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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.

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 familial 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%; the courses with the highest completion rates are those geared toward older adults and adults with disabilities. Basic education and ESL have lower completion rates.
- In 2006–07, federally-funded adult education programs met nine of 11 performance targets; this is a substantial improvement from program year 2005–06, in which 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, with the first report due for release in January 2008.

Adult Education in California

Adult basic skills are one measure of 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, not only as a foundation for continued

learning but also to enhance the individual's growth and performance in the workforce. Because developing "intellectual capital" is one of the more important investments California makes, it maintains a fairly comprehensive system of adult education to enable adults who have not completed a high school education or acquired basic employment skills to do so.

The administration of "Adult Education" in California is a complex marriage of federal and state funded programs. The federal government, under the direction of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), provides approximately \$84 million dollars annually in grant money for local agencies to offer programs that improve basic literacy and English language proficiency. The federal program has a data reporting structure that is mandatory for all states and includes unique performance goal targets assigned by the U.S. Department of Education based on enrollment and previous performance trends.

The bulk of the resources invested in California adult education, about \$750 million, comes directly from state resources, specifically, the Proposition 98 portion of the budget. These funds are allocated to local school districts for various programs at the 287 adult schools around the state. The adult programs offered at the schools include, but are not limited to, Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language (ESL), Career Technical Education, Home Economics, and Parental Education. In 2005–06 adult school programs enrolled more than 1.1 million students, with ESL classes having, by far, the greatest enrollment levels.

The California Community Colleges also provide adult basic skills and ESL education. About \$31 million was allocated to community college districts based on the full-time equivalent student (FTES) participation in basic skills and ESL classes during the previous fiscal year. An additional \$1.6 million is 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 local 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 offered 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 Adults

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 greatest enrollment numbers, and combined with ASE/GED and ABE programs, account for 64% of all enrollments.¹

Ethnicity, Gender, and Age of Participants

In light of the significant enrollment levels in ESL programs, it is no surprise that Latinos make up the majority, 54%, of participants in adult school programs. White participants account for 24%, Asians 12% and African Americans almost 6%. The remaining 4% is classified as “Other” and includes American Indian, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. Latino students dominate participation in ABE, ASE/GED, ESL, and Citizenship programs, while White students have higher enrollment rates in Adults with Disabilities, Health and Safety, Home Economics, and Older Adult courses. Latinos and Whites have almost equal participation rates in Career Technical programs.

A commonly discussed “Gender Gap” in education also applies to adult school programs. Women make up more than 60% of total enrollment and dominate every program offered. The gap is narrowest for ASE/GED programs, where the participation of women is only 2% more than men. The largest gender gap is in the program areas of Health and Safety, Home Economics, Parent Education, and Older Adult; Home Economics has the largest gap of all courses, with female enrollment making up more than 85%.

The majority of adult school participants are between the ages of 16 and 40, with the largest group being 21- to 30-year olds. The age distribution of participants is diverse in most programs. The programs dominated by a narrower age group are ASE/GED (mostly 16–20), Parent Education (mostly aged 31–40), and Older Adult (mostly 65 years and older).

