The exercise demonstrated that two factors – the extent of involvement by the field and other stakeholders in designing PD, and questions that drive the design process – account for much of the diversity among state PD systems. From this research, the decision was made to involve the field as much as possible in decisions about the PD system, and to develop guiding principles as a foundation for developing our own state-wide system. (See below.)

Dr. Drennon also researched the components, staffing, activities, and “drivers” for adult education professional development systems in all fifty states. She provided a comprehensive “inventory of options” culled from this review to use in our own design work while encouraging us to also develop original ideas that would best serve the needs of Rhode Island practitioners. Three sub-groups constructed hypothetical models of a state-wide PD system and then critiqued the model systems in relation to the guiding principles drafted for professional development. Finally, the groups compared and contrasted the hypothetical models to identify both their consistency and variation. From this process, agreement about the best system for Rhode Island has begun to emerge.

## III. Building a Rhode Island-Specific Model

The group brainstormed their own list of characteristics of quality instructors with the intention of taking the draft out to the field for feedback before it is refined and written in final form. The next steps are to define terms, categorize and refine the list of characteristics from field input, and finalize how they will be used to improve teaching and student outcomes.

### Characteristics of Qualified Instructors (Draft)

- Understand adult students
- Respect students and believe in their ability
- Are culturally sensitive, culturally competent
- Teach to students' strengths and interests
- Teach contextually
- Create a safe and engaging learning community
- Have pedagogical knowledge (how to teach)
- Have content knowledge (e.g. reading, math, etc.)
- Use multiple instruction methods
- Have knowledge of different learning styles and ability to address them
- Have knowledge of learning disabilities
- Teach multiple levels effectively
- Understand a variety of support systems

- Help students understand their learning is connected to their lives
- Help students build self-efficacy as learners
- Understand and use a variety of assessment strategies
- Can assess effectiveness of teaching and make adjustments accordingly
- Open to (and influenced by) being evaluated by students
- View self as learner as well as teacher
- Are invested in and committed to the profession and to their own professional growth (new or experienced)
- Are reflective about the teaching/learning process and their own teaching assumptions and beliefs
- Communicate (talk/share/listen) with other adult educators
- Are able to articulate and support their teaching philosophy
- Are creative communicators
- Practice mediation strategies

The group then turned their attention to designing an ideal professional development system for the state. The following guiding principles were drafted to inform the design of a professional development system for Rhode Island.

### **Guiding Principles for State-Wide Professional Development System**

- ✓ Professional development is a long-term investment in the strength and stability of adult education.
- ✓ Professional development results in improved practice in teaching adult learners.
- ✓ Professional development addresses the educational needs of learners, practitioners\*, communities, and the state.
- ✓ Professional development activities, attitudes, structures, and values support building a community of practitioners and develop leadership.
- ✓ Professional development focuses on both program improvement and individual development and is based on research and best practices in the process of teaching and adult learning, effective program management and effective professional development strategies.
- ✓ There is significant input by practitioners in the planning, implementation and evaluation of professional development activities.
- ✓ Practitioners are encouraged and supported to generate and apply new knowledge. Knowledge is not simply delivered.
- ✓ Professional development is viewed as an integral part of practitioners' work.

\* Note: The word practitioner is used to mean all adult education staff—teachers, directors, administrators, counselors, tutors, and other support staff.

## IV. Recommendations

Finding resources to develop and maintain a comprehensive state-wide professional development system for all adult educators in Rhode Island in concert with raising instructors' wages and improving their working conditions is critical to enhancing the quality of the system. The success of planning for and implementing both state-wide learning standards and assessments (Team 5) and program performance standards and measures (Team 4) depends on the system's capacity to provide much needed training and professional development in implementing, analyzing and using standards and assessment results to improve program and learner outcomes.

To address the need for expanded state-wide professional development and based on guiding principles listed on page 20, the work group sketched out a beginning picture of what a PD system would look like in Rhode Island.

### Vision for State-Wide Professional Development System

There should be a **central state-wide resource center** and director/coordinator of professional development, adding additional staff/practitioners with a variety of expertise as funding is available. The PD center will be selected through a competitive process.

A central feature of the system is **collaborative decision making** with representatives from programs, the PD center, and the state agency, linked to the adult education board. This structure is designed to ensure balance and integration between the needs of individual staff, programs, and the state.

The team will be charged with drafting a **state PD plan**, building on what is already in place, and recommending policies that will support a culture of PD state-wide and at the local program level.

All program staff (not just instructors) will develop **individual PD plans** based on self-assessment around a list of state supported competencies and in accordance with their **program's PD plan**.

State and program plans should include: program performance data, training **needs assessments** (including staff self-assessment), **incentives** to encourage staff participation, and **evidence of impact** of training on both instruction and adult learner outcomes.

**Incentives for programs and individuals** (e.g. paid professional development hours, release time, paid substitutes) to participate in PD must be in place and supported by state-level policies.

**Opening and maintaining communication** across the system is necessary for program staff (especially directors), professional developers, and state staff to work together in building a culture of PD in the state and in every program.

Team 3 strongly recommends locating professional development outside of the state entity for several reasons. Lessons learned from other states, as well as education professional development literature, emphasize the importance of carefully balancing the needs of the state (based on state plan), local programs

(based on continuous improvement plans), and individuals (based on individual PD plans). An entity outside of both local programs and the state agency with strong professional development expertise helps ensure this balance.

A contractual agreement will be more flexible in addressing changing needs and areas of expertise than if the professional development function was located in a state agency with state employees. Further, part of the state's role is to conduct monitoring of programs, ensure quality control, and base funding decisions accordingly. It is unwise to mix this function with professional development support where candor in expressing needs and challenges is critical. For these reasons, most state-wide professional development systems in adult basic education are contractual, and not part of the state government.

Nonetheless, the state has the responsibility to ensure an effective and efficient system for professional development that supports all system components including standards and assessments. A competitive bid process would be used to identify an appropriate vendor. The state would control the contract and has the option to put it out for re-bid if the work is not satisfactory or if the expertise needed changes over time.

The group recommends that the process of designing and implementing a comprehensive state-wide system continue, while current PD structures in the state and region<sup>2</sup> provide the activities necessary to support the work of the Program Quality and Participant Assessment Task Teams. This support includes professional development to program staff in quality improvement models; collecting, analyzing and using data for program improvement; workshops on linking content standards to instruction and assessment; and aspects of the Equipped for the Future reform system if it is adopted by the state.

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<sup>2</sup> Literacy Resources/RI, Workforce Literacy Collaborative, New England Literacy Resource Center, MA System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES), URI, etc.

I want to be able to read the newspaper so I will know what is going on in the world. If I can read better it will help me in my job. I want to be able to read books to my grandchildren. If I can read better, when I am out I won't have to ask help reading things. I think I am doing a little better. It's hard learning something new.

—Grazia Ferraro

# PROGRAM QUALITY

## I. Charge to Team 4

The following were the tasks charged to the Program Quality Task Team by the Task Force:

- Define characteristics of a quality adult basic education and literacy program that result in effectively achieving the objectives of the system defined by Team 2.
- Determine the measures that will provide information on how well programs are meeting the indicators of program quality, as well as the objectives of the system. What information do we need in order to check how well the system is meeting its objectives?
- Decide what are acceptable standards or levels of program performance.
- Design a process for institutionalizing a culture of systematic data collection, analysis and use for continuous improvement in providing services, including how the state system assists in this process (e.g. electronic information systems). What staffing, technical assistance, and resources are needed? How can we integrate the information gathering process with the data federal regulations require us to report?

