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Bridges to Better Jobs: How Texas Can Equip Texas Adults For Good Careers

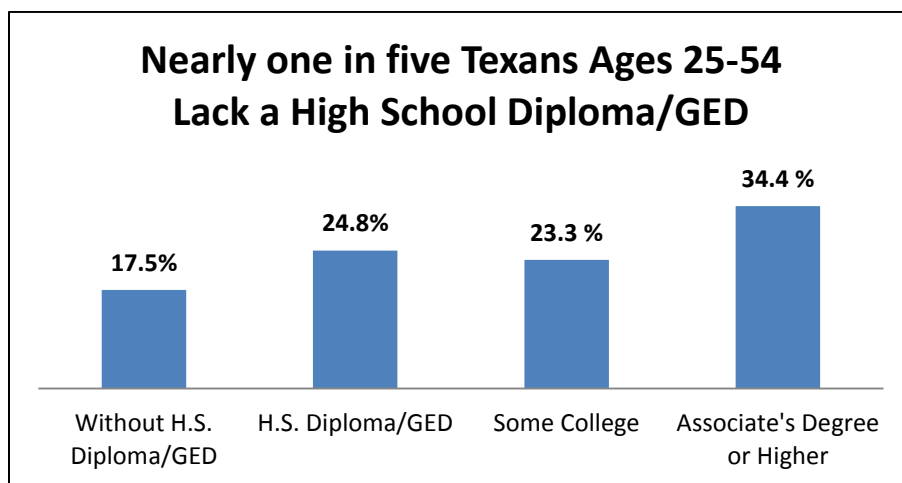
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Introduction

As the Texas labor market transforms in order to become globally competitive, the state needs to ensure that its diverse workforce is equipped for high-demand jobs that pay a family-supporting wage. By 2018, nearly two of every three jobs will require postsecondary education; jobs in the top growth professions will require an even higher share.¹ As technology rapidly advances, jobs that have typically been filled by people who do not have any postsecondary education are being offshored, making it difficult for people without a high school diploma/GED or postsecondary credential to earn a high wage.²

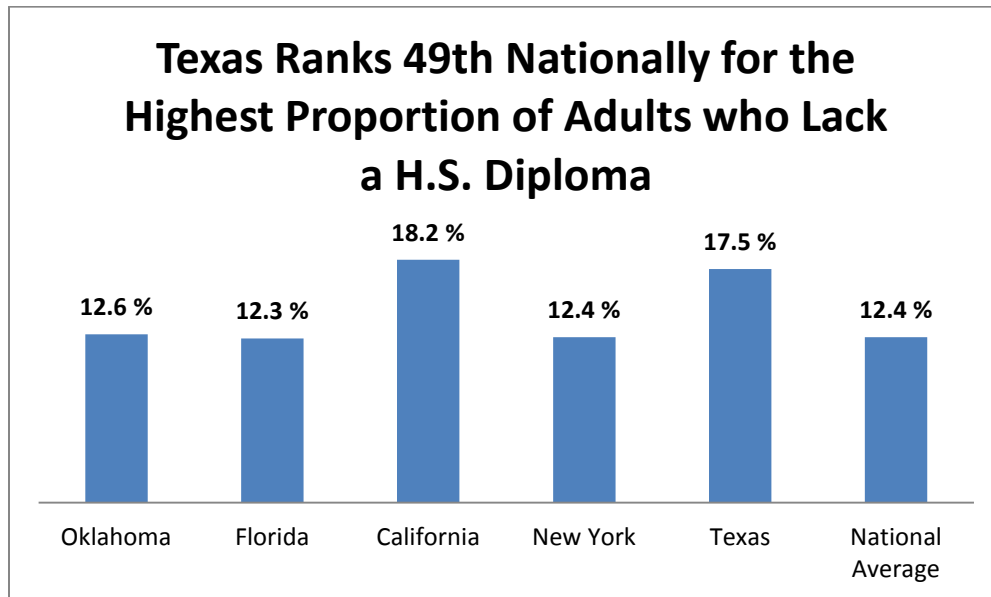
Unfortunately, too many Texans lack the necessary skills and education to fill higher-skilled and higher-wage jobs. Basic literacy is a necessity for financial independence in Texas; yet, over half (51 percent) of adult Texans were at basic or below basic literacy levels, ranking Texas 39th in the nation.³ To close the skills gap, Texas needs to serve more low-skilled adults who qualify for Adult Basic Education (ABE), and increase the number of adult learners who complete high school/GED and go on to postsecondary education, including career and technical education leading to an industry-recognized credential.

