

# WORKING DRAFT

May 2015

## A Retrospective Summary of Adult Education in Rhode Island, 2004-2015: Revisiting *Building the Critical Links*

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United Way of Rhode Island is requesting public comments on this Working Draft until June 30, 2015. Please visit <http://adulthoodri2015.weebly.com> for more information and to provide comments.

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## Introduction

### **What is Adult Education?**

Adult education here refers to any type of educational service available to adults 16 years of age and older who are not enrolled in high school and either have no high school diploma or whose core academic or English language skills test below a 12<sup>th</sup> grade level. Adult education programs work with learners to build foundational skills including reading, writing, math and English. Services include Adult Basic Education (ABE), GED preparation or Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL / ESL). Adult education can also include Integrated Education and Training (IET), Family Literacy, civics and citizenship education, digital literacy or computer instruction, and support services for adult learners.

In 2014, the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIACC) released data showing that 36 million working-age adults in the United States have low foundational skills, scoring below Level 2 on a five-level literacy assessment where proficiency is Level 3 (US Office of Career, Technical & Adult Education [OCTAE], 2015; Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies [PIACC], 2015). While updated state-level data from the PIACC about Rhode Islanders' skills will not be available until late 2015, it is clear from existing data that the need for foundational skills is a pressing issue on a national level (OCTAE, 2015).

## **2004 Rhode Island Governor’s Adult Literacy Taskforce**

In 2003, Rhode Island Governor Donald Carcieri commissioned an Adult Literacy Taskforce to produce a vision and plan for “an integrated, quality system of adult education.” The recommendations of this group were summarized in [\*Building the Critical Links\*](#), a report produced by the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council (Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, 2004a). The state had lost 93,000 unskilled jobs in the previous decade, decreasing opportunities for an estimated 150,000 working age Rhode Islanders with no high school diploma or limited English proficiency (Titzel, 2003). The Governor’s Adult Literacy Taskforce saw adult education as an important “long-range strategy” for the state to meet the needs of its workforce and changing economy. In *Building the Critical Links*, the Taskforce laid the foundation for an adult education system whose mission was:

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.

## **Change and Opportunity for Adult Education in Rhode Island in 2015**

Now is an important moment to revisit the structure and vision of adult education in Rhode Island. Rhode Island has emerged slowly from the recent recession. Policymakers, including Governor Gina Raimondo, who took office in January 2015, have responded with a focus on workforce development. The Rhode Island Governor’s Workforce Board is preparing to implement its 2016-2017 Biennial Plan (RI Governor’s

Workforce Board [GWB], 2014), and in 2015 the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training will develop a Comprehensive System Improvement Plan (CSIP) to support the quality and coordination of workforce development services across the state (RI General Laws § 42-102-6, 2014).

At the federal level, Congress has reauthorized funding to states for workforce development activities, including adult education and literacy. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which was passed by Congress in July 2014, will be fully implemented in July 2016 (National Skills Coalition, 2015). While this legislation maintains the core programs authorized under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the impacts of key changes in the legislation remain unclear. This transition offers important opportunities to consider the shape of adult education and workforce development systems in Rhode Island in the years to come.

### **Reflecting on Adult Education in Rhode Island Since 2004**

More than a decade after the work of the Governor's Adult Literacy Taskforce, how has adult education fared in Rhode Island? Using data from adult education programs funded by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), this Retrospective looks back at the key recommendations of *Building the Critical Links* and adult education in the state since its publication, considering the five areas addressed by the 2004 Adult Literacy Taskforce (Budget; System Objectives, Elements & Governance; Professional Development; Program Quality; and Participant Assessment).

## **Looking Ahead**

Reflecting on this recent history provides a starting point for new conversations about the education of adults in Rhode Island. How can all adults build the skills they need to participate in the economy and society? How can the state best support the nearly 100,000 working age Rhode Islanders with no high school diploma, limited English, or both (RI DataHUB, 2014)? What do policy and technology changes mean for adult learners and those working to support them?

This retrospective is intended to inform community members, teachers, learners, administrators, employers, workforce partners, policymakers and others as they come together to articulate a shared vision for adult education and provide a platform for discussion and advocacy for adult education in Rhode Island going forward.

## Adult Education in Rhode Island at a Glance

**Adult education serves our workforce and economy.** Each year about 6,000 people participate in adult education programs funded by the Rhode Island Department of Education. 82% of participants are in the labor force, meaning that they are working or looking for work (RI DataHUB, 2014).

**About 75,000 working age people in Rhode Island do not have a high school diploma, and about 35,000 have limited English skills or none at all.** About 2,000 high school students leave school each year before they earn a diploma. 93% of participants in adult education programs funded by the Rhode Island Department of Education test below the 9th grade level in one or more foundational skill (RI DataHUB, 2014).

**Diverse organizations provide adult education,** including nonprofits, schools, libraries, colleges, state agencies and religious organizations. 34 adult education programs are funded by the Rhode Island Department of Education in 2015 (RIDE, 2014a). 80% of paid instructors are part-time employees, and many instructors are volunteers (RIDE, 2015a).

**There is a waiting list for adult education services in Rhode Island,** with 1,504 individuals listed as of April 2015 (RIDE, 2015b).

## State and Federal Funding for Adult Education: Budget

### **Recommendations of the 2004 Adult Literacy Taskforce**

Task Team 1 of the Governor’s Adult Literacy Taskforce was asked to determine, “What resources are necessary to support the system components and program and staff qualities to reach system goals and learner outcomes?” This Task Team developed a case statement for the Governor recommending the amount and structure of the adult education budget for 2005-06. They recommended nearly doubling the state’s investment in adult literacy and consolidating funding streams at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RI Economic Policy Council, 2004a).