## II. Research & Experience from Other States

The first major federal push for the adult basic education system to demonstrate effectiveness focused on inputs, what components or processes should be present in programs to ensure they are providing quality services resulting in specific outcomes. If results or outcomes of the system aren't what is expected, program quality indicators provide a framework to look at the conditions and processes that lead to those results and determine what the program may need to do differently. The National Literacy Act of 1991 required states to develop indicators of program quality and use them to evaluate local programs.

By 1996, all states, including RI, had developed program quality indicators in such areas as recruitment and retention, strategic planning, curriculum development, professional development, support services and collaborations. However, in order to use the indicators for program evaluation, states need to establish measures for each indicator and decide a level of acceptable performance or performance standard—also called opportunity to learn (OTL) or delivery standards. Fewer than half of the states developed performance standards and measures for program monitoring. As in K-12 education, resistance to OTL standards is often based on opposition to unfunded mandates and loss of local control.

National research by Larry Condelli (director of National Reporting System development project) collected important lessons learned from states that have gone through a process of establishing adult education program quality indicators, performance standards, and measurement tools for those standards. The research showed agreement on the following critical process features:

- Successful states developed indicators, measures and standards through interagency working

groups that included representatives from labor, social services, education (including practitioners) and workforce development.

- The draft measures and standards were sent to local programs for field testing before implementation.
- The most essential ingredient to successful implementation was “broad inclusion of local programs in the development process” and on-going communication.
- Extensive professional development and training on how to collect, analyze and use the information is critical.

The states involved in the research felt to institutionalize program quality it was important to give “state and local staff the opportunity to define and reach consensus on the characteristics of effective program operation” (Condelli, 1996).

Program assessment and improvement literature outside the field of adult education supports these findings. Researchers emphasize that development of an accountability system should first use comprehensive field testing of draft standards, tools and measurement processes as the basis for discussion within programs, among programs, and between programs and those in charge of the larger system. The objectives of field tests are to gain confidence that 1) the indicators of quality are appropriate for improving programs and outcomes, 2) the tools to measure indicators are appropriate and result in reliable numbers, and 3) the necessary training, technical assistance, and other supports are in place to enable programs to carry out the accountability process. Only then is the performance measurement system used for funding allocation decisions. This does not mean, however, that quality is ignored until that point. Both the local programs as well as the state staff must show commitment to and continuous progress in the process of instituting a program quality improvement system.

### **III. Building a Rhode Island-Specific Model**

To design an accountability system, Team 4 first went through a logic model process of developing learner outcomes as a starting point for determining what program components and characteristics (inputs) are necessary to reach those outcomes. After reviewing program quality indicators from a variety of other states (including RI, MA, OH, PA, ProNet) the team drafted indicators through a dynamic and interactive dialog.

The next steps in the process, articulated in the Transition Plan, are to establish measures and acceptable measurement tools for each indicator and decide a level of acceptable performance or performance standard for each indicator to be measured. [For example: for the indicator of student retention, a measure might be total hours of instruction a student receives and an acceptable level of performance might be 80% of students remain in the program for at least 50 hours.] The following are guidelines for establishing performance standards.

### **What a performance standards system should do...**

- Ensure there is consistency in the quality of services
- Motivate those reluctant to undertake program improvement
- Give funders a level of assurance of what they are buying
- Ensure consistency in gathering and using data for improvement
- Provide flexibility to accommodate various program goals, student goals, and student levels

### **What a performance standards system should NOT do...**

- Discourage emergence of new programs
- Be unrealistically burdensome
- Establish a new level of bureaucracy that is not based on improving learner outcomes

Team 4 then turned to a discussion about how to use the indicators and performance standards in an accountability system for adult basic education programs. The central feature of the discussion was the idea of developing a process of accreditation for adult basic education programs. Most members felt they did not have enough information to recommend developing an accreditation process at this time, but research into such a system should be done. The team agreed that some form of monitoring/ accountability process that incorporates both the indicators of program quality as well as the National Reporting System outcome requirements is important, and the process of developing such a system is 3-5 years away.

The following are guiding principles for establishing an accountability system across all adult basic education providers.

### **Guiding Principles for Adult Basic Education Accountability System**

- ✓ The primary focus of an accountability system is on enabling programs to improve with appropriate technical assistance and resources from competent state staff and the state-wide professional development center.
- ✓ The accountability system should preserve and support the rich variety of programs within the state.
- ✓ Development of an accountability system should be an iterative process between the state agency and adult education programs.
- ✓ The accountability process (whether accreditation or other) should not be an additional burden put on top of myriad accountability requirements from various funding streams, but an important component of integrated funding with consistency in reporting requirements.

## IV. Recommendations

Team 4 recommends collecting feedback on the program quality indicators listed below to inform development of performance standards and measures, and a pilot program to field test the indicators and measures through winter and spring 2005. This process will not only help verify the validity of the indicators and measures, but will provide needed professional development in data collection, analysis and use, and garner necessary buy-in from the field.

### PROGRAM QUALITY INDICATORS FOR RI ADULT BASIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

#### INDICATOR 1:

##### Learner Progress toward Literacy & Numeracy Goals that Impact All Adult Roles

###### A. Learner Outcomes

- Staff works with students to identify educational and career goals and to assess progress toward those goals.
- Learners' progress is demonstrated by advancing performance levels (as described in standards), obtaining secondary degree or certificate, enrolling in higher education or job training, securing employment or advancement in their job.
- Learners remain in the program long enough to meet their own education goals.

###### B. Assessment of Learner Performance

- Assessment tools and procedures are based on an understanding of the learning process and the complexities of language, literacy, and numeracy acquisition and use.
- The assessment process is ongoing and uses various tools (standardized tests, authentic products and projects, observation, portfolios, self-assessment rubrics) to place students and guide instruction.
- Assessment tools and procedures are consistent with program philosophy, and are aligned with instructional approaches, curricula, and state-wide standards.
- Students are actively involved in the assessment of their own progress.
- Staff works with students to develop self-assessment strategies to monitor their own performance and growth.
- The program has a consistent process that meets state guidelines to assess student achievement across outcomes and over time.
- All students have a complete and accessible file of assessment results.

## INDICATOR 2:

### Planning, Philosophy, On-Going Improvement & Management

#### A. Philosophy and Policy

- A mission statement defines the program's roles and purposes, guiding principles and philosophy.
- Staff, students, volunteers and members of the board participate in mission and policy development.
- Policies address all aspects of program functioning (personnel, organizational structure, funding) are consistent with program's mission, and are easily accessible to staff and board.
- Policies exist that describe how special needs populations have equitable access and are served in an integrated and equitable manner.

#### B. Planning, Evaluation and Improvement

- There are comprehensive planning and evaluation processes that involve all program constituents, including students, staff, volunteers, community members, and board members.
- Plans contain clear implementation steps and timelines, are easily accessible, and are regularly reviewed, revised and evaluated.
- Community needs, program data, and relevant research on adult learning is incorporated into planning, evaluation, and on-going program improvement.

#### C. Communication

- The program promotes openness and the sharing of information, ideas, and expertise.
- Management structures and staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and communicated.
- Various program efforts such as recruitment, intake, orientation, instruction and support services are coordinated and support one another.
- The program maintains a working partnership with funders and policy makers, and informs them of the program's achievements, plans and needs, and of developments in the larger literacy community.
- The program maintains working partnerships with next-step agencies and institutions such as employers, career centers, post secondary education and job training.

#### D. Finance

- The program utilizes standard accounting and auditing procedures that are sound, ethical, and consistent with program policy and funding requirements.

- Continuity of funding is maintained so that payroll, rent and other fiscal obligations are met in a timely manner.
- The budget, developed with appropriate input from staff and students, is coordinated with planning and evaluation, and allocates resources to best meet the needs and goals of the program.
- Facilities are comfortable, safe, and adequately equipped.

