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California Postsecondary Education Commission

Public Higher Education Performance Accountability Framework Report:

Goal - Student Preparation

Measure: Adult Basic Skills Proficiency Levels

This report examines the various adult basic skills programs in operation in California, and explores program funding and structure, enrollment and demographics, and to the extent data allow, program outcomes. This measure is presented as part of the Commission's Performance Accountability Framework for California postsecondary education.

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The Commission advises the Governor and the Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. Its primary focus is to ensure that the State's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities. More information about the Commission is available at www.cpec.ca.gov.

Commission Report 08-05

Summary of Findings

- Adult Education offers a broad range of programs, from basic literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL), to home economics and courses for adults with disabilities.
- Students cite numerous reasons for taking courses, including job obtainment or retention, meeting personal goals, attaining citizenship, and other community or family motivations.
- ESL programs draw, by far, the most student enrollment of all Adult Education programs.
- State-funded adult school programs have an overall completion rate of 65%. Courses geared toward older adults and adults with disabilities have the highest completion rates. Basic education and ESL programs have lower completion rates.
- In 2006–07, federally funded adult education programs met nine of 11 performance targets. This is a substantial improvement from 2005–06, when only three out of 11 performance targets were met.
- Under legislative directive, the California Community Colleges will report limited outcome data on basic skills course completion: the first report was released in January 2008.

Adult Education in California

Adult basic skills are one measure in the Commission's accountability framework used to determine progress toward the goal of student preparation for postsecondary education. It is critically important for students to have basic language and math comprehension, both as a foundation for continued

learning and to enhance their growth and performance in the workforce. Because developing intellectual capital is so important, the state maintains a comprehensive system of adult education to enable adults to complete high school education and acquire basic employment skills.

The administration of adult education in California is a complex marriage of federally funded and state-funded programs. Most funding, about \$750 million, comes directly from state resources, specifically the Proposition 98 portion of the budget. These funds are allocated to school districts for programs at the 287 adult schools around the state. Programs include Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language (ESL), Career Technical Education, and Home Economics. In 2005–06 adult school programs enrolled more than 1.1 million students, with ESL classes having, by far, the greatest enrollment levels.

The federal government, under the direction of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), provides local agencies with \$84 million annually in grants for programs that improve basic literacy and English language proficiency. This program has reporting requirements that include performance targets assigned by the U.S. Department of Education based on enrollment and previous performance trends. The federal government also provides funds for some literacy and vocational programs at adult schools.

The California Community Colleges also provide adult basic skills and ESL education. In the fiscal year 2005–06, about \$31 million was allocated to community college districts based on the full-time equivalent student (FTES) participation in basic skills and ESL classes. An additional \$1.6 million was directed to faculty and staff development programs for improving ESL and basic skills instruction.

State-Funded Adult School Programs

The state-funded Adult School Programs, administered by K–12 school districts, cover a wide range of programs that promote academic achievement, workforce growth, personal and family improvement, and community involvement. The ten specific programs are:

- Adult Basic Education (ABE)
- English as a Second Language (ESL)
- High School Diploma or Adult Secondary Education including General Education Development certification programs (ASE/GED)
- Citizenship
- Career Technical Education
- Adults with Disabilities
- Health and Safety
- Parent Education
- Home Economics
- Older Adult

Public Higher Education Accountability Framework

The public's investment in higher education should be measured by outcomes. As the California's independent higher education planning and coordinating body, the Commission is in a unique position to assess performance without bias or conflict of interest. Under State law, the Commission is the only public agency with the data needed to assess student success across the University of California, California State University and California Community College systems. The Commission uses these data, coupled with other relevant State and national higher education data, to compile the performance assessment presented here. The Commission has put a priority on improving public confidence in the administration and delivery of public postsecondary education by increasing public knowledge of student outcomes, transparency of higher education decision making, and efficient achievement of a well educated and prepared workforce and population.

ESL courses have the largest enrollments, and combined with ASE/GED and ABE programs, account for 64% of all enrollments according to the California Department of Education Adult Education Office report *California Adult Education Student Progress and Goal Attainment*.