### **Funding History**

Until 2004, adult education funding streams were administered by multiple state agencies (Titzel, 2003). Following the report’s recommendation to consolidate funding and monitoring functions for adult education at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), the majority of these state and federal funding sources were combined under RIDE’s Office of Adult Education. The most recent RFP process selected programs to receive funding for FY 2011-2015, with funding varying year to year according to a Performance-Based Funding (PBF) formula (see Program Quality section for more information) (RIDE, 2010).

Following the release of the 2004 Governors Adult Literacy Taskforce recommendations, adult education funding administered by RIDE increased for a few years, then declined to 2004 levels. From a FY 2005-2006 baseline of \$8.1M invested in adult education programming, funding rose 30% to a peak of \$10.5M in FY 2008-2009,

before declining steadily to \$8.3M in FY 2014-2015.<sup>1</sup> In 2015, total state and federal funding for adult education in Rhode Island is roughly equivalent to what it was before the recommendations were published and funding streams were consolidated, not accounting for inflation (\$8.3M in FY 2004-2005) (Less, 2014; RIDE, 2014a). Federal funding has declined due to loss of state population, the end of the Even Start<sup>2</sup> program, and sequestration. State funding for adult education has also declined with the reallocation of General Revenues and a reduction in the size of the Job Development Fund (JDF) during the recent economic downturn (P. Less, personal communication, April 2, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> RIDE-funded adult education programs contribute 10% to 25% matching funds, whether through in-kind or cash matches. These program grant amounts do not include matching funds, nor do they include investments made by adult education programs not funded by RIDE. The four agencies receiving the largest grants in FY13-14, accounting for \$3.75M (about half) of program funding, budgeted \$522,005 of matching funds. Sources included private foundations, public funding including CDBG and SNAP Education and Training funds, corporate contributions, staff and volunteer hours, in-kind use of classroom facilities, and fundraising events (RIDE, 2014a).

<sup>2</sup> *William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Programs (Even Start)* – Under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the U.S. Department of Education administered funding to states for local adult education programs. Federal funding under this law was cut after FY 2010-2011.

## **Funding Administered by the Rhode Island Office of Adult Education**

### **State Funds**

- *Job Development Fund (JDF)* – Generated from a state tax on employers, JDF is administered by the Governor’s Workforce Board (GWB). JDF is the largest single funding stream supporting adult education in RI in 2015 (RIDE, 2015a).
- *State General Revenue* – The Rhode Island General Assembly determines and votes on appropriations for adult education as part of the annual state budget process (Rhode Island General Law § 16-63-14).

### **Federal Funds**

- *Workforce Investment Act (WIA) / Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)* – Under Title of WIA (the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) and now WIOA, the US Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) administers funding to states for local adult education programs. States receive these funds based on their ability to meet accountability and matching requirements. In Rhode Island, the Office of Adult Education is responsible for negotiating annual performance targets with OCTAE (National Skills Coalition, 2014).
- *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)* – RIDE manages a contract from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services to administer federal TANF dollars in support of adult education activities in the state (Less, 2014).
- *English Literacy and Civics Education (EL Civics)* – The US Department of Education supports English literacy and civics programming to integrate civic participation, naturalization and US history content into English language classes.

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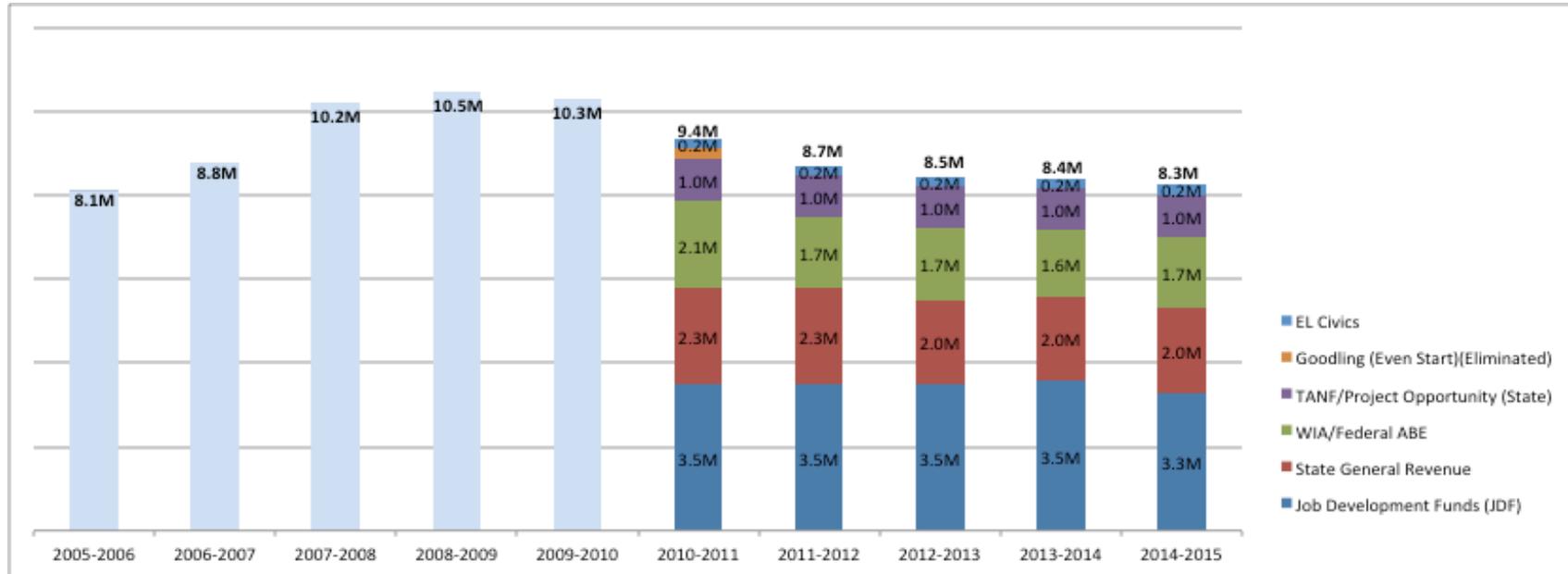
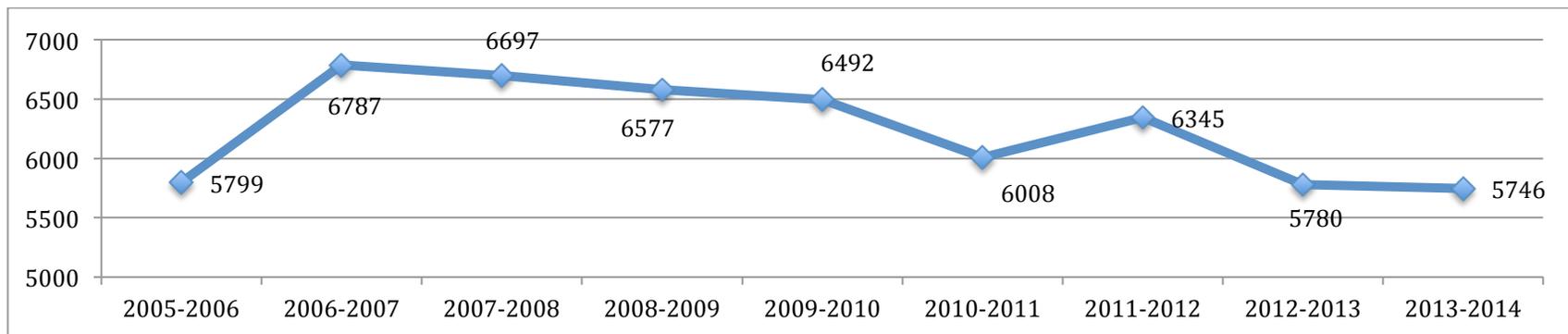