#### E. Records and Reports

- Records and reporting systems are consistent with program policy and with legal and funding requirements.
- Records and reports are clear, accurate, complete and readily accessible to appropriate constituents including students.
- Record and reporting systems ensure appropriate confidentiality and security.
- Data collection, recording and reporting (information management) systems are designed and understood to support planning, evaluation and program improvement, fundraising, immediate decisions, and quick response planning.
- Appropriate technology is used to support easy access to and communication of information within the program, with funders, and with the state adult education division.

#### INDICATOR 3:

##### Professional Development for All Staff\* and Volunteers

- There is a program-wide professional development plan driven by needs of all staff, volunteers, and students in balance with state-wide system goals.
- The PD plan covers a wide range of issues including adult learning theory, instructional approaches, understanding of diverse cultures, use of support services and technology, and program improvement strategies (use of data for improvement, community partnership development, etc.).
- The PD plan includes a variety of professional development formats.
- PD results in growth in behavior, knowledge and attitudes of staff and volunteers.
- A process is in place to determine the impact of professional development on instruction and student outcomes.
- PD is fully integrated into program and state system-wide planning.
- The program encourages commitment and active participation by all staff, volunteers, and administrators in PD, supported by the program as well as the state-wide system.

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\*All staff refers to directors, teachers, administrators, counselors, tutors and support staff

## INDICATOR 4:

### Recruitment, Intake, & Orientation

#### A. Recruitment

- A recruitment plan is developed and implemented by students, staff and members of the larger community.
- Recruitment reflects the program's philosophy and mission.
- Recruitment reflects ongoing assessment of community needs and responds to the program's ongoing evaluation and planning.
- The program uses a variety of recruitment methods, in various native languages when appropriate, to reach the prospective student population identified in the recruitment plan.
- The program documents where and how entering students became aware of the program and assesses the effectiveness of various recruitment strategies.

#### B. Intake and Orientation

- An intake and orientation plan is developed and implemented by students and staff.
- The intake and orientation process is consistent with program's mission and philosophy.
- The program ensures that all staff members are welcoming and respectful, and have the knowledge necessary to provide accurate information regarding program services.
- Staff informs entering students of available support services particularly those that facilitate attendance such as childcare and transportation.
- Staff clearly informs entering students what the program expects of them, such as attendance policies and other student responsibilities.
- Staff obtains and records information from students on their goals, needs, and interests.
- Staff conducts assessment, consistent with the program's instructional approach and offerings, to guide initial placement.
- Staff determines whether there is an appropriate match between student goals and program services and ensures that students know enough about the program to make an informed decision about participation; provides informed referrals as needed.

## INDICATOR 5:

### Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, & Learning Environment

- Instruction is intentionally planned and based on best practices in the field.
- Instructors develop lesson plans with clear objectives.
- Staff works with students to identify educational goals and to create individual education plans that are reviewed regularly.
- Instructors use technology to support instruction, where appropriate.
- Instructors use interactive and multi-sensory teaching methods.
- Instruction is contextual and reflects the needs, strengths, goals and interests of learners.
- There is periodic assessment of student progress, both subjective and measurable, that is shared with the student.
- Instructors engage students in using and producing authentic materials (stories, letters, job-related materials, articles, graphs, poems, etc.) to enhance their reading, writing, language, and problem-solving skills.
- Instructors foster literacy and numeracy practice beyond the classroom.
- Staff provides opportunities for students to evaluate and give feedback to the program.
- Instructors foster a respectful learning environment.

## INDICATOR 6:

### Support Services

- Staff works with each student to identify assets and barriers to participation in a program and to achieving his/her personal, educational, and/or career goals.
- Staff works with each student to recognize and build on his/her strengths, interests, and experiences in developing goals and overcoming barriers.
- Staff provides students with information on appropriate support services available in their community and assists in referral to these services, when appropriate.
- All program staff has access to current information about community agencies that provide support services.
- Staff is provided training in appropriate support and referral processes.
- Staff collaborates with community service providers to coordinate services.
- Staff encourages students to become advocates for themselves and their families.

## INDICATOR 7:

### Community Interaction & Outreach

- Staff stays informed of the community's history, culture, political and social structures, needs and resources.
- Staff uses community demographics, economic and needs data to inform planning and evaluation.
- Staff invites community input into planning and evaluation of program's services.
- Staff maintains collaborative relationships with resources (community services, public schools, libraries, higher education and job training, employers and career centers) in the community to ensure coordination of services and to share expertise.
- The program encourages staff and students to participate in community events and advocate for community concerns.

I came to this country 17 years ago because my country had terrorist problems at that time. That decision was very hard, because I always had the idea to be a professional and work for my people, but when I started to live here, I learned to love this country too. I had a lot of different kinds of jobs but I never felt happy. I had obligations in my country and the only way to cover them was working very hard.

I started to work in a factory, I stayed there for a long time but I always I thought my life was going to go in another direction. I was looking for something to make me feel good like a human being. When I came to Rhode Island, I worked in factory and cleaner companies, but again, I was not happy. That was the reason for me to make a decision to change my life. I started to study English and [attend a Direct Support job training] course to do something different for me and for the people who need special care. I hope this is my opportunity to work with people helping them to live as best they can and help me also to feel satisfaction with my life.

**—Roberto**

[Roberto is now a direct support professional working with disabled adults]

### I. Charge to Team 5

The following were the tasks charged to the Participant Assessment Team by the Task Force:

- Explore current research and best practice around learning standards and participant assessment, as well as federal requirements for assessing outcomes among different funding streams.
- Define a working set of expectations for learners, commensurate with the objectives and components of the system defined by Team 2 and in accordance with research and best practice. What information will allow us to evaluate student levels and facilitate placement? What information about learner experiences and outcomes do we need in order to check how well the system is meeting its objectives? What is the best way to collect that information?
- Determine forms of assessment already in use among providers, what purpose they serve, how well they are working, and what other assessment tools are necessary to support teaching and learning.
- Recommend assessment tools to measure each outcome and the resources needed to ensure adoption and proper use.

### II. Research & Experience from Other States

The demands for accountability in public education—results for investments made—has lead to national discussions around what success looks like (content and performance standards), what assessment tools reliably show learners are making progress, who needs to be held accountable, how they are held accountable, and for what (opportunity to learn standards).

Two types of educational standards are generally defined when talking about expectations for students: content standards and performance standards. Content standards define “everything a student should know and be able to do” as a result of participating in an educational program. In other words, content standards describe the range of generally agreed upon knowledge and skills within a particular subject area, such as reading or math.

Performance standards specify “how much” students should know and be able to do at a particular education level. While content standards guide what goes into a curriculum, performance standards set benchmarks—specified levels of achievement—that provide a basis for learner outcomes and assessment tools. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act National Reporting System (NRS) literacy level descriptors, for example, have served the same purpose as performance standards. Unfortunately, the descriptors were not based in research on adult learning or informed by the full range of authentic adult student educational goals. (Please see Glossary for more information on NRS.)

There have been many counter attacks against standards-based reform. The following guidelines are meant to address many of these concerns.

### **What Standards are...**

- Accurate reflections of what adults want and need to know and be able to do.
- Flexible, dynamic, and capable of being changed.
- Reflective of broad consensus.
- Specific enough to guide instruction and assessment.
- Measurable.
- Multiple levels of performance for students to strive for.
- Written clearly enough for all stakeholders to understand.

### **What Standards are NOT...**

- Prescriptive; they do not dictate how ideas or information should be taught.
- Mandates for a standardized, one-size-fits-all state-wide curriculum, text or materials.
- Exclusionary of any learner.
- Rigid, requiring any one particular type of assessment.

(These definitions are adapted from "A User's Guide to Standards-Based Educational Reform: from Theory to Practice" by Regie Stites in *Focus on Basics*, Volume 3, Issue C, Sept. 1999.)