In this arena, Texas is falling behind in workforce preparation. Nearly one in five adult Texans ages 25-54 lack a high school diploma or GED, while only one-third of adults have completed an associate's degree or higher.⁴ According to the National Center for Higher Education, Texas ranked 49th in 2008 in the number of GEDs awarded—6.1 certificates per 1,000 adults with no high school degree—well below the national average of 9.8 GEDs awarded (per 1,000 adults with no high school degree).⁵



Source: CPPP Analysis, Working Poor Families Project, 50 State Data, Ch. 2, (2011) Population Reference Bureau Analysis of American Community Survey.

As shown below, Texas faces a steep challenge in competing with our neighbors and peers to have a more prepared workforce. Overall Texas is ranked 49th nationally for the highest proportion of adults who lack a high school diploma or GED.



Source: CPPP Analysis, Working Poor Families Project, 50 State Data, Ch. 2, (2011) Population Reference Bureau Analysis of American Community Survey

Texas can do better to strengthen the adult basic education and literacy system to move more Texans into a family-supporting career. To make system-wide changes to the way adult basic education is delivered and improve outcomes for adult learners in Texas, state policymakers and ABE providers should adopt a goal of integrating career pathways and bridge programs to streamline and shorten the process for adult learners to obtain the training and education they need to attain a certificate or degree, a higher-wage job, and financial independence.

This policy page provides an overview of the adult basic education and literacy system in Texas and makes recommendations for strengthening the ABE and literacy framework to reach more students and improve outcomes for adult learners.

Overview of Adult Basic Education and Literacy in Texas

Adult Basic Education (ABE) provides adults (ages 16 and over) that are not enrolled in high school and do not have a high school diploma with English literacy services and basic instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics.⁶ ABE also provides adult learners with workplace and family literacy services. Adult education instruction is usually broken up by Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English as a Second Language (ESL). In order to qualify for ABE services, an adult learner must:

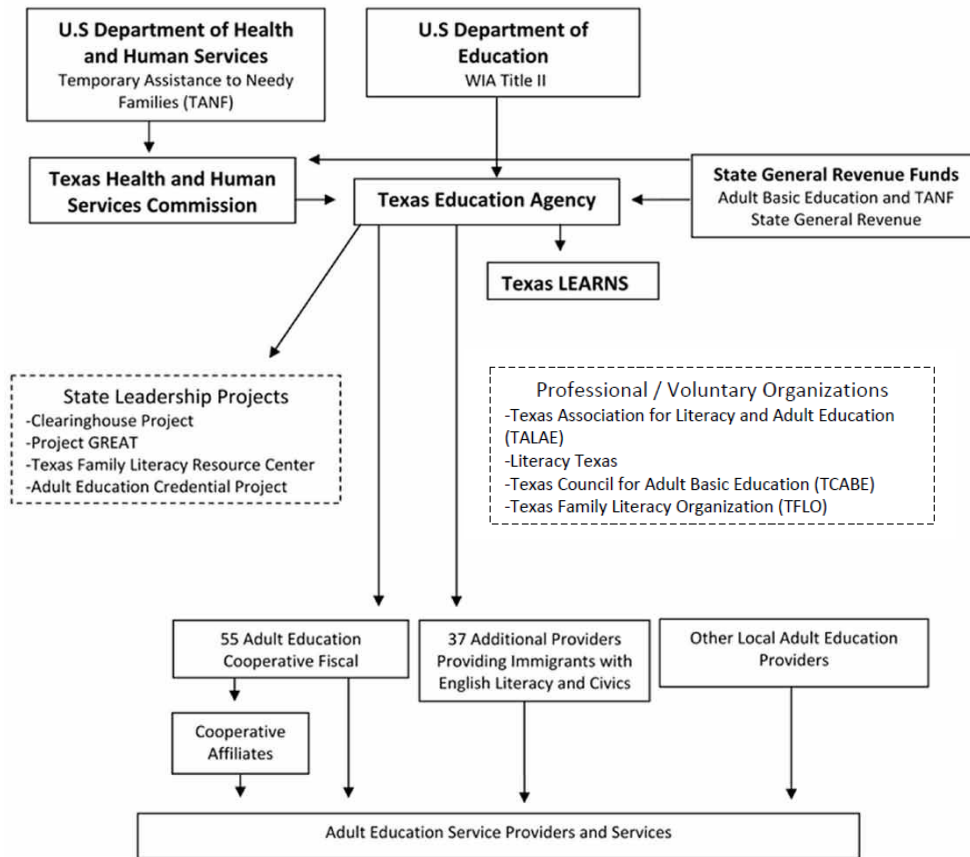
- function at or below the eighth grade level;
- not have a high school diploma; and
- must not currently be enrolled in secondary school.⁷

