



COLORADO
Department of Education

Adult Education and Literacy Grant Program Evaluation Report

Submitted to:

Office of the Governor
Colorado State Board of Education
Colorado House Education Committee
Colorado Senate Education Committee
The Joint Budget Committee of the Colorado General Assembly
Colorado Senate Business, Labor, and Technology Committee
Colorado House Business, Labor, Economic, and Workforce Development Committee

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Executive Summary

Purpose

In an effort to meet workforce, educational attainment, and poverty-reduction goals, the state of Colorado authorized the Adult Education and Literacy Act (AELA) Grant Program in 2014 (HB 14-1085). On July 8, 2020, SB 20-009, “Concerning Expansion of the Adult Education and Literacy Grant Program” was passed. The bill expanded the AELA grant program beyond its original focus on employment to include services which also:

- assist adults in attaining basic literacy and numeracy skills that lead to additional skill acquisition and which may lead to postsecondary credentials and employment and
- assist adults in providing academic support to their own children or to children for whom they provide care.

The Office of Adult Education Initiatives (AEI) at the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) manages the AELA grant.

Learners Served

In 2021-2022, the AELA grant program served 2,272 learners. Eligible learners are at least 17 years old; are not enrolled in a public or private secondary school; lack a high school diploma or its equivalent or need English language instruction; or lack sufficient mastery of the basic literacy and numeracy skills necessary to enable the person to function effectively in the workplace. Grant recipients (grantees) serve areas along the Front Range, the Western Slope, and in the Southwest corner of the state. Grantees are adult education providers, which may include school districts, community-based nonprofit agencies, state institutions of higher education, libraries and Indian tribes.

Outcomes

To evaluate AELA impact, grantees measure performance outcome goals for each learner and progress towards those goals through progress measures. Performance outcomes include post-secondary entrance and credential attainment, post-test educational functioning level gain, and obtaining employment, among others; performance outcomes and progress measures are listed in detail in [Appendix I](#). Individual learners may meet multiple performance outcomes.

In 2021-22, the first year of the AELA 2021-2025 grant cycle, the 2,272 AELA learners achieved 1,338 total performance outcomes. Learners achieved 688 employment-related outcomes, 435 test-based outcomes, 91 secondary credential or equivalent outcomes, and 73 postsecondary outcomes, among other categories of outcomes. Learners also met progress measures associated with these performance outcomes. Because some learners achieved multiple outcomes, the total outcomes achieved, 1,338, when compared to the funds expended for the year, \$1,234,437, returns a per outcome cost of \$922.59. Per learner funding equated to a state average of \$543.32.

Conclusion

The expansion of the Adult Education and Literacy Act provided AEI and grantees with the opportunity to better serve learners through expanded services focusing on two-generation strategies (which ensure that adult learners’ education has benefic impacts on the children that they care for) and civic opportunities in addition to workforce and educational attainment goals. Because of this, hundreds of learners were able to attain employment, a living wage job, and secondary credentials, allowing for increased socio-economic mobility for themselves and their families.



The Adult Education and Literacy Act Program

Introduction

The Adult Education and Literacy Act (AELA) was enacted in 2014. The Act established the AELA Grant Program that awards state funds for public and private nonprofit adult education and literacy programs. With the passage of SB20-009, “Concerning Expansion of the Adult Education and Literacy Grant Program” on July 8, 2020, the AELA program expanded in several ways. Previously, AELA-funded programs had to partner with at least one local education provider, one postsecondary education or training provider, and one adult workforce development provider. Since 2020, programs can apply for funds as either an Educational Attainment Partnership, a collaboration that assists adults in attaining basic literacy and numeracy skills that lead to additional skill acquisition, or a Workforce Development Partnership, a collaboration that assists adults in attaining basic literacy and numeracy skills leading to additional skill acquisition, postsecondary credentials, and employment.

Previously, there were seven outcomes AELA learners worked towards under the grant. With the revision of the law and its emphasis on additional measures of adult learner progress towards educational and workforce goals, additional performance outcomes and associated progress measures were added to the menu of options for grantees. The categories of performance outcomes and associated progress measures are listed below; new categories for 2021-22 are starred. Please see [Appendix I](#) for a complete detailed list of performance outcomes and progress measures.

- Postsecondary entrance
- Postsecondary credential attainment
- Obtaining employment or employment in an in-demand sector or industry
- Post-test educational functioning level (EFL) gain
- Secondary credential or equivalent attainment
- Earning a livable wage¹ or leaving public assistance*
- Military entrance*
- Work-based learning completion*
- Civic engagement*
- Two-generation strategies*
- Wrap-around services*

Obtaining adult or postsecondary education, certificates, or training is a proven strategy in poverty reduction. Research consistently demonstrates that obtaining additional education after high school results in increased socioeconomic mobility and decreased instances of unemployment. This is further supported by national and state-wide employment data, which indicates that by 2025, two-thirds of all jobs will require some level of postsecondary education or technical skill training. Approximately 47% of Colorado’s jobs are classified as “middle-skill,” requiring some level of postsecondary education or training, but not mandating a four-year degree. As only 36% of Colorado workers have the training necessary to fill these positions, adult education providers are positioned to connect adult learners with the education needed to pursue in-demand careers while promoting equity and socio-economic mobilityⁱ.

¹ Livable wage is defined in the [2020 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report](#) as meeting Tier 1 wages (\$25.88 per hour) for a family of three with two adults—one working—and one child; or Tier 2 wages (\$13.43 per hour) for an individual.