Following the lead of K-12 education, standards-based education reform became a hot topic in adult basic education over a decade ago. In response, various states have developed adult education learning standards, adapting or adopting those in K-12 or, in a few cases, designing standards unique to the needs of adult basic education. These state standards vary considerably in content, expected learner outcomes, and underlying teaching/learning philosophies.

By far the most extensive effort to develop standards and assessments specifically for adult education is the Equipped for the Future (EFF) project of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL). In the early 90s, NIFL initiated a field-driven, broad-based effort to define clear, specific and measurable learner outcomes, standards, and a performance continuum for adult basic education. The project engaged adult learners, practitioners, representatives of key stakeholder groups (including employers), and experts in standards and assessment across the country to build a national consensus around goals and standards for adult basic education. Through a ten-year iterative process of focus groups, lengthy discussions, inquiry projects, field development and piloting testing, revising and refining, the project articulated content and performance standards common to major adult roles (worker, citizen and community member, parent and family member). The EFF methodology starts with learner goals and guides students to identify the skills and knowledge in the EFF performance continuum necessary to achieve those goals. The project is currently working to complete performance assessments aligned with these standards. Also available are student goal setting strategies, instructional tools, and teacher training.

Because EFF standards are so comprehensive, going beyond the traditional reading mechanics and basic skills of literacy (decoding, encoding, etc.), adapting EFF throughout a state is a long process that requires

significant resources for professional development, training, and restructuring of both programs and system components. About a dozen states, including Maine, Vermont, and Ohio, have adopted or adapted the EFF standards to their states' needs and provide important lessons learned for others wishing to incorporate EFF.

#### IV. Building a RI-Specific Model

The types of assessments currently in use in programs throughout Rhode Island reflect the variety of purposes for assessment of learners, but the limited number of published tests available to adult educators. Though these assessment tools mirror those advocated in the NRS for measuring academic achievement, most are not aligned with a given set of standards nor are they used for developing appropriate curricula. Therefore, the results from administering these tools do not always capture what adult students are achieving. Responses to the Task Force Provider Survey (winter/spring 2004) captured the variety of assessments used in Rhode Island, presented below. (The Content Area categories in the following table are taken from the NRS core and optional competencies.)

##### Assessment tools used in RI programs

Content Area	Formal Assessments	Alternative Assessments
Speaking/listening	Oral BEST, CASAS, ESL–basic skills	Portfolios, interviews, oral presentations, student evaluations, teacher developed tools, teacher observations
Reading comprehension	TABE, BEST, CASAS, LASSI, GED practice test, Skills Tutor, Payne Inventory (LD screen)	Student evaluations, teacher quizzes, teacher developed tools, teacher observations, progress reports
Writing	TABE, BEST, CASAS, LASSI, GED practice test, Skills Tutor assessments	Portfolios, journals, projects, sample essays, teacher quizzes, teacher developed tools, teacher observations, progress reports
Math	TABE, CASAS, Key, GED practice tests, Skills Tutor assessments	Teacher quizzes, teacher developed tools, progress reports
GED attainment	Diploma, data match on completions	Student self-reports
Enrollment in higher ed	Tracking enrollment	Student interviews, word of mouth, self-reports
Work readiness	CASAS (employability), Skills Tutor assessments	Student interviews, portfolios based on SCANS, certificates of workforce readiness, student goal plan & outcome documentation, check lists
Citizenship		Student interviews
Employment outcomes	Tracking employment and wage status	Student interviews, word of mouth, student goal plan & outcome documentation
Family outcomes		Questionnaires, student/teacher evaluations, teacher observations
Other		Computer skills check lists

As indicated in the introduction, assessment (particularly mandated assessment) drives curriculum and therefore learner outcomes, whether the assessment is testing the appropriate outcomes or not. Therefore, the participant assessment workgroup, as well as the program quality workgroup, started their work with in-depth discussions around appropriate learner outcomes. From those discussions, research findings, and reading a variety of standards from other states, the following guidelines for developing a content and performance standards and assessment system for Rhode Island were articulated.

### **Guiding Principles for Adult Basic Education Standards and Assessment System**

- ✓ Standards and assessments must support adult student goals, needs and interests.
- ✓ Application of literacy and numeracy skills in adult roles is a critical outcome of adult education; therefore, assessments should measure more than the mechanics of literacy and must include demonstration of literacy and numeracy use in daily-life situations.
- ✓ Increasing student efficacy as learners is a critical outcome of participation in adult education programs and should be addressed explicitly throughout the system.
- ✓ Enhancing life-long learning skills (critical thinking, problem solving, decision making) are critical outcomes of participation in adult education programs; therefore, a standard that focuses on life-long learning skills should be included.
- ✓ The standards should be broad enough to allow flexibility and creativity in the classroom, yet describe core outcomes across the variety of adult education programs.
- ✓ An assessment system should include a variety of tools and strategies for a variety of purposes.
- ✓ Resources must be available for professional development in the use of standards and in aligning curriculum and assessment with standards.
- ✓ It is critical to use an open inclusive process to adapt/adopt standards for RI, for necessary buy-in from providers in the field as well as important stakeholders (e.g. employers, higher education, etc.).

## IV. Recommendations

While preserving the rich diversity of adult education programs across the state, Team 5 recommends establishing a common core of content and performance standards and aligned assessments for use in programs across the adult basic education system in Rhode Island in order to:

- Align outcomes, standards, curricula, and assessments (test what is taught).
- Provide consistency in assessments across programs for a core set of standards.
- Provide consistency in outcomes across programs serving similar populations with similar purposes (e.g. family literacy, workforce development, work site education, English language/civics, etc.).
- Provide consistent information to next-step institutions or agencies (e.g. employers, job training, higher education).
- Provide reliable data to programs for improvement purposes.
- Provide consistent screening and referral processes in all programs for students demonstrating learning disabilities.
- Align workplace education programs, as much as possible, with the adult basic education standards and assessment process.
- Develop state-issued credentials (e.g. workforce readiness certificate) for specific achievement that are recognized by employers, job training programs and the like.

As the EFF adult education standards and assessment system best captures the guidelines outlined above, Team 5 recommends EFF be embedded, adopted or adapted, for the Rhode Island adult basic education system. The Team also recommends that programs continue to use the standard assessments of their choice until a state-wide standards and assessment system is adopted. Choosing one state-wide assessment tool and requiring programs to adopt it without standards to guide that decision is counter productive, requiring resources, training and staff time that should be mustered in developing the whole standards and assessment system. A variety of stakeholders, including employers, should be involved in the development of the system. Resources and time need to be made available to prepare programs (through technical assistance, professional development, resources, etc.) for the implementation of standards, standards-based curricula, and aligned assessments. This process of development, training, and implementation is expected to take 3-5 years, based on experience in other states.

## V. Critical Issues to be Addressed

Team 5 identified two important issues that time did not allow for, yet need to be addressed.

### A. EDUCATION ARTICULATION

An important assessment issue that this team did not address is how assessment in adult basic education programs articulates with other education and training systems, particularly higher education and training, and the K-12 system.

For many graduates of adult education programs, accessing post-secondary education and training, often at Community College of Rhode Island or Bristol Community College, is a primary objective. It is important that literacy providers have a clear understanding of entry requirements, assessment procedures, academic expectations and support services available of next-step providers and that post-secondary institutions understand and address the many barriers adult students face. It is critical that all aspects of the education continuum (including adult basic education) be articulated so that a graduate of one phase is ready and prepared to enter the next phase of education.