In Texas, ABE is administered through two avenues: federally funded programs managed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) through Texas LEARNS and independent programs that do not receive federal funding and are not managed by the state.⁸ Federally funded ABE programs

are funded by WIA Title II– Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA). Up to 10 percent of the allocation is used for incarcerated and institutionalized adults. Adult education is provided to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Recipients by the General Appropriations Act.⁹

Although TEA is responsible for awarding grants and making policies for ABE in Texas, Texas LEARNS (part of the Harris County Department of Education) “provides nondiscretionary grant management functions, program assistance, and other statewide support services to Texas Adult Education and Family Literacy Providers”.¹⁰ Texas LEARNS administers federal and state funds, and provides the services listed above to the 55 federally funded grant programs, eight adult education professional development programs, and the state data management system (TEAMS).

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), which distributes WIA Title I funds to local workforce development boards, also play a role providing adult education services and funding pilot projects around the state. TEA, TWC and THECB, aided by the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC), have a joint directive from the Governor’s Office and the Legislature to align ABE and postsecondary education.¹¹



Source: Texas Workforce Investment Council ¹²

Non-federally funded adult education and literacy programs

Several independent adult education providers in Texas are neither funded by the federal government nor supervised by the state. These programs use numerous public and private

funding streams. Many providers are community-based organizations that provide skills training and services such as health literacy and financial literacy, in addition to ABE and ESL services.¹³ Community-based organizations, in some cases, partner with federally funded ABE programs, which provide the basic education and ESL teachers.¹⁴

Limited data exist on the number of students served through these programs and whether or not students complete their course sequence or meet their academic and career goals.

ABE System Challenges Hinder Texas from Closing the Skills Gap

Texas lags behind the rest of the country in moving Texans with lower-skill and lower-educational attainment into targeted skill and vocational training that could lead them towards a more stable and family-supporting career. The following section outlines several challenges Texas must overcome to provide adequate career pathways at large scale.

