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ABSTRACT

This document suggests the following eight model indicators of quality in adult education programs: (1) learners demonstrate progress toward attainment of basic skills and competencies that support their educational needs; (2) learners advance in the program or complete program requirements that allow them to continue their education or training; (3) an ongoing, participatory planning process exists that is guided by evaluation and based on a written plan that considers community demographics, needs, resources, and economic and technological trends; (4) curriculum and instruction is geared to individual learning styles and levels of needs; (5) an ongoing staff development process exists that considers the specific needs of staff, offers training in instruction, and includes opportunities for practice and systematic follow-up; (6) students' needs for support services are identified and either provided for or referred to other agencies; (7) population in the community identified in the Adult Education Act as needing services is served; and (8) students remain in the program long enough to meet their education needs. The document also contains the following: an overview; definitions of quality indicators and performance standards; a description of the process used to develop the indicators; sample measures for each indicator; a list of six resources; and lists of focus group participants and state directors of adult education. (CML)

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Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs

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Office of Vocational and Adult Education
U.S. Department of Education

July 1992



Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs

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Foreword

For more than 25 years, the Adult Education Act has supported states' efforts to provide lifelong learning opportunities for educationally disadvantaged adults. Adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) programs have allowed adult learners to reach their full potential as parents, workers, and citizens of their communities.

The National Literacy Act of 1991 renewed the federal commitment to adult education. Foremost among its priorities is the improvement of programs to ensure that educational services supported with federal funds are quality services. To this end, the National Literacy Act called for the development of indicators of program quality by the Secretary of Education that could be used by states and local programs as models by which to judge the effectiveness of their services.

The model indicators presented in this report fulfill that mandate. They were developed through a comprehensive process that included the participation of adult education administrators and practitioners, adult learners, researchers, and other experts in the field. They have taken into account the different conditions under which the broad array of local programs operate. Both the indicators themselves, and the process by which they were developed, can guide states as they develop and refine their own quality indicators in the coming year to meet the requirements of the National Literacy Act.

As a new century approaches, Americans will need higher levels of literacy than ever before. The National Literacy Act challenges all of us involved in adult education and literacy to make certain that this need is met. The model indicators represent a first and critical step in our efforts to define and promote quality in programs that serve as the foundation for ensuring that "every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a national global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship."

Betsy Brand
Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education



Contents

Foreword	i
Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs	v
Overview	1
Quality Indicators, Measures, and Performance Standards	2
Indicator Development Process	3
Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs	5
Promoting Program Improvement and Effectiveness	9
Resource Documents	10
Acknowledgments	11
Appendix 1: Focus Group Participants	13
Appendix 2: State Directors of Adult Education	17

Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs

Topic	Indicator
<i>Educational Gains</i>	#1 Learners demonstrate progress toward attainment of basic skills and competencies that support their educational needs.
	#2 Learners advance in the instructional program or complete program educational requirements that allow them to continue their education or training.
<i>Program Planning</i>	#3 Program has a planning process that is ongoing and participatory, guided by evaluation, and based on a written plan that considers community demographics, needs, resources, and economic and technological trends, and is implemented to the fullest extent.
<i>Curriculum and Instruction</i>	#4 Program has curriculum and instruction geared to individual student learning styles and levels of student needs.
<i>Staff Development</i>	#5 Program has an ongoing staff development process that considers the specific needs of its staff, offers training in the skills necessary to provide quality instruction, and includes opportunities for practice and systematic follow-up.
<i>Support Services</i>	#6 Program identifies students' needs for support services and makes services available to students directly or through referral to other educational and service agencies with which the program coordinates.
<i>Recruitment</i>	#7 Program successfully recruits the population in the community identified in the Adult Education Act as needing literacy services.
<i>Retention</i>	#8 Students remain in the program long enough to meet their educational needs.



Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs

Overview

The Adult Education Act establishes the federal role in supporting the provision of basic skills instruction to educationally disadvantaged adults. The Act authorizes the U.S. Department of Education to provide basic grants to states that support local instruction to adults in adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) programs. The Act also promotes quality in state and local programs through requirements for program evaluation. The most recent amendments to the Act, embodied in the National Literacy Act of 1991, highlight the importance of program quality by requiring that

Within one year after the enactment of the National Literacy Act of 1991, the Secretary, in consultation with appropriate experts, educators and administrators, shall develop indicators of program quality that may be used by State and local programs receiving assistance under this title as models by which to judge the success of such programs, including success in recruitment and retention of students and improvement in the literacy skills of students. Such indicators shall take into account different conditions under which programs operate and shall be modified as better means of assessing program quality are developed (Section 361 (c) of the Adult Education Act).