#### Articulation Recommendations:

- Adult basic education should be part of the K-16 initiative in Rhode Island.
- Funding and support to create more transition to college programs throughout the state should be sought.
- In designing the state-wide adult basic education standards and assessment system, the Acuplacer, the computerized assessment tool used by CCRI and many other community colleges for course placement, should be kept in mind. (Arrangements should be made for adult education providers to take the Acuplacer tests themselves to better understand the tool.)
- Higher education should work closely with the newly created state adult education division to ensure that providers across the state have current information on admittance to various programs, including entry requirements, developmental education courses, Acuplacer testing, financial aid, noncredit learning opportunities, etc.

### B. LEARNER CERTIFICATIONS

For many years adult educators and students have felt the need for nationally recognized benchmarks or certificates in addition to the GED. A certificate of initial mastery or other benchmark certificate could demonstrate significant student achievement and provide motivation for those adults whose progress toward completing the GED may take many years. Certificates of workforce readiness, building off of SCANS, could ensure that adults possessed the skills and knowledge really necessary for entry-level jobs. EFF is developing a Workforce Readiness Certification that Rhode Island should explore. The issue of certificates is important to the field and should be continued through discussions with other stakeholders, particularly in business and industry.

## System Elements, Objectives, and Governance

In order to implement the Task Force recommendations that have the support of the Governor as effectively and efficiently as possible, Team 2 has outlined a transition plan with responsible parties as follows:

<b>Sept 04</b>	Define specific support to be provided by the host agency; work out legal/regulation details, negotiated by Governor’s Policy Office and codified in MOU. [Policy Office]
<b>Sept – Oct</b>	Form Interagency Group. Develop transition plan recommendations concerning charge and transition to Interagency Group. [Team 2]
<b>Fall/Winter</b>	Determine roles and responsibilities of governing board, in concordance with new HRIC legislation. [Governor’s Office]
<b>Sept – Dec</b>	Conduct national search for and hire Director of adult basic education division. [RIDE, representatives from Task Force, others to be determined]
<b>Sept – Oct</b>	Form Task Team 1 (Budget), develop FY 06 budget for adult education, prepare white paper to submit to the Governor. [Task Force, Task Team 1 led by Policy Office]
<b>Nov 04 – Feb 05</b>	Conduct search and hire additional staff for adult education division. [RIDE, adult education director, others to be determined]

## Professional Development

### YEAR 1

<b>Sept 04</b>	Inform the field and other critical stakeholders of work to date; recruit additional team members.
<b>Sept – Oct</b>	Develop plan for gathering feedback from the field on staff competencies.
<b>Oct – Dec</b>	Gather feedback on teacher competencies and refine draft. <i>Deliverable: Final teacher competency lists</i>
<b>Sept – Dec</b>	Sub-group draft New Teacher Orientation (based on effective models from other states). <i>Deliverable: New Teacher Orientation for pilot</i>
<b>Jan 05</b>	Pilot New Teacher Orientation, inviting both old and new teachers across the system; refine based on feedback from participants. <i>Deliverable: New Teacher Orientation for anyone entering the state adult education system</i>
<b>Sept – Dec</b>	Continue developing/refining PD system model. Draft self-assessment tool for individual staff and program-wide PD plans. Determine process for selecting field representatives to Collaborative PD Council. Research models and experts for state-wide program quality improvement training. (See Team 4 recommendations)
<b>Jan – Feb 05</b>	Begin transitioning to Collaborative PD Council - (a) state agency staff, (b) PD staff from LR/RI, (c) representatives from the field including members of the Task Team 3.

- March** Provide training (via consultants) in program quality improvement model for pilot programs including use of PD self-assessment tools.
- March – June** Collaborative PD Council conducts training needs assessment; Develop state-wide PD plan (including 1 year & 5 year goals).  
*Deliverable: state-wide PD plan to include in WIA 5-year State Plan.*
- June – Aug** Refine training, support, and accompanying self-assessment tools based on feedback from pilot programs

**YEAR 2**

Collaborative PD Council designs and state agency manages competitive bid process for state PD center; sets further PD policies; continues to provide professional development and support to programs as the state pilots and institutionalizes program quality improvement and a state-wide standards and assessment system.

**Program Improvement**

**YEAR 1**

- Sept 04** Inform field and other critical stakeholders of progress to date; recruit new members for the task team including broader ranger of stakeholders (employers, students)
- Sept – Dec** Task team identifies potential measures for indicators; communicates progress to the field; gathers initial feedback from the field on draft indicators and measures (through website/ email/ focus groups). Sub-group formed to research accreditation systems. *Deliverables: draft program quality indicators and measures for pilot*
- Feb 05** 5-8 program pilot sites selected for quality improvement training. PD team/consultants conduct training on quality improvement models and collecting, analyzing, and using data for program improvement.
- May – June** Application process for programs to pilot indicators and measures in the field, documenting successes, challenges and supports needed for the process.

**YEAR 2**

- Sept 05** Pilot begins; state actively involved.
- June – Aug 06** Present findings from first pilot; gather feedback from pilot site practitioners and students and other stakeholders; refine indicators, measures and tools. State negotiates minimum performance standards with pilot program directors, based on actual data gathered in pilot. Based on research, develop a 5-year plan for moving toward accreditation system or appropriate alternative.  
  
Continue rolling out indicators, measures and performance standards; continuing professional development and TA; refine process where needed.

**YEAR 3**

All programs complete pilot of indicators and measurement tools; performance standards negotiated with program directors; performance integrated into monitoring and funding decisions.

## Participant Assessment

### YEAR 1

#### Sept 04

Current work group narrows the field of state standards to consider (RI, OH, PA & EFF) based on learner outcomes desired and research and best practices; outlines a consistent format to write the standards; begins recruiting for work group. Expand the current group through an application process, number of participants approximately 15-20.

#### Oct – May 05

Small work groups (about 6 members each, including members of current group) work on content strands adapting/adopting standards that are measurable with appropriate assessment instruments available (or soon to be); maintain ongoing communication among groups and with the field.

Interagency group develops agreements, support structures and systems to ensure all other outcomes are measured (e.g. agreement with DLT to monitor employment outcomes; a system at RIDE to track and report secondary credential outcome; a system at Higher Ed to track and report post-secondary outcomes). With program improvement group, develop consistent processes for tracking and documenting learner progress and computerized system for collecting and reporting data.

**Deliverables:** Draft learner content standards, state-wide MIS.

#### Feb – June

PD provided on using standards to develop curriculum and using assessment results for adjusting instruction, improving programs, and actively involving students in their education.

#### Spring

Incorporate in WIA State Plan a core set/menu of standards and assessments that will serve for the interim until integrated standards and assessment system is developed.

### YEAR 2

#### Sept 05 – April 06

Mini-grants to programs to pilot the standards and assessment system; develop curriculum products to be shared with field; collect feedback from practitioners and students. Ongoing PD offered around using standards to develop curriculum and use of assessments for program improvement, enhancing instruction, and fostering learner-centered programming.

#### March

State RFP for 2006-2007 requires use of state-wide standards and assessment system to drive curriculum. Programs must include the use of the adopted standards and assessments system in this year's proposals.

#### May – July

Standards are finalized, incorporating program feedback.

**Deliverable:** State-wide content standards.

# STATE & FEDERAL FUNDING FOR ADULT EDUCATION IN RHODE ISLAND

The following table begins to identify state and federal funding that supports adult literacy services and programs in Rhode Island. These funds are administered by five state agencies. There are also programs that have multiple objectives—including adult literacy—but funding is not discrete to literacy activities only. Some of these types of programs are identified as footnotes below. Other funds not yet analyzed include HUD/PHA, CDBG, WIA for Out of School Youth and NAFTA/Trade Adjustment Assistance.