Figure 1. Program grants made by the Rhode Island Office of Adult Education, FY 2005-2006 to FY 2014-2015 (Less, 2014; RIDE, 2013a; RIDE, 2013b).



### Costs of Adult Education in Rhode Island

The average yearly cost per student in RIDE-funded adult education programs has remained around \$1,500 over the past ten years, while the cost per outcome has dropped by half (Less, 2014; RIDE, 2014c). The average annual cost per student in the Rhode Island K-12 system was \$15,657 in FY 2012-2013, more than ten times as high (RIDE, 2013c). The number of students enrolled in adult education programs each year (see Figure 2) has fluctuated near a 10-year average of 6,300. Total enrollment in RIDE-funded adult education programs was 5,730 in FY 2013-2014 (Less, 2014; RIDE, 2013c), the lowest level of all years since the Governor’s Adult Literacy Taskforce published its recommendations in 2004. However, adult education programs report a wide range of per-student costs depending on the nature and intensity of services and the structure of program budgets. In FY 2014-2015, RIDE-funded adult education programs spent from \$321 to \$9,402 per reported student (RIDE, 2013c; RIDE, 2013b).

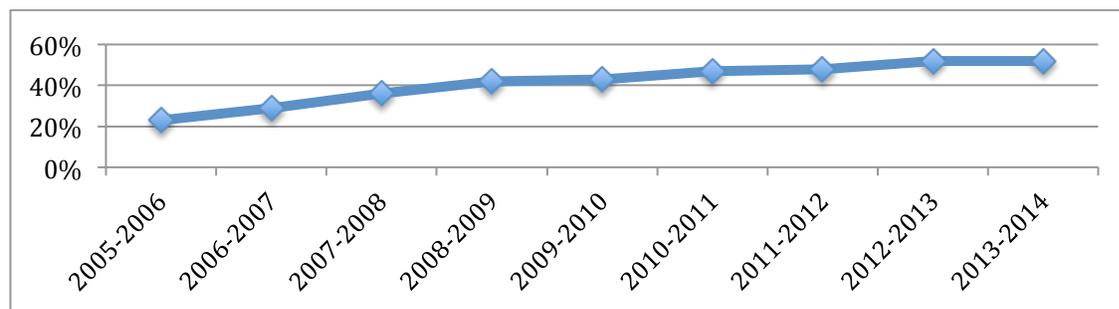


Figure 3. The percentage of students in RIDE-funded adult education programs achieving one or more Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gains in a given program year, from FY 2005-2006 to FY 2013-2014 (Less, 2014; RIDE 2014c).

RIDE-funded adult education programs administer pre- and post-tests to their students in order to assess improvement in student skills. Each student whose skill improves by the equivalent of two grade levels (known as an Educational Functioning Level or EFL)

is reported as a positive outcome. In these programs, the number of positive student outcomes more than doubled between 2004 and 2014 (see Figure 3), lowering the effective cost per outcome to about \$2,800 (see Figure 4).