Federally Funded Adult Education Programs of the Workforce Investment Act

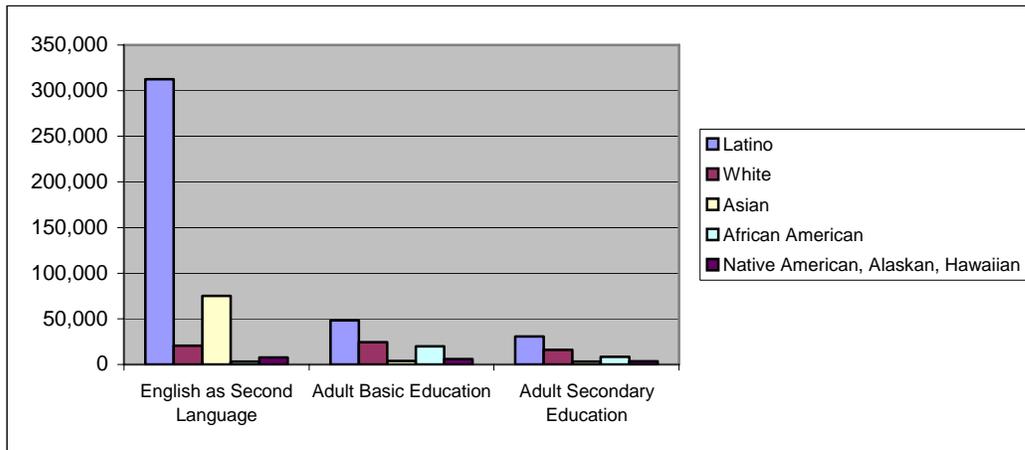
The Workforce Investment Act appropriates federal funding to the states to improve adult literacy and basic skills needed to support the nation’s workforce. Grants are allocated to local agencies, through the California Department of Education, to provide instruction in English as a Second Language, Adult Basic Education, and Adult Secondary Education to adults in need of these literacy services. Each state is federally mandated to collect and report annually on enrollment and outcome data for its programs.

Ethnicity, Gender, and Age of Participants

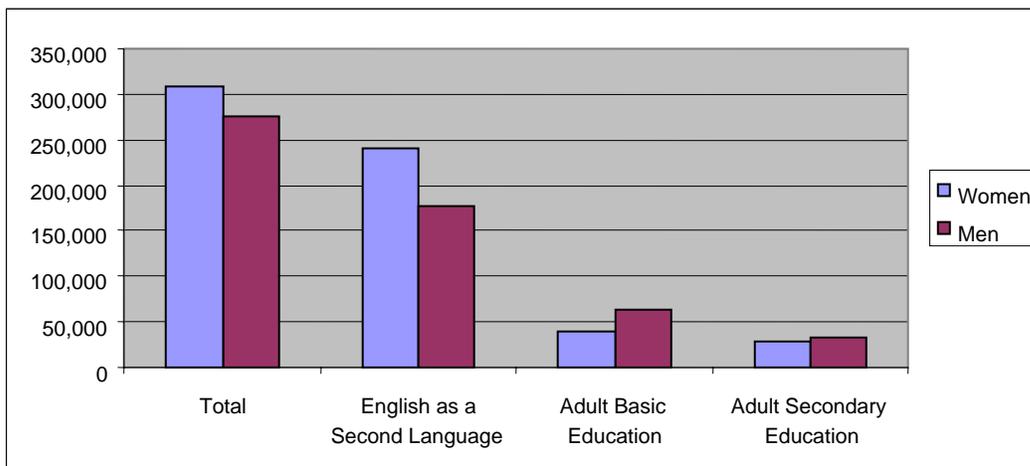
In California, a large portion of students enrolled in the federally-funded programs are Latino, constituting about two-thirds of the total population served. As shown in Display 1, Latino and Asian students are mostly enrolled in ESL courses. White students are more evenly dispersed across all course offerings, while African American students are primarily enrolled in Adult Basic and Adult Secondary Education courses.²

Within federally-funded courses, gender participation does not differ as greatly, nor do women dominate enrollment, as they do in the state adult school programs. Women account for 53% of enrollment and men account for 47%. While more women than men enroll in ESL courses, men outnumber women enrolled in ABE and ASE courses. Display 2 charts gender participation in each course.

