

Adult Literacy Study Commissioned by Legislature

On April 27, 2006, the Program Review and Investigations (PRI) committee of the state legislature approved a study of adult literacy to be conducted in the time period between the end of the 2006 legislative session and the beginning of the 2007 session. The PRI committee is a joint, bipartisan, statutory committee of the Connecticut General Assembly comprised of 12 members. The impetus for the study came from members of the state legislature's Higher Education Committee. The study is expected to include interviews with stakeholders and experts and a review of all data sources, reports and national trends.

A briefing report to the PRI committee is expected in the late summer - early fall regarding the research, the issues they are finding, and comparisons with other states. The committee will have informational public hearings in the early fall for the public to comment on the preliminary findings, and then the staff will draft final findings. **The Literacy Council will be following this process very closely and provide updates when information is available.**

Following is the Scope of the Study approved by the PRI committee.

Scope of the Study

Coordination of Adult Literacy Programs

Under federal and state law, certain basic education, secondary school completion, English as a Second Language (ESL), and citizenship programs must be provided to adults who are over age 16 and not enrolled in a public school to improve their literacy skills as well as to promote employability and self-sufficiency. Definitions vary, but according to the National Institute for Literacy, an interagency federal entity administered by the U.S. Secretaries of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, literacy refers to an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute, and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family, and in society.

In Connecticut, the mandated state adult education system is overseen by the State Department of Education. The system's instructional programs including basic literacy, high school diploma/equivalency testing (GED), and ESL courses, are actually provided through local school districts and, in some cases, operated by community-based organizations and made available in the workplace. In addition, services to improve adult literacy are frequently a component of various state social service and employment programs targeted to help low-income families and special need populations.

The most recent available demographic data show Connecticut's adult education system in FY 04 served nearly 33,000 individuals, the majority of whom were age 25 and older (56 percent) and members of minority groups (71 percent). The primary focus of 43 percent of all adult education participants was the system's ESL program, while 38 percent were participating in high school completion programs, 17 percent were in adult basic education programs, and 2 percent were in citizenship programs.

For FY 06, state grant funding to towns for adult education totaled approximately \$16.9 million and about \$5.9 million in federal funds was appropriated for state-administered adult education programs. Required local matching funds and private contributions accounted for another \$18.9 million allocated to the mandated adult education system in the current fiscal year. Adult literacy services also may be funded through employment and training programs administered by other state agencies, including the Departments of Social Services and Labor, but no estimate of funding from such sources is readily available.

Given the many different program locations and operators, and the variety of funding sources and mandates, concerns have been raised about the adequacy of coordination and consistency of standards and opportunities. Legislators have also expressed interest in accountability for program outcomes and the success of the current system in meeting adult literacy needs now and in the future.

Area of Focus

The study will focus on: 1) examining how adult literacy programs and services are funded, delivered, and overseen in Connecticut; and 2) determining if the state's current system for providing adult literacy services through adult basic education, secondary school completion, workplace education, family literacy, and English as a Second Language programs is efficient and effective.

Areas of Analysis

I. Describe Purpose of Adult Literacy Programs

- How is adult literacy defined and measured?
- What are the federal and state mandates regarding adult literacy?
- What are the primary goals and intended outcomes of adult literacy services (e.g., gains in literacy skills, English fluency, employability, self-sufficiency)?
- What is the need for services and who are the target populations?

II. Assess Coordination of Programs and Funding

- What adult literacy services are available in Connecticut?
- What are the major sources of funding and trends in expenditures (e.g., funding in total, by source, by program, costs per program, per student, at present and over time)?
- Who are the program providers and how are services delivered?
- Who is receiving services and what are the trends in participation and demand?
- What is the process for overseeing and coordinating services in terms of content, access, quality, and costs?
- How does Connecticut's system compare to systems in other states in terms of structure, programs, students, and costs?
- Are program standards, goals, and eligibility requirements clear to providers and students?
- Are there gaps or duplication in services available, by type of program, target population, or geographic region?
- What, if any, changes to the current structure and coordinating procedures for adult literacy services in Connecticut are needed to improve system efficiency?

III. Assess System Performance

- What are the generally accepted outcome measures for adult literacy services?
- What performance data are available for Connecticut's adult literacy service system and how are outcome measures compiled, analyzed, reported, and reviewed?
- How is the system performing, in terms of available outcome measures, overall, and by type of program, provider, student category, and in comparison to similar states?
- What information is available regarding student experiences (e.g., program completion and other "success" rates, time to complete programs, waiting lists, extent of repeated courses) and what are the trends in any student-related performance measures?
- Based on available research, what factors about state adult literacy systems contribute to, and what factors detract from, good performance and effective service delivery?
- What, if any, changes to the current structure and coordinating procedures for adult literacy services in Connecticut are needed to improve system effectiveness?