

COORDINATION OF ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

- Literacy is not defined in state statute; for the purposes of the committee study, the following national definition of adult literacy, which is incorporated in federal legislation, is used:
 - 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.

- There is significant need, nationally and in Connecticut, for the services provided through adult literacy programs. A recent regional study estimated Connecticut's unmet demand for adult basic literacy skills instruction and English as a Second Language (ESL) services at 181,000 individuals in 2002.

- Connecticut's adult literacy activities are subject to state and federal mandates.
 - The main state laws are those concerning the free public adult education system overseen by the state education department and carried out by school districts.
 - The primary federal legislation on adult literacy is the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), which provides block grants to states for adult basic and secondary education and ESL, family literacy, and workplace literacy programs.

- Adult literacy services in Connecticut, as in other states, are not delivered through one program administered by a single state agency. Instead, they are a collection of programs delivered primarily through adult education, higher education, and workforce development systems.

- The adult education system, Connecticut's primary resource for adult literacy services, currently includes 71 different providers, most of which are school districts and regional education service centers but also are community-based and volunteer organizations (Literacy Volunteers) as well as state and nonprofit agencies.
 - The system served almost 32,000 adult learners in FY 05 with a total budget of about \$40 million in federal, state, and local funding.

- Effective adult literacy activities are a key priority of the state's strategic workforce investment plan. The state network of one-stop career centers operated by regional workforce investment boards, in partnership with the Connecticut labor department, are an important access point to services for adults in need of improved literacy skills, particularly participants in the state Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) welfare-to-work program.

Key Points

- Information on resources within the workforce investment and welfare systems for adult literacy services (other than public adult education programs) is not readily available; it is also difficult to track adult literacy service referrals and outcomes since the information systems for adult education, workforce investment, and JFES are not linked.
- The state's community colleges, through their non-credit workforce development programs, provide job-related education and training courses that may include basic literacy and English language instruction. Like many higher education institutions, the community colleges also make developmental education (remedial) courses available to help prepare students for college-level work. Information on the resources available within the community college system for adult literacy services is being developed by program review committee staff.
- Responsibility for coordinating adult literacy programs and services across systems is not formally assigned to any state agency.
 - The state education department manages and promotes consistency across adult education programs and has periodically undertaken special projects to improve, expand, and better coordinate basic literacy services throughout the state.
 - Some broad policy coordination is achieved through planning activities of the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission (CETC), the state-level workforce investment board, and service delivery is integrated to some extent through the state's one-stop centers.
 - Issues related to coordination of adult literacy resources and services are being addressed at present by an ad hoc group of various state agency staff and stakeholder group representatives formed by the state education department, the Statewide Workforce Coordinating Committee, and two private, community-based groups -- the Greater Hartford Literacy Council and the Coalition for a Working Connecticut.
- Accountability for results is a key provision of federal adult education and workforce investment legislation and states are required to regularly collect and report on certain performance data related to adult literacy as well as employment and training activities.
 - The state education department established its own internal accountability process that collects demographic and outcome information for all programs it funds, including adult education, in the late 1980s.
 - Since 1999, state law has required CETC to prepare an annual report card on the effectiveness of education and job training programs, including adult education, in the state.

Key Points

- Initial program review staff analysis of the adult education program participant data compiled by the state education department shows:
 - Most adult education program participants (69 percent) are members of minority groups and just over half (52 percent) are between the ages of 25 and 59.
 - The greatest portion of adult students, 45 percent, attend ESL classes; 17 percent are enrolled in adult basic education courses and the remainder are participating in adult secondary education instruction/high school completion programs.
 - Many adult education participants are employed (around 43 percent) and about one-third are unemployed but seeking employment, while approximately 23 percent do not have jobs and are not seeking employment.
 - More than 80 percent of adult education participants attend class at least 12 hours per year and, on average, students attend 85 hours per year. In effect, about one adult student in five, drops out (attends less than 12 hours).
 - Most participants in adult basic education and ESL classes demonstrate gains in literacy skills, as measured through a standardized assessment process, and many who complete their instructional programs advance one or more levels of proficiency.