DISPLAY 1 Enrollment by Ethnicity, Federal WIA Programs

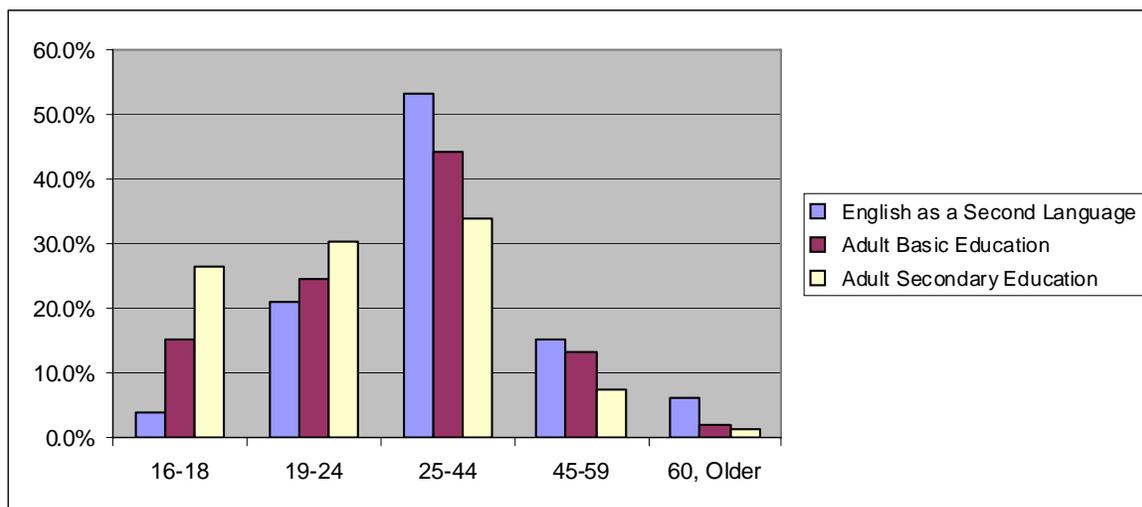


DISPLAY 2 Participation by Gender, Federal Programs



As illustrated in Display 3, the highest participation rate in all courses is in the 25–44 age group, with more than half participating in ESL instruction. Adult Secondary Education has the next highest participation rate, particularly among 16- to 24-year-olds. For participants aged 45 and older, participation patterns across all three courses is similar to that of the 25- to 44-year-olds, but the number of participants is significantly lower.

DISPLAY 3 Percent Participation, by Age Group and Program



Basic Skills Credit and Non-Credit Programs at the Community Colleges

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 fairly evenly dispersed across disciplines, the majority of non-credit enrollees are taking ESL courses. As shown in Display 4, ESL courses are the most attended basic skills classes within the community colleges. There are three levels of ESL courses: ESL General, ESL College, and ESL Survival. Participants in ESL General account for 84% of total ESL enrollment. Of those participants, 39% took the course for credit and 61% were enrolled in non-credit courses.

DISPLAY 4 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 of Non-Credit and Credit FTES
Reading / Communication	8,574 (15.7%)	391 (0.01%)	8,964 (9.6%)
Learning / Living Skills	9,187 (16.7%)	2,831 (0.07%)	12,018 (12.8%)
Math	11,686 (21.2%)	1,043 (0.03%)	12,728 (13.6%)
ESL	16,619 (30.2%)	23,719 (62%)	40,338 (43.2%)
Other	8,880 (16.2%)	10,367 (27%)	19,248 (20.8%)
Total	54,946 (100.0%)	38,351 (100%)	93,297 (100.0%)

Adult Basic Education and Adult Secondary Education account for a very small portion of credit and non-credit basic skill courses offered at the community colleges (2% and 6%, respectively), and are collapsed into the “Other” category with other low-enrollment courses.³

The information available for community college Basic Skills Education does not include the demographic composition of participants. Based on significant participation in ESL courses, many of the students are likely to be Latino, Asian and other groups of English learners. However, without collection of these data, this assumption cannot be verified. In addition, conclusions cannot be made regarding the ages or gender distribution of participants.

Measuring Success of Adult Education Programs

California Adult Schools

The Adult Education Office of the California Department of Education identifies four primary measures for determining goal attainment. In its “Student Progress and Goal Attainment” report, the authors discuss 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 65% completed the course in which they were enrolled. Of the students who completed a course, the majority (63.9%) continued education at the same level, while 18.9% advanced to a higher course level. The courses that had the highest levels of completion or continuation are Home Economics (82%), Adults with Disabilities (79%), and Older Adults (79%); the lowest levels of completion were in ASE/GED (59%), ABE (59%), and ESL (60%).