In addition, the National Literacy Act requires that states develop and implement their own indicators of program quality to be used to evaluate programs assisted under this title "to determine whether such programs are effective, including whether such programs are successfully recruiting, retaining, and improving the literacy skills of the individuals served in such programs" (Section 331 [a][2] of the Adult Education Act). The indicators must be integrated into the state's evaluation system for local programs. States have until July 1993 to develop and implement their indicators.

This report presents the model indicators of program quality and describes the process by which they were developed. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, had responsibility for this process. Pelavin Associates, Inc., under contract to the Department, assisted by reviewing indicators already developed by various states; reviewing indicators and standards used in related federal programs; commissioning background papers by experts in the field; conducting meetings with experts, educators, and administrators; and conducting workshops for state directors of adult education who will be responsible for developing and implementing state indicators.

The model indicators developed through this process have taken into account the different conditions under which programs operate and will be modified as better means of assessing program quality are identified. Their primary purpose is to provide states and local programs with models by which to judge the success of their programs. These model indicators represent the elements that the Department, based on consultation with the field, views as essential to ensure high-quality services in adult education and literacy programs.

The Department gratefully acknowledges the invaluable contributions of the many educators, administrators, and experts—including adult learners—who assisted in this process.

Quality Indicators, Measures, and Performance Standards

The National Literacy Act specified that indicators were to be developed in the areas of recruitment, retention, and learning gains. In addition, the Department identified two general topic areas for which indicators were to be developed: program process and content, and student outcomes. *Program process and content* refers to components of the program that define how it operates, such as program planning, recruitment of students, intake, assessment, staff characteristics, curriculum and instructional content, materials and equipment, assessment of student progress, evaluation, and follow-up. *Student outcomes* refers to the impact of the program on students, such as learning gains and goal attainment.

To guide the development of the model indicators, the Department established a framework for the quality indicator development process. It was especially important to distinguish *quality indicators* from *measures* and *performance standards*. The three terms are often used interchangeably, yet they differ conceptually. Defining them clarified the development process and the meaning of a quality indicator.

Quality Indicator. A *quality indicator* is a variable that reflects effective and efficient program performance. Indicators were defined for each of the above topics.

Measures. A *measure* is defined as the data used to determine the quantitative level of performance. For example, retention may be measured by the number of hours students remain in the program.

Performance Standards. A *performance standard* defines a level of acceptable performance in terms of a specific numeric criterion. For example, a retention performance standard specifies a minimum number of hours of instruction per student. A standard may be established for a single point in time or to measure changes in performance over time.

To meet the requirements of the National Literacy Act, the Department limited its work to the development of model indicators of program quality, although some sample measures were also developed to clarify the quality indicator. States may select their own specific measures and standards of program performance after they have developed their own indicators of program quality.

Indicator Development Process

Using the definitions just described, the Department developed the model indicators of program quality through a seven-step process.

- Step 1: *Review of Current State Activity.* The Department first reviewed current state practices related to program quality, as reflected in state criteria for allocating funds to local programs, monitoring, and evaluation, and where applicable, state indicators of program quality. In addition, the Department reviewed the literature to identify all evaluations of state programs conducted since 1985 and then organized the quality indicators used in each of these documents by topic area. The results are reported in *Synthesis of State Quality Indicators for Adult Education Programs*.
- Step 2: *Review of Federal Programs.* Several other federal programs that support basic skills instruction are developing or already using indicators of program quality or performance standards. The Department reviewed the experience of programs funded under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program of the Hunger Prevention Act of 1988, and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Program of the Family Support Act of 1988. The results of this review are reported in *Quality Indicators for Adult Education Programs: Lessons Learned from Other Programs*.
- Step 3: *Commissioned Papers.* The Department obtained input from experts in the field through commissioned papers. Seven researchers, administrators, and practitioners were asked to write brief papers on the issues related to developing and implementing quality indicators from the perspective of their program area or organizational affiliation. The experts represented the three program areas funded under the Adult Education Act (ABE, ASE, and ESL) and the four main providers of instructional services (local educational agencies, community-based organizations, community colleges, and volunteer organizations). These papers have been compiled into a single document, *Program and Provider Perspectives on Developing Indicators of Program Quality*.
- Step 4: *Focus Groups.* The Department obtained the most comprehensive input from the field through four focus group meetings. Each group consisted of eight to ten persons and included state-level administrators, local program directors, teachers, adult learners, representatives of national organizations, and researchers. These individuals represented a broad array of programs (ABE, ESL, ASE, JOBS, JTPA) and providers (local educational agencies, community colleges, community-based organizations, literacy volunteer organizations, correctional education agencies, libraries).¹

¹ Appendix 1 lists all focus group participants.

The focus group participants were brought to Washington, D.C., to meet in four day-long sessions organized by Pelavin Associates. Staff from the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services were invited to observe these meetings.