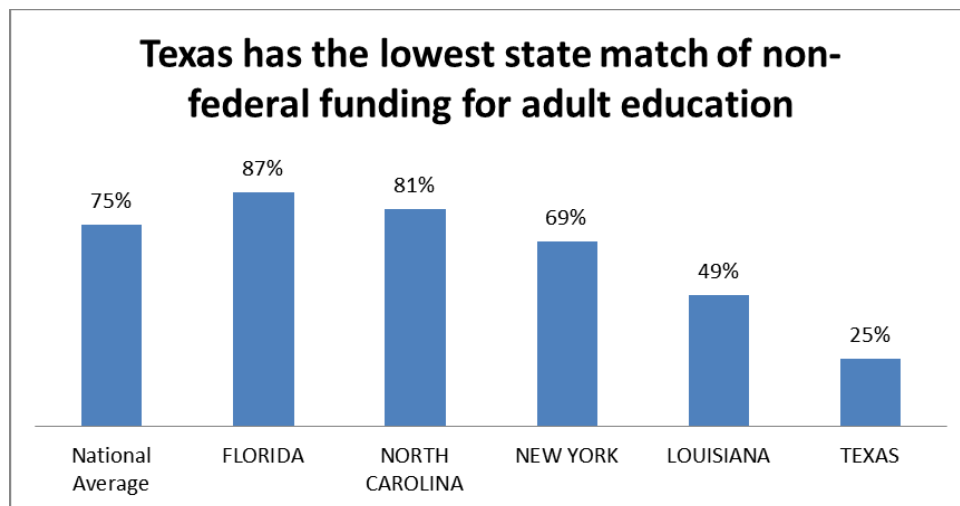
Texas Underinvests in Adult Basic Education

The U.S. Department of Education funds ABE in Texas through the WIA Title II– Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA). States are required to match these funds with a minimum of 25 percent in non-federal funding. Texas has the lowest state match—25 percent—in non-federal funding among all states.¹⁵

Adult Basic Education Funding in Texas 2010-12			
	Federal	Texas Match (~25%)	Total Funding
FY2010	\$48.3M	\$13.9M	\$62.2M
FY2011	\$53.6M	\$13.9M	\$67.4M
FY2012	\$53.1M	\$11.4M	\$64.4M

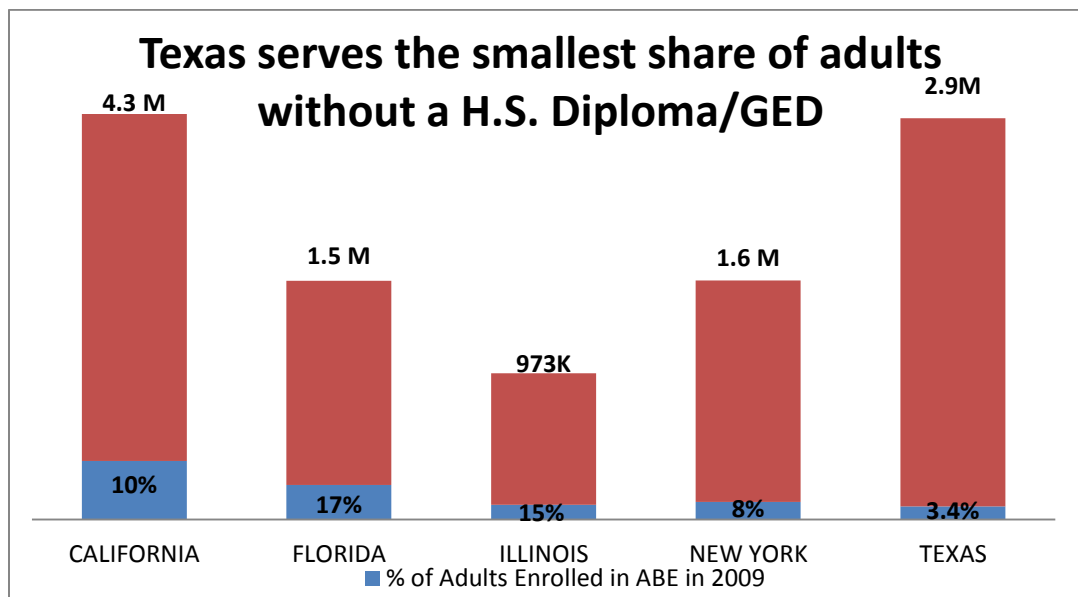
Data Source: Texas Education Agency (TEA), Adult Basic Education, TEA, 2013.
[http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=7266&menu_id=814#Funding Information](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=7266&menu_id=814#Funding%20Information)

As shown below, Texas lags behind its neighbors and peer states in its investment to support literacy and skills attainment.