Ethnicity, Gender, and Age of Participants

Because of high enrollments in ESL programs, it is no surprise 54% of all participants in Adult School programs are Latino. Whites account for 24% of participants, Asians 12% and Blacks almost 6%. Latino students dominate ABE, ESL, ASE/GED, and Citizenship programs. White students account for a high proportion of students in Adults with Disabilities, Health and Safety, Home Economics, and Older Adult courses. Latinos and Whites have almost equal participation rates in Career Technical Education programs.

Adult school programs also have a gender gap. Women account for more than 60% of enrollments and are the majority in every program offered. The exception is in ASE/GED programs, where enrollment by women is only 2% higher than that for men. Health and Safety, Home Economics, Parent Education, and Older Adult programs have large gender gaps. Home Economics has the largest gap, with women accounting for more than 85% of enrollment.

Most Adult School participants are aged 16–40, with the largest group between 21 and 30. Programs dominated by a narrower age group are ASE/GED where most students are aged between 16 and 20, Parent Education (mostly aged 31–40), and Older Adult where most are 65 and older.

Community College Programs

The California Community Colleges annually enroll more than 93,000 students in credit and non-credit basic skills courses. While enrollment in for-credit basic skills courses are evenly dispersed across disciplines, most non-credit enrollment in basic skills is in ESL courses. There are three levels of ESL courses: ESL General, ESL College, and ESL Survival. ESL General accounts for 84% of total ESL enrollment. Of ESL General students, 39% took credit courses and 61% took non-credit courses.

DISPLAY 1 California Community Colleges Statewide Annual Credit and Non-Credit Full-Time Equivalent Students, 2006–2007

Type of Program	Basic Skills Credit FTES		Basic Skills Non-Credit FTES		Total	
Reading / Communication	8,574	16%	391	<1%	8,964	10%
Learning / Living Skills	9,187	17%	2,831	<1%	12,018	13%
Math	11,686	21%	1,043	<1%	12,728	14%
ESL	16,619	30%	23,719	62%	40,338	43%
Other (a)	8,880	16%	10,367	27%	19,248	21%
Total	54,946	100%	38,351	100%	93,297	100%

a — Includes Adult Basic Education and Adult Secondary Education.
Data compiled by California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office.

The enrollment data for community college Basic Skills programs do not include any information on the ethnicity, age, or gender of students. However, it seems likely that many ESL students are Latino and Asian.

Community College Program Outcomes

The community college system reports outcomes for Basic Skills and ESL programs through the Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges. This reporting structure was established by AB 1417 (Pacheco, Chapter 581, Statutes of 2004). The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges developed an initial framework for annual evaluations that covers a wide variety of educational outcomes. The first such report, *Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges: A Report to the Legislature, pursuant to AB 1417*, was released as a draft in October 2007, with the final version to be released in January 2008.

For basic skills and ESL instruction, these annual reports will include three performance indicators for each college and for the community college system as a whole:

- Annual successful course completion rate for credit basic skills courses
- Improvement rate for credit ESL courses
- Improvement rate for credit basic skills courses

For these measures, students who successfully completed an initial basic skills or ESL course were followed for three academic years to show how many students later completed a higher-level course. Preliminary numbers from the October 2007 report are shown in Display 2.

DISPLAY 2 Students Completing Courses at Least One Level Above Their Initial Course Within a Three-Year Period

Year of initial course	Number of Students	Annual % Change
2002–03	124,380	N/A
2003–04	121,048	-2.7%
2004–05	121,478	0.4%

The data show a slight decline in the number of students who completed a higher-level course. It would be misleading to draw conclusions from these data, particularly since the numbers are preliminary and outcomes were affected by a variety of factors in the early 2000s, such as reductions in course sections and fee increases. In future years, this reporting system will enable a closer examination of success and progress in community college basic skills courses.

Federally Funded Adult Education Programs

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) appropriates federal funding to the states to improve adult literacy and basic skills. Grants are allocated to local agencies, through the California Department of Education, to provide instruction in ESL, ABE, and ASE. Each state must collect and report annually on enrollment and outcome data for its programs.