Participants received the Department's indicator development framework, a preliminary list of draft indicators, the *Synthesis of Quality Indicators and Lessons Learned* reports, and the seven commissioned papers as background materials prior to the meeting. During discussions at the meetings, participants were asked to identify what they considered to be the most appropriate quality indicators and to prioritize their importance. Evaluation Research, Inc., under subcontract to Pelavin Associates, prepared a summary of the focus group proceedings.

Step 5: *Primary and Core Indicators*. Following the focus-group meetings, the Department synthesized the indicators recommended by the groups into a list of draft primary indicators. *Primary indicators* were those identified by at least three of the groups as being the essential elements of program quality that could be used to judge the success of adult education and literacy programs.²

The draft list contained 18 primary indicators of program quality. The Department selected *core indicators* of program quality from the list of primary indicators in accordance with the following criteria:

- ◆ The indicators are consistent with the requirements and goals of the Adult Education Act, as amended by the National Literacy Act.
- ◆ The indicators allow for valid and reliable measurement.
- ◆ The indicators are limited to a manageable number for state and local data collection capabilities.

An additional requirement for outcome measures was that they be capable of producing data that, at a minimum, can be aggregated across students within a program.

Step 6: *Review by State Directors*. The Department received further input on the draft indicators from state directors of adult education and other state and local staff at a series of four regional workshops. The purpose of this review was to help state directors lay the groundwork for developing and implementing their own state indicators of program quality.

At these workshops, over 70 participants discussed the draft indicators in small groups, recommended revisions, and rated the importance of the indicators, as the four focus groups had done. Participants recommended ways to clarify the indicator language, descriptions, and sample measures.

² Pelavin Associates, Inc., *Primary and Secondary Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs* (1992).

Step 7: *Model Indicators*. The Department revised the core indicators following the regional workshop discussions after reviewing the focus group minutes and other materials.

This comprehensive process produced eight model indicators of program quality. They include indicators of educational gains, recruitment, and retention, as required by the National Literacy Act, and indicators of program planning, curriculum and instruction, staff development, and support services. Included with each indicator is a brief clarifying description and several sample measures. The sample measures are intended to demonstrate ways in which state and local programs can effectively implement the model indicators.

Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs

Educational Gains

Indicator 1: *Learners demonstrate progress toward attainment of basic skills and competencies that support their educational needs.*

Programs support learners' educational needs by promoting progress toward attainment of linguistic, mathematics, communication, and problem-solving competencies. Progress is demonstrated by improvement in participants' abilities to understand, speak, read, and write English, perform basic computations, and function more effectively in the home, community, and workplace.

Sample Measures

- ◆ Standardized test score gains.
- ◆ Competency-based test score gains.
- ◆ Teacher reports of gains/improvements in communication competencies.
- ◆ Alternative assessment methods (e.g., portfolio assessment, student reports of attainment, or improvement in specific employability or life skills).

Indicator 2: *Learners advance in the instructional program or complete program educational requirements that allow them to continue their education or training.*

Programs promote progression to higher levels of learning within the adult education program or promote the attainment of skills required for learners to advance to other education or training opportunities. Progress is demonstrated by participants' attainment of a credential or movement into other programs or skill levels.

Sample Measures

- ◆ Rate of student advancement to a higher level of skill or competency in the adult education program.
- ◆ Attainment of a competency certificate.
- ◆ Attainment of a GED or high school diploma.

- ◆ Percent of students referred to other education or training programs.
- ◆ Percent of students entering other education or training programs.

Program Planning

Indicator 3: *Program has a planning process that is ongoing and participatory, guided by evaluation, and based on a written plan that considers community demographics, needs, resources, and economic and technological trends, and is implemented to its fullest extent.*

Planning begins with a written plan that proceeds from the program's mission statement. The planning process is ongoing, with mechanisms for revising plans on a regular basis, drawing on input from program evaluations. Planning is responsive to the needs of learners and the community through input from staff, students, and other appropriate programs and organizations in the community.

Sample Measures

- ◆ Existence of a planning document that specifies program goals and objectives and is regularly reviewed and revised.
- ◆ Openness of the program to community input through mechanisms such as an advisory board, staff meetings, student questionnaires, and public hearings (checklist); and frequency with which these sources are consulted.
- ◆ Evidence of use of documents in the planning process that have data on community needs (e.g. census data, needs assessments).
- ◆ Program plan matches community needs regarding location of classes, skills taught, and type of program services offered (e.g., sufficient ABE or basic literacy instruction).
- ◆ Existence of program evaluation component and evidence that evaluation feeds into the planning process.
- ◆ Congruence between planned program activities and actual activities.