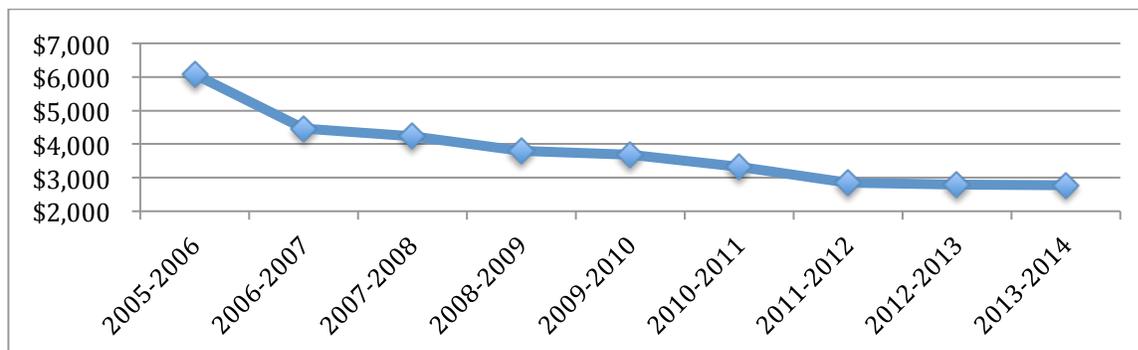


Figure 4. Cost per Educational Functioning Level Gain, the standard measure of learning progress among adult learners, in RIDE-funded adult education programs from FY 2005-2006 to FY 2013-2014 (Less, 2014; RIDE, 2013b).

### **Demand for Adult Education Services**

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) maintains a database for RIDE-funded adult education programs to track individuals who are waiting for adult education services in Rhode Island. The accuracy of the waiting list depends on how consistently programs enter and remove individuals from the list and how frequently individuals waiting for services at one program decide not to seek services at all or enroll at another program. While this waiting list could be over- or under- estimating the demand for adult education services at different times, it remains the best available metric of need in the state. As of April 2015, there were 1,504 unique individuals on the list. The addresses of individuals listed at that time were heavily concentrated in urban areas of the state – particularly Providence – but also include rural and suburban areas. In 2014, each individual’s name remained on this list for a median of 230 days. More individuals were

listed as waiting for ESOL services than for any other type of adult education service (RIDE, 2015b).

### **Regional Comparisons**

The National Council of State Directors of Adult Education (NCSDAE) publishes a report on services funded by each state, using census, funding and outcomes data. For each state, the report lists total federal funding for adult education and non-federal matching funding reported by states.<sup>3</sup> This data indicate that Rhode Island has invested less non-federal funding in adult education than either Massachusetts or Connecticut, which is not surprising given differences in size. However, Rhode Island also matches federal funding with a lower investment per adult education student, per state resident, and relative to total estimates of need (see Figures 6 – 8) (NCSDAE, 2014).

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<sup>3</sup> Non-federal matching funding listed in the NCSDAE Blue Book may represent less than the total investment in adult education for each state. The amount of non-federal funding listed in the NCSDAE Blue Book for Rhode Island is slightly lower than RIDE's reported state grant total for FY 2012-2013 (RIDE, 2013a).

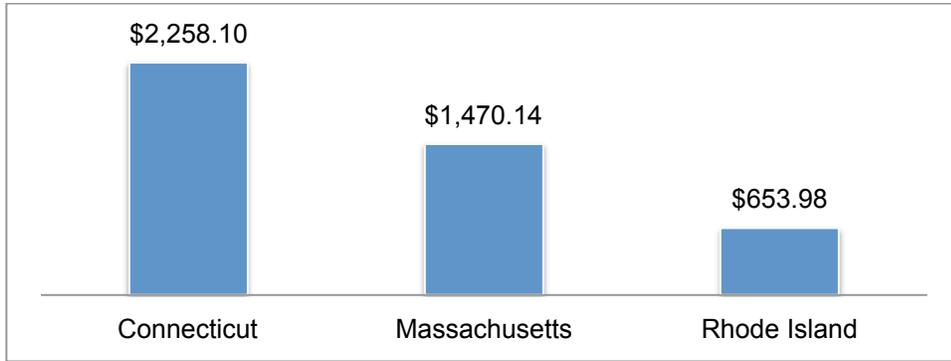


Figure 6. Amount of non-federal funding invested by Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island for adult education in FY 2012-2013 per student enrolled in a RIDE-funded program (NCSDAE, 2014)



Figure 7. Amount of non-federal funding invested by Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island for adult education in FY 2012-2013 per state resident (NCSDAE, 2014).

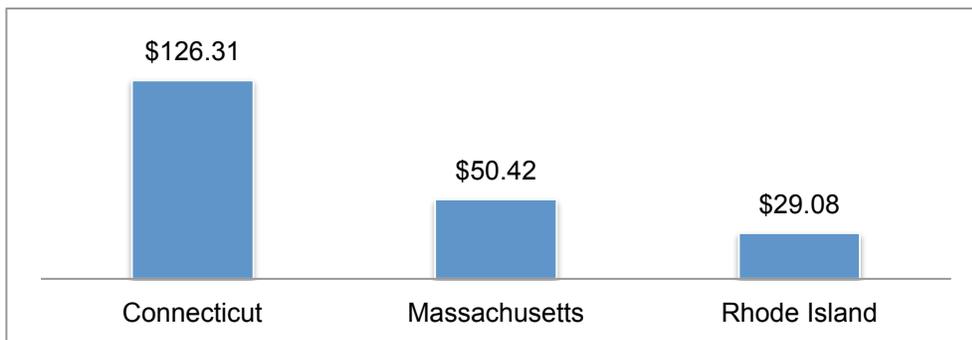


Figure 8. Amount of non-federal funding invested by Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island for adult education in FY 2012-2013 relative to the estimated number of state residents with less than a high school diploma (NCSDAE, 2014). This does not reflect the additional presence of residents in each state who have a high school diploma and limited English proficiency.