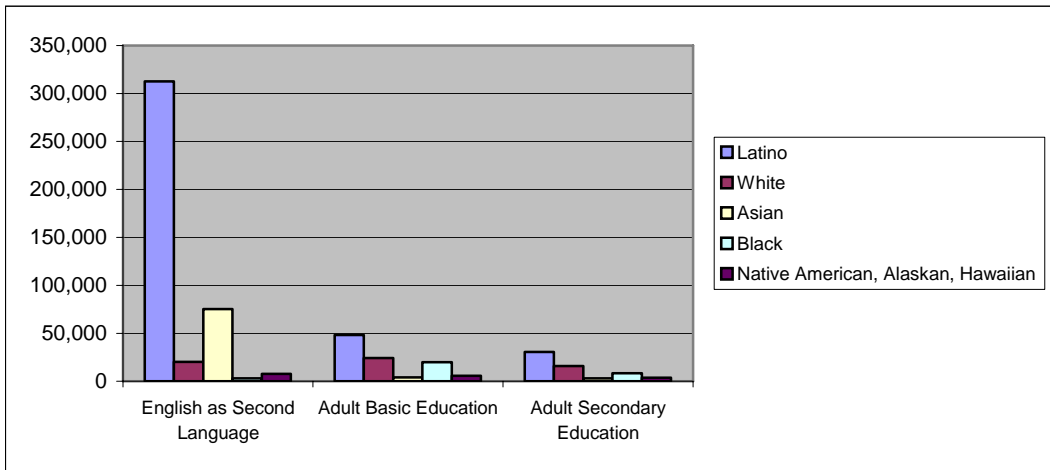
Ethnicity, Gender, and Age of Participants

ESL is by far the largest of the federally funded programs. As shown in Display 3, Latino and Asian students account for most enrollment in ESL courses. White students are more evenly dispersed across all course types. Black students are primarily enrolled in ABE and ASE courses. Overall, about two-thirds of students enrolled in WIA programs are Latino.

Overall, enrollment is equally divided between men and women. More women enroll in ESL courses, but more men enroll in ABE and ASE courses.

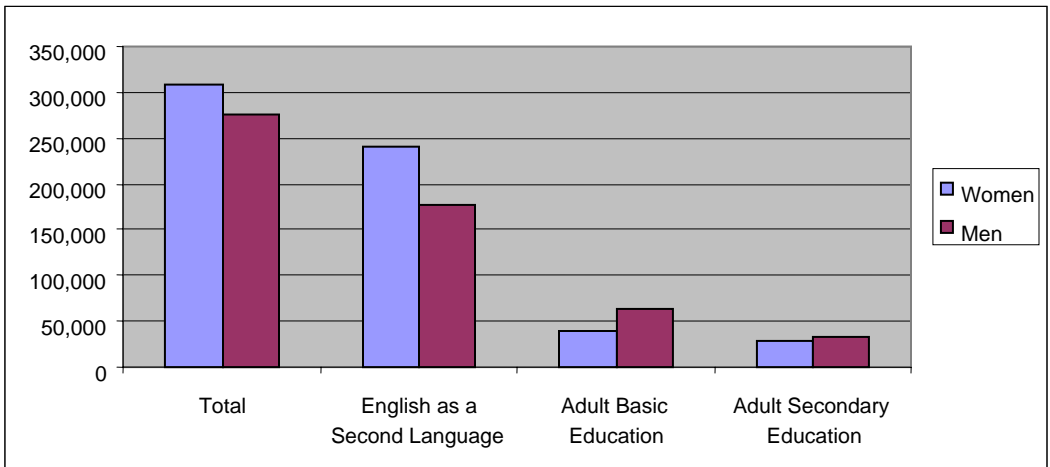
As shown in Display 5, the 25–44 age group has the highest participation rate in all courses and accounts for more than half of ESL enrollment. ASE has the next-highest participation rate, with high enrollments in the 16–18 and 19–24 age groups. Participants aged 45 and older have the same pattern of enrollment across courses as the 25–44 age group, but the overall number of participants is significantly lower.