Curriculum and Instruction

Indicator 4: *Program has curriculum and instruction geared to individual student learning styles and levels of student needs.*

Curriculum and instruction are individualized to meet the educational needs of students with diverse educational and cultural backgrounds. Since students have different learning styles and goals, instruction includes a variety of instructional approaches and strategies. To ensure the program's success in meeting student needs and capturing changes in those needs, student and staff input is obtained periodically.

Sample Measures

- ◆ Use of student assessment information to inform the instructional process.
- ◆ Existence of student goal-setting process linked to decisions on instructional materials, approaches, and strategies.
- ◆ Instructional content addresses educational needs of individual students.
- ◆ Instructional strategies used and frequency with which they are used, measured through observation or self-report.

Staff Development

Indicator 5: *Program has an ongoing staff development process that considers the specific needs of its staff, offers training in the skills necessary to provide quality instruction, and includes opportunities for practice and systematic follow-up.*

The program's staff development is designed to enable staff to provide quality instruction by meeting their specific training needs. Staff development begins with an orientation to the goals and philosophy of the program for new staff and continues with periodic training on effective practice. The process also includes input from staff and students to identify needs, and practice and follow-up to ensure effective instruction.

Sample Measures

- ◆ Presence or absence of preservice and in-service staff development opportunities that include a program overview, philosophy and goals of the program, and ongoing topics appropriate to adult learning.
- ◆ Existence of process for identifying staff development needs.
- ◆ Staff development based on known promising practices.
- ◆ Effective staff performance as measured by student ratings or observations of staff.
- ◆ Percent of staff needs met through training activities.
- ◆ Average hours of preservice and in-service staff development training received by staff.

Support Services

Indicator 6: *Program identifies students' needs for support service and makes services available to students directly or through referral to other educational and service agencies with which the program coordinates.*

Programs identify support service needs that affect participation in the program and promote student access to these services by referral to other agencies or direct provision of service. The program has formal or informal coordination linkages with other service providers to facilitate referral.

Sample Measures

- ◆ Presence of a process for identifying student support service needs.
- ◆ Presence of agreements or linkages between the program and child care and transportation providers.
- ◆ Number and type of support services provided.
- ◆ Number and type of support services to which students are referred.
- ◆ Percent of students obtaining specific needed services through the program or through referral.

Recruitment

Indicator 7: *Program successfully recruits the population in the community identified in the Adult Education Act as needing literacy services.*

The program recruits and enrolls the population in need of literacy services in the community as identified by needs assessments or demographic data.

Sample Measures

- ◆ Types of recruitment activities the program performs.
- ◆ Percentage of target population enrolled compared with state demographics.
- ◆ Percent of students enrolled with specific characteristics compared with the population with these characteristics in need of instruction in the service area.
- ◆ Percentage of target populations enrolled compared with state average.

Retention

Indicator 8: *Students remain in the program long enough to meet their educational needs.*

Retention is measured in light of student progress toward meeting their educational needs by time in program. Retention benchmarks are established that account for the type of program and learning gains expected for a given number of hours in the program.

Sample Measures

- ◆ Hours in program by type of program and learning gains achieved as measured by student progress.
- ◆ Percent of students returning to the program within specified time period.

Promoting Program Improvement and Effectiveness

The model indicators presented in this report fulfill the federal mandate of the National Literacy Act. As stated in the Act, they will be modified as better means of assessing program quality are developed. For now, however, they provide invaluable guidance to the states, local programs, the field, and policymakers at all levels.

For the states, the model indicators and the process used in their development will assist states as they develop indicators during the coming year.

For local programs, the model indicators offer a clear method for judging the success of their programs and promoting program improvement.

For the field, the model indicators offer a focus for basic and applied research, innovative practices, evaluative studies, and technical assistance efforts.

For policymakers, the model indicators provide better, more appropriate, and more accurate information on the effectiveness of the adult education and delivery system—information that will enhance their understanding of the value of this educational system.



Resource Documents

Pelavin Associates, Inc. prepared the following documents as part of this project and other activities performed under contract to the U.S. Department of Education. All documents are available through the Division of Adult Education and Literacy Clearinghouse U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20202-7240, (202) 205-9996.

Synthesis of State Quality Indicators for Adult Education Programs, by Larry Condelli, Judy Koloski, and Lenore Webb.

Quality Indicators for Adult Education Programs: Lessons Learned from Other Programs, by Larry Condelli and Mark Kutner.

Program and Provider Perspectives on Developing Indicators of Program Quality, by Mary Ann Corley, Connie Eichhorn, Donna Lane, Inaam Mansoor, Kevin Smith, Sondra Stein, and Mary Williams.

Quality Indicators, Measures and Performance Standards, by Larry Condelli.

Primary and Secondary Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs, by Larry Condelli.

Evaluation Framework for the State Adult Education Program, by Joel Sherman and Larry Condelli.



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