## Structure of Rhode Island’s Adult Education System: System Objectives, Elements & Governance

### Recommendations of the 2004 Adult Literacy Taskforce

Task Team 2 of the Governor’s Adult Literacy Taskforce was asked to determine, “What system components and governance structure support [learners’] goals and outcomes?”

In 2004, adult education funding and leadership was dispersed at multiple state agencies with little coordination. The Taskforce recommended consolidating and elevating an adult education division at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) in order to support an integrated system. The anticipated advantages of this restructuring included RIDE’s content expertise, the alignment of adult education’s goals with the goals of the K-12 system, RIDE’s experience in funding stream and RFP management, and minimal new overhead. Risks cited included the size of adult education relative to RIDE’s overarching K-12 mandate and RIDE’s lack of connections to employers and the workforce development system. To manage these risks, the Taskforce recommended that the state restructure the role of the state’s Director of Adult Education to report directly to the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. The Taskforce also recommended that business representatives and employers be appointed to a proposed governing board of Adult Education (Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, 2004a).

### Adult Education Governance in Rhode Island, 2004

Before the reforms recommended by the Governor’s Taskforce on Adult Literacy in *Building the Critical Links*, funding streams for adult education were housed in at least

five state agencies, each with separate application and oversight processes. Statewide leadership staffing levels were minimal, and located in separate offices with little coordination. There was no statewide Management Information System for adult education. Professional development, program quality measures, and participant assessment were not systematized (Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, 2004a). A 2004 survey accompanying the Governor's Adult Literacy Taskforce report found that 47 programs in the state were providing Adult Basic Education service in this context. These programs reported a combined capacity of 7,117 students, or 10,865 students annually (RI Economic Policy Council, 2004b).

### **Consolidation of Adult Education Administration at RIDE**

As recommended by the Taskforce, state-level administration of state and federal adult education funding was consolidated at RIDE beginning in FY 2005-2006. Since then, RIDE's Office of Adult Education has been responsible for administering state funding for adult education from the Job Development Fund and from General Revenues; as well as federal funding under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the Even Start Family Literacy Programs, English Literacy and Civics Education, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (Less, 2014). RIDE has administered this funding to adult education programs under combined grant cycles. As of 2015, RIDE provides funding from these sources to 34 adult education programs, which are monitored by and accountable to RIDE (RIDE, 2015c; RIDE, 2015d).

### **Role of the State Director of Adult Education**

The Taskforce's recommendation to elevate the role of the state's Director of Adult Education (Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, 2004a) was implemented from 2005

to 2010. The position reported to the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education until RIDE was restructured in 2010. At that point, a new Commissioner relocated the Office of Adult Education under the Office of Multiple Pathways within RIDE, and the role of Administrator of Adult Basic Education and GED became a non-management, union position. As of 2015, this role reports to the Director of Multiple Pathways, who reports to the Chief of Accelerating School Performance under the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education.

### **Staffing Levels at the Office of Adult Education**

As recommended by the 2004 Adult Literacy Taskforce (Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, 2004a), the initial build-out of the Adult Education division at RIDE included staff sufficient to effectively oversee and develop the state's adult education system. However, in more recent years, the original seven full-time staff has been reduced, and there are now 4.5 full-time staff members in the Office of Adult Education. These include the Administrator of Adult Basic Education and GED and two Specialists.

### **Board Leadership**

Although the 2004 Adult Literacy Taskforce recommended the creation of a policy and oversight Board dedicated to adult education (Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, 2004a), no comparable entity has yet been developed. Adult education in Rhode Island is governed by what is now the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education under the Rhode Island Board of Education. Since the creation of the Rhode Island Governor's Workforce Board (GWB) in 2005, the GWB has included an Adult Literacy Committee (Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training [DLT], 2011), but this Committee carries no legal authority over the administration of the state's adult

education system. However, with the Committee’s support, the GWB has become the largest single funder of adult education in Rhode Island, contributing \$3.5M from the Job Development Fund to RIDE’s budget for adult education in FY 2014-2015, funding programs and a portion of the Professional Development Center (RIDE, 2014a; RIDE, 2013b). This adult literacy allocation is also the single biggest annual expenditure made by the GWB (GWB, 2015).

### **Interagency Collaboration and Integration**

The 2004 Governor’s Adult Literacy Taskforce identified a need for improved collaboration between state agencies around adult education in order to consolidate and align funding, standardize practices, and better coordinate services for adult education students (Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, 2004a). In 2005, state agencies – including the RI Department of Education (RIDE), the RI Department of Labor and Training (DLT), and the RI Department of Human Services (DHS) – combined funding streams at RIDE’s Office of Adult Education. More recently, RIDE has worked with DLT on program initiatives, including the On-Ramps work readiness credentialing pilot project (RIDE, 2015e). However, the development and implementation of a Unified State Plan under the newly passed federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) will require and enforce a new level of interagency collaboration in the state, particularly among the Rhode Island Department of Education, the Department of Labor and Training, the Office of Rehabilitative Services, and the Governor’s Workforce Board (National Skills Coalition, 2015).

## Instructional Quality: Professional Development

### **Recommendations of the 2004 Adult Literacy Taskforce**

Task Team 3 of the Governor’s Adult Literacy Taskforce was asked to determine, “What staff qualities support achieving [learner] outcomes?” This Task Team drafted characteristics of a qualified instructor, considered the current state of the adult education instructional workforce, and outlined a vision for a statewide professional development system. The Taskforce recommended the establishment of a new, centralized professional development resource center for the state. The Taskforce recommended that this center be independent of RIDE and driven by collaborative decision-making, needs assessments, integrated statewide and individual professional development plans, and incentives for programs and individuals to participate (Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, 2004a).