Before Colorado can meet its workforce, educational attainment, and poverty-reduction goals, the state must address the need for adult education. Among adult Coloradans, approximately 250,000 individuals lack a high school diploma or its equivalentⁱⁱ. In addition, as most postsecondary programs and employment opportunities assume a certain level of basic literacy and numeracy, many adult learners must first improve these skills to effectively participate in postsecondary education or the 21st-century workforce. Developing these skills also allows adult learners to better support their children's education, which is essential for present and future workforce development and socioeconomic mobility in Colorado.

To successfully execute the mission of adult education and literacy programs in Colorado, extensive collaboration is required among agencies and organizations that support adult, postsecondary, and K-12 education, training and credential attainment, workforce development, economic development, and human services. Large scale collaboration ensures that these programs will enable organizations to effectively serve more learners, leading to improved educational and economic outcomes for multiple generations of Coloradans.

Grant Competition

In Spring 2021, the AEI Office held a competitive Request for Application process to award four years of AELA funding to eligible providers. The grant cycle spans from July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2025. The awarded grant funds are distributed to meet the following goals, defined in SB 20-009:

Grantees applied as either Education Attainment Partnerships or Workforce Development Partnerships. An

To enable more low-skilled, low-income adults attain the basic literacy and numeracy skills that they lack so that they may improve their own and the next generation's abilities to participate in the current and future in-demand sectors of employment, function effectively in supporting and advocating for their children's education, and actively participate in society.

Education Attainment Partnership (EAP) is a collaboration that assists adults in attaining basic literacy and numeracy skills that lead to additional skill acquisition and may lead to postsecondary credentials and employment. At a minimum, EAPs consist of at least one adult education provider (Community-based nonprofit agency or organization, Indian Tribe or Nation, Library, Literacy Council or other Literacy Institute, Business or Business Association, Volunteer Literacy Organization, Local Work Force Board, or One-Stop Partner) that partners with at least one elementary or secondary school or school district, a public or private institution of higher education, a local district college, or an area technical college. A Workforce Development Partnership (WDP) is a collaboration that assists adults in attaining basic literacy and numeracy skills leading to additional skill acquisition, postsecondary credentials, and employment. Workforce Development Partnerships include one adult education provider (School District, Board of Cooperative Services, State Institution of Higher Education, Local District College, Area Technical College, Community-Based Nonprofit Agency or Organization, Indian Tribe or Nation, Consortium of Adult Education Providers, Charter School, Library, Literacy Council or Other Literacy Institute, Business or Business Association, Volunteer Literacy Organization, Local Work Force Board, or One-Stop Partner), one postsecondary education or training provider, and one workforce development provider.

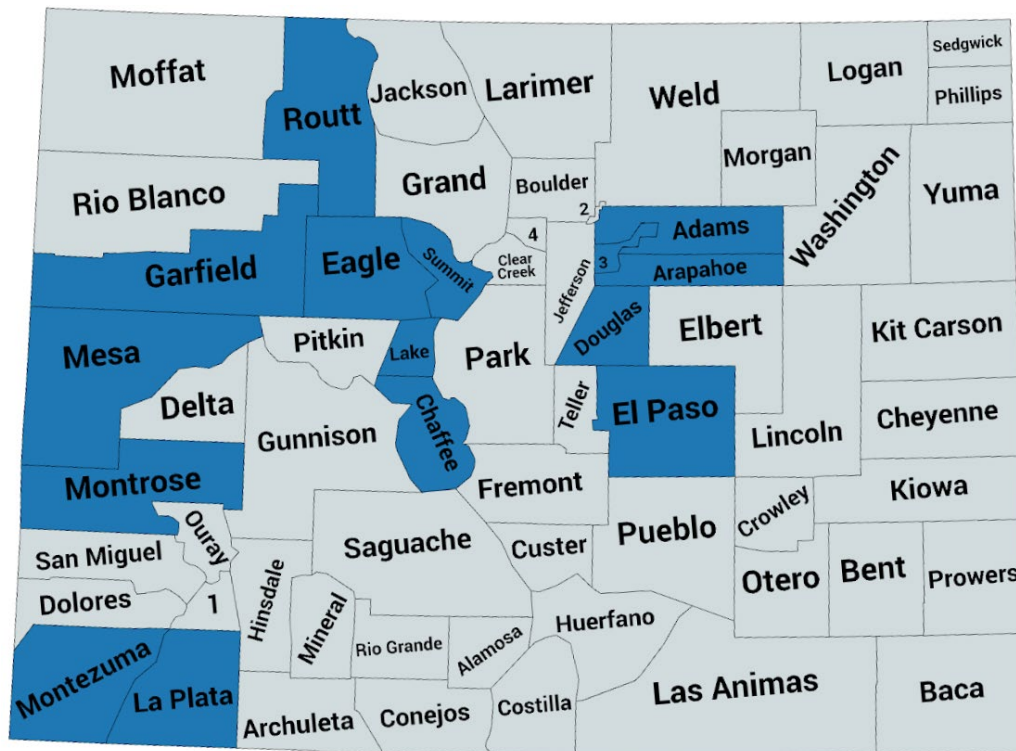
Seventeen adult education programs across the state submitted applications and 14 were deemed fundable by an independent scoring review. For program year 2021-22, 14 AELA grantees serving 15 counties across Colorado were awarded a total of \$1,456,792 in combined AELA funding, with \$820,884 in state funding and \$635,908 in time-limited federal State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) to specifically serve adults

disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 public health emergency. In year one of the grant, all grant recipients received the amounts they requested in their applications. Awards ranged from \$76,757 to \$165,145.

Grantee Makeup

In 2021-22, the 14 grant recipients served areas along the Front Range, the Western Slope, and in the Southwest corner of the state.

Figure A: Counties served by AELA Programs, 2021-22



The 14 grantees represented six community-based organizations, five community colleges/institutions of higher education, two school districts, and one library. There were 8 Education Attainment Partnership grantees and 6 Workforce Development Partnership grantees.