Data Source: US Dept. of Education, Office of Adult and Vocational Education (OVAE), 2009-10.

The 55 federally funded service providers served just fewer than 100,000 students in 2010-11.¹⁶ Although 4.3 million Texans qualified for adult education services in 2011, this population is expected to nearly double by 2040.¹⁷ Despite the large number of adult Texans without a high school diploma, Texas ranks 50th for the lowest amount spent per adult ages 18-64 without a high school diploma/GED.¹⁸ In 2009-10, Texas spent an average of \$5.78 per adult age 18-64 without a high school diploma/GED, compared to the national average of \$66.20.¹⁹



Data Source: US Dept. of Education, Office of Adult and Vocational Education (OVAE) and Working Poor Families Project from ACS 2009 for Adults without HS/GED

Non-federally funded literacy programs in Texas lack a statewide platform

The lack of a statewide platform for non-federal literacy programs makes it difficult to assess program performance and outcomes while also posing obstacles for students to transition between those programs into postsecondary education or vocational training programs. Furthermore, not all students have access to the same quality programs that may be available in certain parts of the state. Texas can better close the skills gap by bringing together a cohesive adult basic education and literacy system under one state agency such as the Texas Workforce Commission. The state agency charged with overseeing ABE and literacy programs in Texas should ensure that all programs, systems, and metrics across the state are aligned to move adult learners towards their educational and career goals.

Texas lacks a centralized data system for all ABE and literacy programs

Texas' current data system is unable to capture the full scope of adult education services in Texas due to a lack of centralized data on non-federally funded ABE and literacy programs. Although a robust level of information is available on federally funded adult education programs through the Texas Educating Adults Management System (TEAMS), sparse data is available for non-federally funded programs. TEAMS data is only available to the 55 federally-funded providers and representatives from Texas LEARNS. Federally-funded providers use TEAMS to enter specific information pertaining to federal accountability reporting requirements. Although a comprehensive set of data exists for federally-funded providers, the Sunset review of the Texas Education Agency found that a lack of data sharing between ABE providers and workforce

development programs, including the Texas Workforce Commissions TWIST database, due to privacy concerns may result in unnecessary re-testing of students who are referred between programs.²⁰

Non-federally funded providers are not required to track or report performance data to the state resulting in local data systems that are disconnected and unaligned to each other or towards the state's overall goals. While very little data exist on these programs, the Texas On Line Database (TOLD), an initiative of the Houston Center for Literacy, funded through the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning at Texas A&M University, is building a statewide database to track student performance data for non-federally funded literacy programs.

Traditional sequence of ABE results in lower completion

While there is no one-size fits all approach to adult basic education and literacy programs, many students aspiring to a obtain a postsecondary degree or credential may encounter a lengthy process to reach their goal, with more than half (55 percent) of GED recipients in Texas needing developmental education—remedial coursework to prepare students for college-level math, reading, and writing.²¹ Texas policymakers should promote a stronger adult basic education and literacy system in the state to address student-specific academic and career goals, especially for aspiring college students who may need additional preparation for postsecondary or other career and technical education in addition to their basic skills training.

Big GED Changes Hitting The States in 2014

The GED Testing Service will launch a new computer-based GED assessment next year, which Texas will use beginning January 2014, except in correctional institutions. Correctional institutions will continue to offer paper-based testing until they are ready to administer computer-based testing, but they must transition by January 2017. TEA is currently in the process of identifying existing GED testing centers for early adoption. The new test will continue to provide a high school credential, but will also measure college and career readiness, or “high school curriculum knowledge and preparedness for entering college or a career.” The test will provide a complete score report with additional information for the test-taker. The new computer-based exam will no longer be available by pencil and paper after January 2014. This requirement could serve as a barrier to obtain a GED as some low-skilled adults may not have the adequate computer literacy skills.² Also, it is questionable whether current GED testing centers will be able to offer a computer-based test without significant new costs. According to a Texas regional- GED Examiner, upgrading to a computer-based test will cost approximately \$15,000 per testing site.