### **Standards, Credentials & Certifications for Adult Education Professionals**

A working group convened by the Rhode Island Department of Education developed the Rhode Island Adult Education Practitioner Standards for Instructors, which were adopted in 2012 (RIDE, 2012a). There is no state credentialing system for adult education instructors in Rhode Island.

### **Rhode Island Adult Education Professional Development Center**

The Rhode Island Adult Education Professional Development Center (RIAEPDC) was established in 2007 to deliver professional learning and technical assistance to adult education practitioners (Westbay Collaborative, 2015). Initial funding for the RIAEPDC

came from the Rhode Island Foundation and the Rhode Island Department of Education. As of 2015, the RIAEPDC engages adult education professionals in state leadership activities, participates in national initiatives, supports statewide accountability initiatives, provides topic-focused professional development for practitioners. The RIAEPDC's professional development offerings are open to all adult education professionals in the state (Rhode Island Adult Education Professional Development Center, 2015). The organization has also managed special projects, including the Rhode Island Resource Hub, an online database of training and education opportunities specifically designed for access by low-literacy adults (RI Resource Hub, 2015).

### **Adult Education Workforce, 2004 - 2015**

In 2004, low wages and a majority part-time workforce meant that turnover among adult education instructors in Rhode Island was high, and most adult education programs in the state relied heavily on volunteer instructors (RI Economic Policy Council, 2004a).

As of 2015, the instructional workforce in adult education remains dominated by part-time workers and volunteers (see Figure 8). The percentage of paid adult education instructional staff that was employed full-time (versus part-time) decreased from 25% in a 2004 survey of all adult education programs to 18% in RIDE-funded programs in 2015 (RI Economic Policy Council, 2004b; RIDE, 2015a). The percentage of all adult education instructional staff that was unpaid decreased from 62% in the same 2004 survey of all adult education programs to 45% in RIDE-funded programs in 2015 (see

Figure 3) (RI Economic Policy Council, 2004b; RIDE, 2015a).<sup>4</sup> No statewide entity in Rhode Island collected comparable data in 2015 about adult education programs not funded by RIDE.

Wages for adult education professionals also have significant implications for instructional quality in adult education programs in Rhode Island and elsewhere. Quarterly Reports submitted to RIDE in April 2015 indicate that average wages for paid instructors in Rhode Island is \$22.45 and that part-time instructors work as few as 3.5 hours per week (see Table 1). Only a handful of part-time adult education instructors receive benefits (RIDE, 2015a).

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<sup>4</sup> Data on the instructional workforce at RIDE-funded adult education programs is drawn here from Quarterly Reports submitted to RIDE by programs in April 2015. RIDE-funded adult education programs also enter data about full-time, part-time and volunteer instructors into the state's Management Information System (MIS) for adult education.

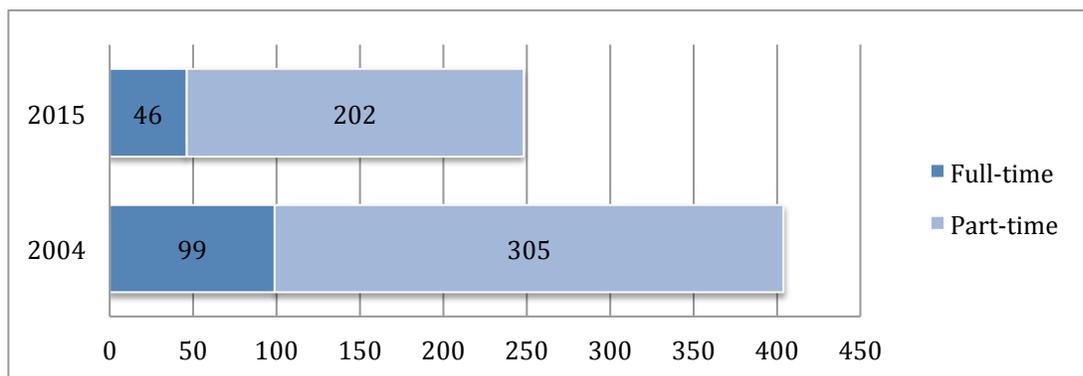


Figure 9. Number of full-time and part-time instructional staff employed by adult education programs in 2004 and by RIDE-funded adult education programs in 2015 (RI Economic Policy Council, 2004b; RIDE, 2015a).

	Hourly Wage, All Non-Volunteer Instructors n=248	Hours Worked Per Week, Part-Time Instructors n=248	Estimated Annual Turnover, All Instructor Types <sup>5</sup> n=176
Minimum	11.5	3.5	5%
Maximum	31.25	35	54%
Average	22.45	15.7	20%

Table 1. Hourly wages, hours per week and estimated turnover for adult education instructors at RIDE-funded programs in Rhode Island in 2015. Data is self-reported by programs (RIDE, 2015a).

<sup>5</sup> This column reflects data from the top twelve largest RIDE-funded adult education programs in Rhode Island.

## Quality of Adult Education Services: Program Quality

### **2004 Recommendations of the 2004 Adult Literacy Taskforce**

Task Team 4 of the Governor’s Adult Literacy Taskforce was asked to determine, “What program qualities support achieving [learners’] outcomes?” This Task Team developed a detailed set of Program Quality Indicators to be used for program self-assessment and quality improvement. These Indicators were grounded in the inputs and activities of programs rather than student outcomes. In the long term, the Taskforce recommended that program quality indicators be integrated with accountability for student outcomes as measured in the National Reporting System. The Taskforce recommended that the state’s performance standards system be developed to be minimally burdensome for programs and administrators, to ensure consistency of services and data, to motivate program improvement, to allow the flexibility to accommodate various program goals and student levels, and to be iterative in its structure to best support programs and funders (RI Economic Policy Council, 2004a).