DISPLAY 3 Enrollment by Ethnicity, Federal WIA Programs

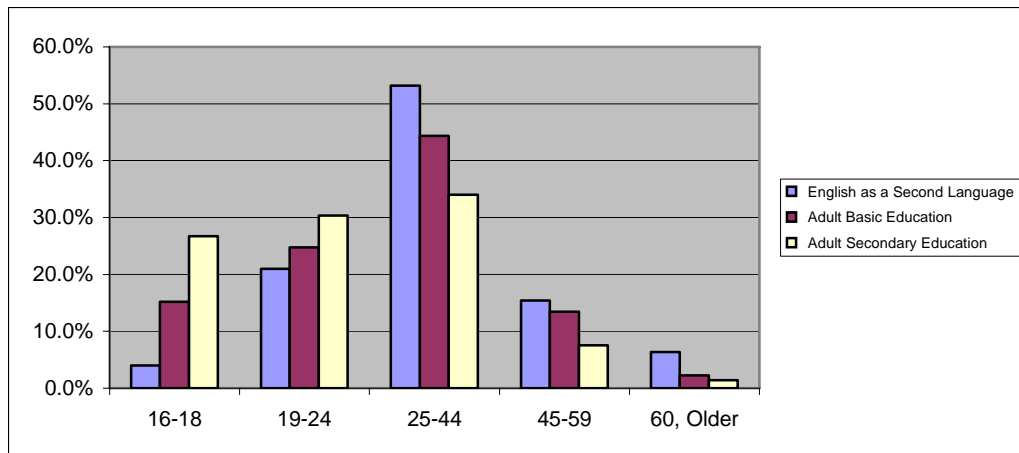


California Department of Education. California Annual Performance Report on Federally Funded Workforce Investment Act Title II Programs.

DISPLAY 4 Participation by Gender, Federal WIA Programs



DISPLAY 5 Participation by Age Group Federal WIA Programs



Measuring Success of Adult Education Programs

California Adult Schools

The Adult Education Office of the California Department of Education identifies four primary measures for assessing performance. Its *Student Progress and Goal Attainment* report discusses goal attainment by enrollment levels, completion rates, achievement of student-identified goals, and results of pre- and post-testing of reading and math levels of participants.

Of the more than 1.1 million students enrolled in courses during 2005, nearly two-thirds completed their course. Home Economics, Adults with Disabilities, and Older Adult had completion rates of around 80%. Completion rates in ASE/GED, ABE, and ESL were all close to 60%. Of the students who completed a course, 64% continued education at the same level, and 19% advanced to a higher-level course.

Participants in adult school programs said the outcomes they achieved included:

- Acquiring technical and computer experience
- Gaining workforce readiness skills
- Mastery of course content
- Increased community involvement
- Earning a certificate
- Achieving citizenship skills
- Acquiring or retaining employment
- Increased involvement in children’s education

Student testing before and after participation in programs provides data on what students learn in the program. These pre- and post-tests are mandated for federally funded programs. The test results show that students who continue participation in ABE and ESL programs for seven or more years test higher than those who participate for six or fewer years. In addition, students who scored lowest on pre-tests showed the greatest gains in post-test scores, regardless of the length of time they participated.

Federal Workforce Investment Act Programs

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs have 12 levels of Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, and English as Second Language courses, ranging from “beginning” to “advanced”. Program performance is evaluated by completion rates as the sole measure for success. The federal government determines the performance goals for each of the courses. These goals vary from state to state based on factors that include past-year performance. For example, the 2005–06 completion target

for ESL Beginning courses was 32%. California exceeded that target with 34% of students completing the course.

California appears to be on the upswing regarding WIA basic skills performance following two years of mediocre results. From 2000 to 2004, California met at least 10 out of its 12 goals, and met all 12 performance goals for two consecutive years. However, in 2005 the state met only seven of the goals and in 2006 it met only three. Display 6 shows a complete summary of the performance results. Preliminary data from the Department of Education Adult Education Office, performance in WIA basic skills programs improved for 2006–07, meeting nine of the 12 goals.