	<b>FY 2003</b>	<b>FY 2004</b>	<b>FY 2005</b>
<b>Education</b>			
General Revenue	254,522	266,748	268,696
Federal <sup>1</sup>			
ABE and Carry Forward Funds Net Corrections	2,543,992	2,854,653	2,451,002 <sup>2</sup>
Project Opportunity (DHS Funds)	645,116	783,152	750,750
Restricted Receipts (HRIC Funds—Payroll Costs for 1.0 FTE)	155,980	81,819	(see below) <sup>3</sup>
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>3,599,610</b>	<b>3,986,372</b>	<b>3,470,448</b>
<b>Labor and Training</b>			
General Revenue	0	1,400,000	0
Restricted (HRIC—Payroll Costs for 1.0 FTE)	65,678	65,678	(see below) <sup>3</sup>
Restricted (HRIC—Grants & Collaborative Support)	1,625,229	1,575,000	3,400,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,690,907</b>	<b>3,040,678</b>	<b>3,400,000</b>
<b>Human Services</b>			
Federal TANF/FIP <sup>4</sup>	738,884	600,848	435,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>738,884</b>	<b>600,848</b>	<b>435,000</b>
<b>Corrections<sup>5</sup></b>			
General Revenue	643,500	643,500	643,500
Federal (RIDE Funds—ABE)	218,000	280,500	290,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>861,500</b>	<b>924,000</b>	<b>933,500</b>
<b>Administration</b>			
Federal—Office of Library & Information Services	56,600	65,000	70,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>56,600</b>	<b>65,000</b>	<b>70,000</b>
<b>Total Adult Literacy Funding</b>			
State	898,022	2,310,248	912,196
Federal	4,202,592	4,584,153	3,996,752
Restricted Receipts	1,846,887	1,722,497	3,400,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$6,947,501</b>	<b>\$8,616,898</b>	<b>\$8,308,948</b>

<sup>1</sup>As part of the Elementary and Secondary Act, there also exists federal funds for EvenStart, an intergenerational literacy program. Rhode Island received \$1.1M in FY05, of which 96% is distributed to local programs. Educational activities target children (birth to age 7) as well as parents (literacy and parenting skills).

<sup>2</sup>\$195,012 of RIDE ABE dollars are earmarked annually to Project Opportunity (for a total of \$945,762) to fund existing adult literacy services for FIP/TANF students.

<sup>3</sup>Cost for existing 2 FY05 FTEs—approximately \$151,000—is included in the \$3.4M administered through HRIC.

<sup>4</sup>In addition to Project Opportunity, administered by RIDE, DHS utilizes these federal funds for programs that may have literacy as a component of their overall program. For FY05 these include (a) state staff support and individual

evaluation for FIP parents with learning disabilities through the Office of Rehabilitation Services, literacy services provided based on individual's rehabilitation plan (\$200,000); (b) remediation services at CCRI (\$75,000); and (c) literacy activities at Dorcas Place (\$160,000). Additional funding to CCRI will be used for on-site testing at DHS offices to determine workplace readiness of new applicants (\$330,000). Numeracy and literacy skills will be a component of that testing.

<sup>5</sup>This support pays for instructors to work directly with incarcerated adults on basic literacy skills who have a reading score below the eighth grade; they do not include support services such as library services, school psychologists, or administration. Based on historical data, DOC funds are projected to be consistent for FY05.

*Adapted from: National Center on Research, Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) Glossary  
[http://cresst96.cse.ucla.edu/resources/glossary\\_set.htm](http://cresst96.cse.ucla.edu/resources/glossary_set.htm)*

### Acronyms, Rhode Island State Agencies.

DHS:	Department of Human Services
DLT:	Department of Labor and Training
DOC:	Department of Corrections
DOH:	Department of Health
RIDE:	RI Department of Education (Elementary & Secondary)
OHE:	Office of Higher Education
OLIS:	Office of Library Information Services

**Alignment.** The process of linking what students should know and be able to do (content standards) to assessment, instruction, and learning in classrooms. One typical alignment strategy is the step-by-step development of (a) content standards, (b) performance standards, (c) assessments, and (d) instruction for classroom learning. In practice, the steps of the alignment process overlap. System alignment also allows for consistency of content taught and levels of student performance among programs and between programs and state resources.

**Assessment.** The process of gathering, describing, or quantifying information about performance.

**Assessment System.** The combination of multiple assessments that produces comprehensive, credible, dependable information upon which important decisions can be made about students, programs, or states. An assessment system may consist of a norm-referenced or criterion-referenced assessment, alternative assessments, and classroom assessments.

**Alternative Assessment (also authentic or performance assessment).** An assessment that requires students to generate a response to a question rather than choose from a set of responses provided to them. Exhibitions, investigations, demonstrations, written or oral responses, journals, and portfolios are examples of the assessment alternatives we think of when we use the term "alternative assessment." Alternative assessment requires students to actively accomplish complex tasks, while bringing to bear prior knowledge, recent learning, and relevant skills to solve realistic problems.

**Criterion-Referenced Assessment.** An assessment where an individual's performance is compared to a specific learning objective or performance standard and not to the performance of other students. Criterion-referenced assessment tells us how well students are performing on specific goals or standards rather than just telling how their performance compares to a norm group of students nationally or locally. [EFF and CASAS are examples of criterion-referenced assessments.]

**Norm-Referenced Assessment.** An assessment where student performance or performances are compared to a larger group. Usually the larger group or "norm group" is a national sample representing a wide and diverse cross-section of students. Students, programs, and even states are compared or rank-ordered in relation to the norm group. The purpose of a norm-referenced assessment is usually to sort students and not to measure achievement towards some criterion of performance. [The GED is an example of norm-referenced assessment.]

**Criteria.** Guidelines, rules, characteristics, or dimensions that are used to judge the quality of student performance. Criteria indicate what we value in student responses, products or performances. They may be holistic, analytic, general, or specific. Scoring rubrics are based on criteria and define what the criteria mean and how they are used.

**Curriculum.** All of the instruction, services, and activities provided for students: including content, teaching methods and practices, instructional materials and guides, assessment and evaluation, and the norms, values, and educational philosophy (both explicit and hidden) held by the program and staff.

**Equipped for the Future (EFF).** EFF is a student-centered, standards-based, collaborative initiative of the National Institute for Literacy that has developed content and performance standards and assessments for adult literacy and lifelong learning. The project, begun in 1994, has attempted to answer the question: What do adults need to know and be able to do in order to carry out their roles and responsibilities as workers, parents and family members, and citizens and community members?

**Evaluation.** When used for most educational settings, evaluation means to measure, compare, and judge the quality of student or staff work, or program performance.

**Indicators.** An indicator provides observable and measurable evidence that a certain condition exists or certain results have or have not been achieved. Indicators enable decision-makers to assess progress towards the achievement of intended outputs, outcomes, goals, and objectives. As such, indicators are an integral part of a results-based accountability system.

**National Reporting System (NRS).** An outcomes-based reporting system required for state-administered adult education program funded through Title II of the Workforce Investment Act. The goals of the NRS are to establish a national accountability system for education programs by identifying measures for national reporting, establishing methods for data collection, and developing software standards for reporting to the US DOE.

**Opportunity to Learn.** To provide students with the teachers, materials, facilities, and instructional experiences that will enable them to achieve high standards. Opportunity to learn (OTL) is what takes place in classrooms and programs that enables students to acquire the knowledge and skills that are expected. OTL can include what is taught, how it is taught, by whom, in what learning environment, and with what resources.

**Program Quality Indicator.** As defined by the federal Office of Vocational and Adult Education (1992), a quality indicator is a variable that reflects effective and efficient program performance. When taken together the Program Quality Indicators are assumed to result in high quality programs and services.