### **Program Quality Indicators and Performance Accountability**

In 2010, adult education Program Quality Indicators<sup>6</sup> developed by the 2004 Adult Literacy Taskforce were incorporated into the state’s Management Information System

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<sup>6</sup> The Program Quality Indicators measure program quality in seven areas: Learner Progress toward Literacy & Numeracy Goals that Impact All Adult Roles; Planning, Philosophy, On-Going Improvement & Management; Professional Development for All Staff and Volunteers; Recruitment, Intake & Orientation; Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment & Learning Environment; Support Services; Community Interaction & Outreach.

(MIS) for adult education and into monitoring rubrics for use in program accountability (RIDE, 2015d). In 2015, the Office of Adult Education continues to use these tools in semi-annual, intensive program reviews of RIDE-funded adult education programs.

### **Performance-Based Funding**

In 2008 and 2009, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) hired a consulting firm to design a performance-based funding (PBF) formula for the state's adult education system, but the resulting proposal was not implemented. RIDE later convened a Working Group, including Office of Adult Education staff and program directors, to design a new formula for Rhode Island's adult education system. RIDE used the formula that this group developed to determine funding for adult education programs from FY 2011-2012 to FY 2014-2015 (RIDE, 2014b). RIDE funding allocations made for FY2014-2015 will be maintained for FY 2015-2016 in anticipation of changes under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

RIDE's performance-based funding formula for adult education was designed to link program funding to reported outcomes. Adult education programs competing for funding under this formula were evaluated not based on whether they were able to meet static outcome targets, but based on how their outcomes compared to those reported by other RIDE-funded adult education programs in the state (RIDE, 2012b). While only a portion of each adult education program's funding was dependent on performance (5% in the first year, increasing to 15% in the third year), the formula resulted in variable distribution of funding year to year. In the years when the formula was in effect, each

RIDE-funded adult education program<sup>7</sup> experienced an annual change in their budget that was not announced until immediately before the start of the new fiscal year.

RIDE's performance-based funding formula for adult education was calculated based on a combination of program efficiency and efficacy, including the number of positive outcomes and the weighted percentage of students achieving positive outcomes.

Outcome measures included the number of students achieving Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gains from pre- to post-test, the number of students obtaining a high school credential, the number of students entering post-secondary education, and the number of students entering employment. Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gains counted for twice as many points as any other outcome measure. The formula did not account for differences in program budgets or cost structures (RIDE, 2012b).

In 2014, the last year of this formula's implementation, seven programs achieved less than 100% of state targets, but 20 of 34 (59%) of programs received reduced funding (RIDE, 2014b). Percentage of state targets is only one component of the Performance-Based Funding formula. The formula also accounts for total number of outcomes achieved with respect to statewide budget share (RIDE, 2012b).

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<sup>7</sup> Except one program funded by a separate funding stream, which was level-funded in the reference year.

WORKING DRAFT: A RETROSPECTIVE SUMMARY OF ADULT EDUCATION IN RHODE ISLAND, 2004 – 2015

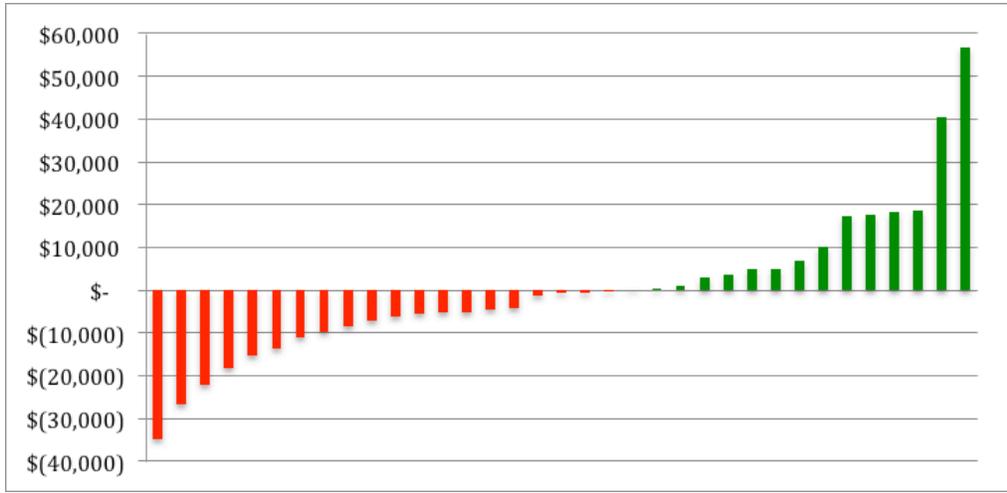


Figure 6. Each of the 34 columns above represents the change in grant amount for one of the 34 RIDE-funded adult education programs entering FY 2014-2015. Under the Performance-Based Funding formula, RIDE awarded reduced funding to 20 programs (represented by red columns) and increased funding to the remaining 14 (represented by green columns) (RIDE, 2014b; RIDE, 2013b; RIDE, 2014c).