The price for each new GED test will increase considerably for students. However, individual states will determine the actual fee to the individual test-taker.³ In Texas, local programs determine GED testing fees, which currently vary between \$50 and \$120, and the state does not provide a subsidy for the fee. Subsidies through community college testing centers and some donor-funded scholarships are available to test takers.⁴ Even though TWIC anticipates that the new fee will result in a considerable increase for test-takers in Texas, they are unable to provide an exact estimate of local impact due to the variability in provider’s local charges.⁵

Although the Texas Education Agency considered creating an alternative high school equivalency exam to be offered in both paper- and computer-based formats, the State Board of Education has directed the agency to implement the new GED 2014 test rather than pursue a new Texas-based test.

¹ Singleton-Rickman, Lisa, New GED test coming in 2014, TimesDaily.com, 2011. Web. <http://timesdaily.com/stories/New-GED-test-coming-in-2014,185687>

² Carol Clymer, Working Poor Families Project, “Preparing for the New GED Test: What to Consider Before 2014, December 2012. Web. http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/WPFP-fall-brief_2012.pdf

³ GED MEMO, Pricing for the New GED Test (2014), 2012. Retrieved from: GEDtesting.com

⁴ Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), Texas Interagency Literacy Council Report (TILC), 2012, p. 42. Web.

<http://www.twc.state.tx.us/svcs/adultlit/interagency-literacy-report.pdf>

⁵ TILC, p.42.

Promising Practices

Despite the challenges and underfunding of ABE in Texas, a few of Texas’ adult basic education providers are moving the state forward in getting adult learners into jobs and careers—faster and more effectively. Many programs achieve better student outcomes by braiding numerous funding sources and applying evidence-based approaches that reduce their time-to-completion and successfully transition them into targeted skills training or a postsecondary degree or certificate program. The most effective programs combine expertise across departments and agencies, and leverage funding from multiple sources to provide a system that best serves the adult learner and creates a pathway to a certificate or credential and a stable career. The following section outlines programs that have demonstrated positive outcomes for adult learners.

Accelerate Texas

To get more ABE students to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education, THECB created Accelerate Texas, formerly known as the ABE Innovation Grants (ABE-IGs). The program awards competitive grants to community colleges and public technical institutions that focus on “vocational English as a second language, vocational adult basic education, workforce readiness, entry-level job skills training, and Level 1 certificate training”.²² Accelerate Texas grantees are required to work with local workforce boards and employers to identify local labor market needs.²³ To date, THECB has made ABE grants to 14 community colleges across the state.

Accelerate Texas weaves Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) into ABE programs administered at grantee institutions. The Texas version of the I-BEST approach focuses on integrating workforce training or career pathway programs with basic skills instruction, moving students more quickly through basic education and toward certification.²⁴ While grantee institutions use various models to integrate technical training and basic skills, the major program delivery approaches include:

- **Concurrent enrollment:** Students are concurrently enrolled in a technical certificate course and a Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL), ESL, or GED support course.
- **Contextualization:** Accelerate Texas grantees couple career pathway programs with contextualized training where the subject matter from a content course is introduced into the structure of a basic skills lesson.
- **Integration:** Content courses integrate basic skills into the structure of the course curriculum.

Pre- and post-test results from the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) demonstrate that students enrolled in career training along with basic skills support classes are making greater academic gains compared to students who are enrolled in career training without basic skills support. For example, the average cumulative TABE pre- and post-test scores for students not enrolled in a basic skills support class were unchanged, while scores for those enrolled in a support class increased 3.2 percent.²⁵ Pre- and post-test reading scores for those enrolled only in career training without a basic skills support course dropped 2.2 percent while scores for students enrolled in the basic skills support class increased by 2.2 percent.²⁶ Student scores in math and language also improved more significantly for those enrolled in the support classes with an increase of 4.5 percent in math and 3 percent in language.²⁷ This compares to an increase of only a 1.9 percent in math and 0.03 percent in language for students not enrolled in the support classes.²⁸