DISPLAY 6 Performance Outcomes: Workforce Investment Act, Title II Programs

**APPENDIX B
Summary of California Core Performance Results**

Entering Educational Functional Level	2000-01		2001-02		2002-03		2003-04		2004-05		2005-06	
	Performance Goal	Performance (Against all Enrollees)	Performance Goal	Performance (Against all Enrollees)	Performance Goal	Performance (Against all Enrollees)	Performance Goal	Performance (Against all Enrollees)	Performance Goal	Performance (Against all Enrollees)	Performance Goal	Performance (Against all Enrollees)
ABE Beginning Literacy	15.0	22.6	17.0	25.7	20.0	21.2	22.0	23.3	25.0	25.1	25.0	24.2
ABE Beginning Basic	22.0	33.2	24.0	36.4	26.0	36.4	28.0	41.1	37.0	43.0	42.0	41.4
ABE Intermediate Low	22.0	34.5	24.0	37.7	26.0	38.1	28.0	33.8	39.0	37.6	38.0	33.5
ABE Intermediate High	24.0	29.3	26.0	29.9	26.0	29.6	28.0	29.3	30.0	30.4	31.0	27.4
ASE Low	14.0	13.6	15.0	25.4	15.0	24.6	17.0	22.1	32.0	24.7	26.0	21.5
ASE High	8.0	26.9	9.0	28.3	11.0	30.5	13.0	29.3	31.0	26.2	30.0	24.8
ESL Beginning Literacy	20.0	30.6	22.0	32.2	24.0	33.6	26.0	35.4	34.0	38.7	36.0	40.1
ESL Beginning	22.0	26.7	24.0	28.4	24.0	30.2	26.0	31.1	31.0	32.6	32.0	34.3
ESL Intermediate Low	24.0	37.0	26.0	39.8	28.0	40.6	30.0	42.4	41.0	42.9	43.0	43.3
ESL Intermediate High	24.0	39.7	26.0	43.0	28.0	42.8	30.0	43.3	43.0	43.0	44.0	42.3
ESL Advanced Low	20.0	21.7	22.0	22.7	22.0	22.6	24.0	22.6	25.0	22.2	24.0	21.7
ESL Advanced High	N/A	17.7	N/A	19.3	N/A	18.8	N/A	18.3	N/A	17.7	N/A	19.7
Core Follow-Up Outcome Measures *												
GED/HS Completion	8.0	26.7	9.0	31.7	11.0	27.6	13.0	28.8	30.0	27.9	30.0	26.5
Entered Employment	9.0	17.8	10.0	54.5	11.0	54.4	13.0	54.6	55.0	50.2	56.0	49.9
Retained Employment	11.0	34.3	12.0	85.7	13.0	81.9	15.0	82.4	83.0	87.0	83.0	91.4
Entered Postsecondary Education	6.0	11.7	7.0	60.4	8.0	53.5	10.0	54.9	55.0	57.2	56.0	47.3

CASAS 2006

* These performance results were obtained from a student survey and include those students that returned the survey. Performance for 2000-01 was based on data entered by students or local education officials. Results differed significantly based on the two methodologies. In addition, performance results are weighted by program.

Policy Considerations

Adult basic skills courses are funded by several different programs and are provided by both the K-12 system and the community college system. Consistent definitions of course types and course level are needed in order to analyze how well these programs are meeting the state’s needs. Consistent data collection practices are needed, so that outcome data are available for all programs. Outcome data should be disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and age of course participants.

Limited outcome data exist for federal adult education programs, and only recently have the community colleges begun to measure outcomes of their basic skills programs. The figures showing California per-

formance in federally funded programs include data from previous years, but not in great detail. Trend data is essential to understanding progress and change from year to year. In addition, it is important to reveal any changes in data collection or methodology that may have an impact on interpreting figures from one year to the next. For example, the federally funded adult education programs show a rapid decline in meeting performance goals over the past few years. Could factors other than poor performance be contributing to declining outcome data?

The outcome data reported by the Department of Education on adult school programs is fairly comprehensive. With more than 80% of adult learners enrolled in ESL, ABE, ASE, and Career Technology classes, reporting in greater detail would allow researchers to study methods for increasing persistence and completion in these programs.

ESL, ASE, and ABE are the most critical of basic education offerings — they enroll the majority of students, yet have the lowest completion rates. There are a number of personal and economic reasons why students do not complete courses. By understanding the characteristics of the students who do not finish, and the reasons why they fail to complete, the state may be able to find solutions for increasing student success.

Attainment of basic math and reading skills by all Californians is fundamental to the civic and economic well-being of the state. Basic skills are the foundation for continued education throughout life, whether that education occurs in a postsecondary institution or as growth within a career. The need for basic education transcends all areas of daily life, whether it includes interpretation of documents for signature, helping children with homework, filling out a job application, or casting a vote in a polling booth. Continued support and expansion of basic skills in community colleges is an example of one way the state can ensure access to those seeking such education. Insuring that all residents have basic skills education is an essential investment for the State of California.