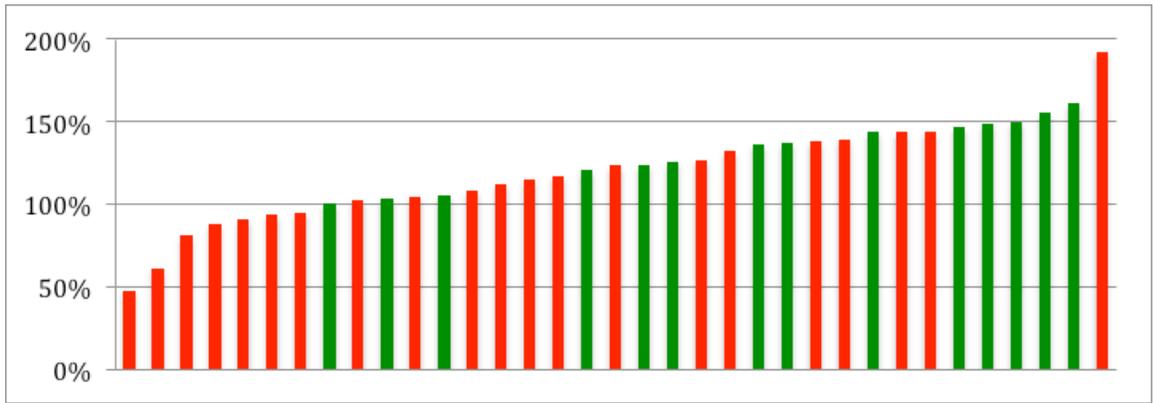


Figure 7. Each of the 34 columns above represents the percentage of state outcome targets achieved by one of the 34 RIDE-funded adult education programs in FY 2012-2013. Red columns represent programs that were awarded reduced funding in FY 2014-2015. Green columns represent programs that were awarded increased funding in the same year (RIDE, 2014b; RIDE, 2013b; RIDE, 2014c).

## Adult Education Student Outcomes

### **2004 Recommendations of the Governor’s Adult Literacy Taskforce**

Task Team 5 of the Governor’s Adult Literacy Taskforce was asked to determine “What learner outcomes demonstrate progress toward their goals?” This Task Team recommended establishing statewide content and performance standards and aligning assessments to those standards. With the right combination of standards and assessments, the system could provide consistent assessment, screening & referral, outcome measures, information to partner institutions, articulation with post-secondary and training systems, and aligned workforce readiness credentialing. The Taskforce recommended that standards and assessments support students in achieving their personal goals and be responsive to necessary changes in adaptation or use. The Taskforce recommended that each adult education programs continue to use assessments of its choice until such standards and process were implemented (RI Economic Policy Council, 2004a).

### **Standards and Articulation**

In 2007, RIDE adopted the Rhode Adult Education Program Quality Content Standards, which were adapted in large part from the Equipped For the Future framework (RIDE, 2007). In 2013, the federal Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE)<sup>8</sup> under the U.S. Department of Education released the National College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (CCRS), which are aligned with K-12’s Common Core

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<sup>8</sup> Now OCTAE.

State Standards (MPR Associates, 2013). As of 2015, the RI Adult Education Program Quality Content Standards are being replaced by the CCRS.

### **Assessment Tools and Practices**

A 2004 survey of adult education programs in Rhode Island found that most but not all program providers used an assessment tool of some kind to evaluate participant learning and growth. A minority of programs reported using student assessments to place students into different types of classes or make other program design decisions, and many programs lacked the databases or computer systems to maintain or analyze student outcome data. In 2004, the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) was the most commonly used standardized assessment, used by 10 programs, with Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) and Basic English Skills Test (BEST) used in four and five programs respectively (RI Economic Policy Council, 2004b).

States that receive federal funding for adult education are mandated to meet National Reporting System (NRS) requirements for student assessment. NRS has approved a group of assessments that states and programs may choose from in measuring and reporting adult education student outcomes. Responding to these requirements, in FY 2005-2006, RIDE mandated the use of one of a selection of NRS-approved student assessments by RIDE-funded adult education programs. The current assessment policy, revised in 2009, specifies the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) and the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) as allowable instruments for measuring student entering levels and gains (RIDE, 2009).

Although these tests are not designed to align with Rhode Island’s 2007 content standards, they are structured using the same Educational Functioning Levels (EFLs) and test many of the competencies identified in the standards. CASAS and BEST were not originally designed to measure student skills using National College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (CCRS).

As of 2015, all RIDE-funded programs use the CASAS, though it is not a test common in other education and training systems. Several programs supplement with additional assessments including Basic English Skills Test (BEST), the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), the GED Ready Practice Test, and the College Board ACCUPLACER, which is the standard test used by colleges and universities to assess preparedness for college-level coursework (RIDE, 2015a).

All RIDE-funded programs are required to pre-test and post-test their students, and programs are expected to follow common procedural standards in administering these assessments (RIDE, 2009). From FY 2005-2006 to FY 2012-2013, an increase in the rate of post-testing by adult education programs correlated with the increase in the statewide rate of Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gains from 23% to 52% (Less, 2014).

### **State Reporting Database**

Following the conclusion of the 2004 Adult Literacy Taskforce, the Rhode Island Department of Education contracted with an independent company – Benchmark ITS – to build a statewide data Management Information System (MIS) for adult education that

meets National Reporting System (NRS) requirements. This system, called the Comprehensive Adult Literacy Information System (CALIS) was first implemented in 2006, and RIDE-funded adult education programs continue to use the system in 2015. CALIS is not integrated with other RIDE longitudinal data tracking systems, but the Office of Adult Education has implemented cross-agency data matching within the RI Data Hub and the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training (DLT). CALIS users report challenges in user interface, report generation and efficiency (RIDE, 2015f).

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## Appendix A

### Summary of Goals and Objectives for an Improved System of Adult Education in RI, Adapted from *Building the Critical Links* (2004)

(Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, 2004a)

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