The Workforce & Education Readiness Continuum

The Workforce and Education Readiness Continuum is a partnership between 11 Austin-area adult basic education and literacy providers, workforce development organizations, and other community-based service providers. The partnership, funded by the City of Austin, focuses on coordinating literacy services, adult basic education, job readiness and career planning. Adult learners accessing services through the WERC partnership benefit from a more cohesive set of services, including a comprehensive assessment and placement of each student in the appropriate program depending on the student’s career and academic goals. Additionally, the WERC partnership provides a career pathway framework to ensure that adult learners aspiring to obtain a postsecondary degree or credential are connected to college preparatory programs, including instruction and preparation for college assessment examinations. WERC leverages

the existing expertise and community ties of its partners to create a “no wrong door” policy to assist individuals at whatever level they are at, ranging from adult literacy to occupational training and job placements. As participants progress through the continuum, they will be introduced to the next WERC partner and service in their journey to gainful employment and self-sufficiency.

Dropout Recovery Pilot Program

In 2008, TEA created the Dropout Recovery Pilot Program to support students who have dropped out of school and want to earn a high school diploma or demonstrate college readiness to pursue their postsecondary education. Students are able to demonstrate college readiness by earning a GED, passing a Texas Success Initiative approved instrument, or earning college credit in a core course. The program is designed to have maximum flexibility for students by providing child care and transportation, weekend and evening classes, online courses, and open entry and exit from the program. The program is funded through a pay-for-performance model. Grantees are paid for Average Daily Attendance (ADA), but may earn up to \$2,000 per student; \$1,000 can be earned for meeting benchmarks and another \$1,000 per student can be earned for students earning a diploma or demonstrating college readiness.

Texas invested \$21 million in the Dropout Recovery program from 2008-2011. Unfortunately, the 2011 Texas Legislature cut funding for the program for the 2012-13 biennium.

The public costs associated with a high school dropout over 40 years—including lost tax revenues, increased costs of healthcare, criminal justice services, and welfare benefits—is nearly \$75,000, which is the amount the state can save for each TDRP graduate.²⁹ Based on these savings, the program has an expected return of about \$95 million in net public benefits for all students served.

Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD- Training Plus GED Program

The Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD Training Plus GED Program was a grantee of the Texas Dropout Recovery Program. In 2007, Pharr San Juan-Alamo ISD, in collaboration with South Texas College (STC), started the College, Career & Technology Academy (CCTA) to enable non-graduates to earn their high school diploma. When CCTA first opened students who were seniors the previous year and did not graduate because of a lack of three credits or because they did not pass exit-level TAKS had the opportunity to earn a high school diploma. In January 2008, CCTA began to serve young adults up to the age of 26. This was done with funding from House Bill 1137, which targets support for enrollment of older students and recovered dropouts. CCTA and STC staff designed a “mini-mester” course that students could take for STC credit or certification after finishing CCTA requirements.

¹ Campus for non-graduating seniors and recovered dropouts: <http://www.lonestar.edu/abeinnovation.htm>

Recommendations for Improving and Expanding Adult Basic Education and Literacy Programs in Texas

The adult basic education system can provide opportunities to many Texans looking to better their career prospects, find stable employment, and earn a better wage. Below are specific recommendations to enhance the quality of adult basic education and literacy programs to meet the needs of individual students and ensure that adult learners move through programs more efficiently and effectively.

Promote career pathways and bridge programs to reach statewide scale

While GED attainment is a worthy goal, Texas should not focus solely on the GED as an end goal for the state's ABE program.

Texas can promote career pathways and student success by expanding research-based delivery models that have successfully moved students through ABE programs into postsecondary education and into higher-skilled work. State policymakers should continue to support student success in the following ways:

- Adopt a system-wide definition for career pathways to promote innovative practices that have proved successful in moving adult learners into postsecondary education and stable employment. Specifically, Texas' adult basic education, workforce development, and community college system should develop a common definition for career pathway and bridge programs that combine work and learning, including adopting the I-BEST approach or similar models,³⁰
- Restore funding for the Texas DropOut Recovery Program;
- Increase funding for student support models such as those that implement student cohort models or learning communities;
- Support ABE programs that use a case management model of academic advising to ensure that student needs are addressed;
- Continue support for programs that offer flexible scheduling, including evenings and weekends; and
- Support funding for transportation and quality child care.