**Portfolio Assessment.** A portfolio is collection of work, usually drawn from students' classroom work. A portfolio becomes a portfolio assessment when (1) the assessment purpose is defined; (2) criteria or methods are made clear for determining what is put into the portfolio, by whom, and when; and (3) criteria for assessing either the collection or individual pieces of work are identified and used to make judgments about performance. Portfolios can be designed to assess student progress, effort, and/or achievement, and encourage students to reflect on their learning.

**Reliability.** The degree to which the results of an assessment are dependable and consistently measure particular student knowledge and/or skills. Reliability may be expressed as (a) the relationship between test items

intended to measure the same skill or knowledge (item reliability), (b) the relationship between two administrations of the same test to the same student or students (test/retest reliability), or (c) the degree of agreement between two or more raters (rater reliability). An unreliable assessment cannot be valid.

**Standardization.** A consistent set of procedures for designing, administering, and scoring an assessment. The purpose of standardization is to assure that all students are assessed under the same conditions so that their scores have the same meaning and are not influenced by differing conditions. Standardized procedures are very important when scores will be used to compare individuals or groups.

**Standards.** The broadest of a family of terms referring to statements of expectations for student learning, including content standards, performance standards, and benchmarks.

**Content Standards.** Broadly stated expectations of what students should know and be able to do in particular subjects and at specific levels. Content standards define for teachers, programs, students, and the community not only the expected student skills and knowledge, but what programs should teach. [An example of a language arts standard is: "Read with understanding."]

**Performance Standards.** Explicit definitions of what students must do to demonstrate proficiency at specific levels on the content standards.

**Benchmark.** A detailed description of a specific level of student performance. Benchmarks are often represented by samples of student work.

**Standards-Based Reform.** A process of program improvement based on articulating standards, setting high standards for all students and adapting instruction and assessment to make sure all students can achieve the standards.

**Validity.** The extent to which an assessment measures what it is supposed to measure and the extent to which inferences and actions made on the basis of test scores are appropriate and accurate. For example, if a student performs well on a reading test, how confident are we that that student is a good reader? A valid standards-based assessment is aligned with the standards intended to be measured, provides an accurate and reliable estimate of students' performance relative to the standard, and is fair. An assessment cannot be valid if it is not reliable.

## Introduction

Numerous reports over the last few years have indicated a strong need to improve the system of adult education and training in Rhode Island. The shortcomings of our current system are well documented. It has been described as under-resourced, fragmented, and capable of meeting only a small portion of the demand for services. At a time when a highly educated and trained workforce is more important to the economic future of the state than ever before, and community and civic participation are particularly necessary, this effort becomes even more urgent and crucial.

There have always been compelling reasons to foster a healthy adult education system. An educated populace best ensures a strong community and a vibrant democracy. In addition, Rhode Island's efforts to improve educational outcomes for children require parents who are literate and involved with their children's education. Now, however, the need for improved adult literacy is urgent, and investing in this has become an economic imperative for the state.

Looking to the future, the jobs most likely to grow in Rhode Island, as elsewhere, require ever-increasing levels of literacy. The state will face a crisis stemming from a shortage of skilled workers that could lead to economic stagnation. A work plan needs to be crafted now to focus on remedying the problems various past reports have identified. This will ensure that current support—and potential new investments—will produce improved results and a more effective service delivery system for the future.

## Vision Statement

The adult basic education system in Rhode Island will enable adults to participate fully in society in their various roles as parents, workers, and citizens. The system will allow adults to acquire the skills they need to access the larger workforce development system, seek higher education, and cultivate lifelong learning. The education offered will be high quality and available in a convenient, inexpensive, and timely manner. An efficient and coherent system of services and providers will allow clients to enter at the appropriate level and progress until they are able to meet their self-identified goals.

## Infrastructure, Capacity, and Sustainability

In keeping with the stated mission, in order to ensure growth and continuous improvement in the delivery of adult education services, Rhode Island needs to establish a governance structure that will increase the state's capacity to manage the system. This requires the following major steps:

- ✓ Establish a funding plan that (a) integrates federal, state, and other adult education funds, (b) provides equal access to adult learners with special needs, including those with learning disabilities, incarcerated individuals, and speakers of English as a second language, and (c) provides equal geographic access to adult learners throughout the state.
- ✓ Design clear roles and responsibilities for each state agency according to its unique strengths and resources and in response to the demonstrated needs of Rhode Island's population.
- ✓ Establish close collaborations among state/private agencies that fund or provide adult education services.

- ✓ Be customer driven by increasing capacity generally, so that more learners can be accommodated, while making certain that growth occurs at each level to the extent it is needed (i.e., if most demand is at lowest skill level, system can stretch to meet that need, and then adjust again when the center of need changes).
- ✓ Build a technology infrastructure which may provide for assessment and delivery of instruction, student tracking, reporting of results, and performance accountability.

## Access

In order to fulfill its mission, the system must be accessible. In concrete terms, this means:

- ✓ Expand access to adult education and literacy services so those students who decide to take advantage of such services are not placed on waiting lists.
- ✓ Make services available at low/no-cost to be accessible to low-income residents.
- ✓ Provide services within a reasonable commuting distance and offered at times of the week and hours of the day that are convenient for working and non-working adults.
- ✓ Make clear and well-known pathways available for adults completing one level of education, enabling them to pursue educational goals at the next level.

## Quality and Accountability

Affirming that the adult basic education system provides high-quality education to learners and is effective in achieving its stated mission will require the following major steps:

- ✓ Make sure staff are (a) fully qualified to conduct the instructional work they are hired to perform, (b) trained in best practice and methodology of demonstrated effectiveness, and (c) compensated at levels appropriate to attract quality personnel.
- ✓ Create a strong program of professional development opportunities for teachers and other staff of adult basic education.
- ✓ Require support services (e.g. academic advising, career counseling, study skills and test-taking assistance, etc.) to help students achieve their goals.
- ✓ Establish (a) a standards-based curriculum and outline of levels, to be used universally, so that completion of one level leads seamlessly to entry into the next level, and (b) a common method or set of methods, informed by best theory and practice of adult basic education, for assessing learners and determining what level they have reached.
- ✓ Institute a common system of collecting and reporting data to determine how well providers and agencies are (a) fulfilling their role in the overall system, and (b) meeting the mission statement's goals (e.g. how well they are preparing learners for their next goal, how well they are serving special needs populations, etc.).
- ✓ Use the results of the accountability system to ensure continuous improvement of program quality and determine eligibility for future funding.

## Mission

From any adult basic education or literacy\* starting point, adult learners can access education and support services and over time have the opportunity to achieve their short and long term educational and personal goals as workers; parents and family members; citizens and community members; and lifelong learners.

## Four Overarching Goals for Improving the System

- ✓ Develop System Resources, Infrastructure, Linkages, Planning, and Evaluation
- ✓ Enhance Continuum of Integrated Services and Program Linkages/Collaborations
- ✓ Improve Program Quality and Accountability
- ✓ Expand Program and Staff Development and Support

## Objectives to Reach Goals

- ✓ Develop System Resources, Infrastructure, Linkages, Planning and Evaluation
  - A. Build a sustainable system infrastructure and governance that:
    1. Streamlines, simplifies and integrates federal, state and local funding;
    2. Provides consistent, predictable, adequate funding to enable a solid program infrastructure, to compensate staff at appropriate levels with benefits, and to provide suitable working conditions to attract and retain high qualified staff;
    3. Defines clear roles and responsibilities for state agencies and providers;
    4. Promotes collaborations between and among state and private agencies with a stake in adult education;
    5. Is customer driven;
    6. Defines specific indicators of system success and supports a range of measurable system outcomes;
    7. Has a statewide technology infrastructure for student tracking, outcome reporting, and performance accountability;
    8. Has effective system planning and evaluation including a five-year plan, assessment of education needs and assets by community, annual work plan, technology planning, distance learning planning, monitoring and evaluation of programs, and evaluation of system effectiveness.
  - B. Increase system capacity to provide a full range of education services (including for low literacy learners, learners with LDs, incarcerated learners, and for those with limited English skills), support services (counseling, child care, transportation, etc), and employment services in every community or region, which learners can access when and where they need them, and at a cost they can afford.

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\*The levels of adult basic education and literacy include beginning through advanced English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), beginning literacy, beginning through intermediate adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), and transition to college programs.

- C. Establish outreach strategies so that potential learners, education providers, community resource agencies, and employers are aware of adult education and literacy services.
- D. Coordinate service referrals into and between adult education programs, to support services, and to next-step resources such as career centers, post-secondary education and job skills, apprenticeship training and employment.
- E. Other System Objectives:
  1. Provide students with strategies to set and meet short-and long-term goals and allow learners sufficient time in the system to achieve their goals.
  2. Eliminate situational and state policy barriers which prevent students from accessing services or being successful (including supported distance learning and assistive technology accommodations or universal design).
  3. Develop an online job announcement service for adult education and literacy teaching, substitute teaching, and volunteer opportunities.
  4. Deconstruct skill requirements for lower level jobs so that they are based on skills, not credentials.

### ✓ Enhance Continuum of Integrated Services and Program Linkages/Collaborations

- A. Map statewide need for services as well as unique services and strengths of all providers to identify gaps.
- B. Define seamless levels of service from beginning literacy and beginning ESOL up to post-secondary education and training and entrance into a career ladder.
- C. Create strong information and communication networks between potential learners and providers, among providers, and between providers and community services.
- D. Build referral networks between education providers and other appropriate support and next-step resources such as career centers, post-secondary education and job skills, apprenticeship training and employment.

### ✓ Improve Program Quality and Accountability

- A. Create a shared concept of program quality that results in effectively achieving the objectives of the system.
- B. Establish standard processes to assess a range of measurable indicators of learner and program success.
- C. Establish program quality performance standards that serve as benchmarks for measuring program effectiveness and improvement.
- D. Establish standards-based curriculum frameworks (content standards) for all programs.
- E. Institute a common system to collect, analyze and use program level data to identify areas for program improvement.
- F. Institutionalize a culture of systematic data collection, analysis and use to enable programs to reach the program quality standards.

### ✓ Expand Program and Staff Development and Support

Design a professional development system that:

- A. Defines standards of quality for instructors and other staff;
- B. Supports continuous, effective professional development and technical assistance to enable instructors and other staff to reach the staff quality standards;
- C. Provides resources, including staff development, technical assistance and other supports, to enable programs to be accountable and improve their quality related to program quality standards; to institutionalize a culture of systematic data collection, analysis and use for improvement; and to incorporate research on best practices.

**1. System Resources, Infrastructure, and Planning**

System Components	State Level Responsibilities	Program Level Responsibilities
Articulated mission, vision, goals, and objectives for the system	Develop and review mission, vision, goals, and objectives of the system with input from a range of stakeholders.	Participate actively in all statewide decision making processes and provide accurate program level data and feedback for statewide monitoring and evaluation.
5-year strategic plan (as required by WIA Title II), with annual benchmarks and bi-annual review, to operationalize goals and objectives	Develop a statewide five-year plan (including technology plan, assessment of needs and assets, evaluations of programs and system) with input from a range of stakeholders.	
Process for the evaluation and ongoing improvement at the system level	Undergo system level monitoring and evaluation and use results to adjust system elements and policies.	
Policies and mechanisms for the allocation of funding for adult basic and literacy education services	Determine policy for allocating multi-year funds, in accordance with the system's mission and vision. Allocate funding competitively and efficiently to meet the objectives of the system and standards of program quality.	
Fund development and public relations strategy for system improvement and expansion	Implement a fund development and PR strategy for system improvement and expansion.	
Partnerships, and a partnership development strategy, at system level	Promote collaboration between and among all state and private agencies with a stake (or potential stake) in adult education.	
System-wide process and vehicles for information dissemination	Implement an outreach plan so that potential learners, education providers, community resources, and employers are aware of adult education service.	

**2. Service Provision Continuum: Program Linkages, Collaborations, and Accessibility**

System Components	State Level Responsibilities	Program Level Responsibilities
Diverse array of local/regional adult educational services that meet the variety of adult learner needs and abilities, and eliminate barriers to participation	Track services provided geographically versus estimated need, redistribute services appropriately; support community-level planning among providers and support services (vocational and personal counseling; transportation; childcare).	Offer services according to students' needs and abilities. Provide on-site and/or referral to appropriate support services. Participate in community planning to determine local needs and resources and to ensure needed services are available and coordinated.
Seamless system of articulated transitions between types and levels of services, including transition to work, training, and higher education	Ensure that adult basic education services are seamless from beginning literacy through transition to college and articulated with employment ladders, higher education and training.	Assess students according to standard levels of literacy and keep complete student records that a student can easily access. Collaborate with other education providers and support services to provide seamless services.
Mechanisms for effective communication among education providers, and between providers, support services, next steps (career centers, employers, higher education, job training), funders and policy makers	Support and facilitate state-wide coalitions, networking, and dialog between directors, teachers, counselors, tutors, and other staff, and between providers, next steps, funders and policy makers.	Develop and maintain networks and collaborations with other education providers, support services, next-step resources, funders, and policy makers.
Collaboration and partnerships with employers and institutions of higher education to eliminate barriers to participation	Establish partnerships to articulate employment ladders and entrance to higher education with defined literacy levels and credentials.	Participate in partnerships and decision making processes.

### 3. Program Quality and Accountability

System Components	State Level Responsibilities	Program Level Responsibilities
Standards regarding program quality; learner outcome measures; and qualifications of teachers, administrators, counselors, volunteers and other support staff	Develop and update standards through an established process, with significant stakeholder input, including students.	Use quality standards to develop programming, hire staff and determine learner outcomes. Ensure that standards are in language accessible to learners. Include learners in decision making processes.
Uniform process (based on program quality standards) and methodology for program evaluation, monitoring, and improvement	Monitor and evaluate programs against measurable program quality indicators. Use results for accountability and to support improvement.	Collect, analyze, use and report process and outcome data for measuring program effectiveness and improvement to meeting learner needs and goals.
Uniform process for measuring learner outcomes	Develop and update assessment processes with input from administrators, teachers, students and other stakeholders.	Use recommended uniform process for measuring and reporting learner and program outcomes along with assessments for other purposes including feedback to teachers and learners.
Information systems that enable the collection, compilation, and analysis of student and program data	Maintain statewide technology infrastructure for student tracking, outcome reporting, and performance accountability. Support a culture of systematic data collection, analysis and use for program and system improvement. Collect, compile, analyze, use and report program level data across the state.	Support a culture of systematic data collection, analysis and use for program improvement.

### 4. Program and Staff Development and Support

System Components	State Level Responsibilities	Program Level Responsibilities
Processes and resources for professional and leadership development (for directors, teachers, counselors, volunteers, tech coordinators, and other staff)	Support continuous, effective professional development and technical assistance to enable all staff to reach quality staff standards.	Support a culture that values professional development for all staff and volunteers. Plan for program and professional development for all staff, balancing individual, program, and statewide needs.
Processes and resources for technical assistance and organizational development at the program level	Provide technical assistance, professional development, tools, and other resources to enable programs to be accountable and improve, based on program quality standards. Support program planning and development.	
Process for evaluation and ongoing improvement of staff and program development system	Implement professional development evaluation plan and use results to adjust state PD plan.	Evaluate the effectiveness of program and staff development and use results to adjust program PD plan.



**To obtain a copy of this report, contact  
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