Increase enrollment in Texas' ABE and literacy programs

Texas policymakers should focus on increasing the number of adult learners enrolled in ABE programs around the state. To achieve greater capacity and serve more adult learners the Texas Legislature should increase the state match of funds by 15 percent, for a total of a 40 percent state match, for adult basic education and literacy programs. TEA reports an average annual cost of services per students between \$500 and \$600. Increasing the state match of funds to 40 percent would serve 36,000 – 43,000 additional students.

In addition to increasing state funds, the state agency charged with overseeing adult education and literacy programs should ensure that all federal funds, including incentive grants and state leadership funds, are used locally to serve more students and encourage innovation in program delivery.

Require state agency charged with oversight of the Texas ABE program to set clear goals for adult basic education and literacy

The Sunset Commission report recommends moving ABE oversight from the Texas Education Agency to the Texas Workforce Commission to improve the administration and effectiveness of ABE programs in Texas. While it is important to ensure that the agency charged with overseeing ABE is equipped to monitor and administer the funds and programs, certain requirements should be made clear for the agency selected to oversee Texas' ABE programs, including:

- Seek input from all interested stakeholders including both federally and non-federally funded adult basic education and adult literacy providers from independent school districts, colleges and universities, and non-profit community-based organizations;

- Collect additional state-designed program metrics to track performance, including specific metrics on educational attainment and employment outcomes for adult basic education and literacy students;
- Require more robust employer and industry representation on the Adult Education State Advisory Council;
- Require ABE programs to use individualized assessment tools to ensure participants are appropriately placed in courses that will address their specific training needs and put them on a path to reach their academic and career goals;
- Ensure that state and federal funds are issued through a competitive grant process open to all providers in the state. Grantees should be required to collect and report program data that effectively measures student performance and outcomes. Programs that cannot demonstrate positive results for their students should be discontinued and the funds allocated to service providers to encourage local innovation; and
- Ensure that GREAT centers (Getting Results Educating Adults in Texas)—regional ABE service managers—are funded proportionally to their size and service levels. GREAT centers provide professional development and teacher training centers in each region. The centers are funded as federal State Leadership activities by the Texas Education Agency and Texas LEARNS.

Align data systems to measure student progress

Texas policymakers should ensure a centralized and streamlined system of collecting and publishing important data on student outcomes in both federally and non-federally funded adult education programs. One approach to improve data collection and reporting is to support the integration of the TEAMS data collected by TEA and the TWIST data collected by TWC. This would ensure that policymakers and other education stakeholders would have access to more timely data on employment at entry and employment post-exit of ABE students.

State policymakers also should support the statewide expansion, integration and alignment of the Texas On Line database for non-federally funded programs with the TEAMS and TWIST databases. Specifically, state and federal dollars should be allocated to train and provide technical assistance to non-federally funded adult literacy providers in the state so they can begin the process of collecting and tracking data on their program performance and outcomes.

Allow multiple pathways for adult learners to obtain a secondary credential

Texas policymakers should ensure that adult learners in Texas have additional options to achieve high school equivalency beyond completing the GED. Specifically, Texas policymakers should ensure the following:

- Support the creation and implementation of an online TEA high school equivalency exam to increase access for students in underserved areas;
- Classify completers of the Texas high school equivalency exam as high school graduates; and
- Support dropout recovery programs that enable recent high school dropouts to fulfill curriculum requirements for high school graduation.

For more information or to request an interview, please contact Alexa Garcia-Ditta at garciaditta@cphp.org or 512.823.2873.

About CPPP

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Endnotes

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Note: Wisconsin and Illinois developed specific definitions for their bridge programs to ensure system-wide changes needed to introduce innovative strategies into the mainstream operations of local institutions.