Participants in adult school programs cited achievement of several outcome goals under four primary categories: educational, employment, community, and personal or family-related. Within these categories, participants said the outcomes they achieved included: acquiring technical and computer experience, mastery of course content, earning a certificate, acquiring or retaining employment, gaining workforce readiness skills, increased community involvement, achieving citizenship skills, and increased involvement in their children's education.

Student testing prior to and after participation in certain programs provides a quantitative method for evaluating program impact on student learning. These pre- and post-tests are mandated for federally funded programs and are only used for ABE, ASE/GED, and ESL 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 demonstrated the greatest gains in post-test scores, regardless of the length of time in which they participated.

Federal Workforce Investment Act Programs

The Workforce Investment Act 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 goal achievement levels for each of the courses. These levels vary from state to state based on factors that include past year performance. For example, the performance target for ESL Beginning courses was 32% in 2005–06. California exceeded the target in this particular area by achieving a performance level of 34.3%.

California appears to be on the upswing regarding WIA basic skills performance following a couple of years of relatively 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 of them. Based on preliminary data from the Department of Education, performance in WIA basic skills programs improved for 2006–07, meeting nine of the 12 goals.⁴

California Community College Programs

The community college system reports outcomes data on Basic Skills and ESL programs through the Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges (ARCC). This reporting structure was established through Assembly Bill 1417 (Pacheco, Chapter 581, Statutes of 2004). The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges developed an initial framework for annual evaluations which covers a wide variety of educational outcomes. The first such report was released on October 29, 2007, as a draft, with the final version to be released in January, 2008.

In the areas of 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 across three academic years to derive groups of students who successfully completed a higher-level course in the same discipline within this time period. Preliminary numbers of credit basic skills improvement students was available in the October 2007 report for the initial three-year intervals, as summarized in Display 5.

DISPLAY 5 Number of Students Completing Coursework at Least One Level Above Their Prior Basic Skills Enrollment Within the Three-Year Cohort Period

Cohort Years	Number of Students	Annual % Change
2002–03 to 2004–05	124,380	N/A
2003–04 to 2005–06	121,048	-2.70%
2004–05 to 2006–07	121,478	0.40%

The data show a numerical decline from the initial three-year period (2002–03 to 2004–05) to the middle three-year period (2003–04 to 2005–06), with a slight increase for the most recent interval (2004–05 to 2006–07). It would be misleading to draw conclusions from this data, particularly since these numbers are preliminary and the outcomes were affected by a variety of factors in the early 2000s, such as reductions in course sections and fee increases (later rescinded). The establishment of this database will enable more in-depth examinations of community college basic skills course completion and performance in future years.

Policy Considerations

Accurate analysis of the state of Adult Basic Education in California rests heavily on (1) deriving a universal understanding of what courses and curricula encompass “Adult Basic Education” and (2) aligning data collection practices for all programs to include outcomes-based data, disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, age, and course taken.

Limited outcome data exists for federal adult education programs, and only recently have the community colleges begun efforts to measure outcomes of their basic skills programs. The figures showing California performance in federally-funded programs do include data from previous years, although not provided in great detail. Inclusion of trend data in analyses of adult education programs 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 outcomes 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 regarding these programs would allow researchers to study methods for increasing persistence and completion in the aforementioned areas. ESL, ASE, and ABE are, arguably, the most critical of basic education offerings; they enroll the majority of students, and have the lowest completion rates. There are a number of personal and economic reasons for students not completing a course. However, by understanding the characteristics of who is not finishing, and for what reasons, the state may be able to find solutions for increasing student success.

Attainment of basic math and reading comprehension by all Californians is fundamental to the civic and economic well-being of the state. Basic skills are the foundation for continued education throughout one’s lifetime, whether that education occurs in a postsecondary institution or growth within a career. The need for basic education transcends all areas of daily life, whether it include interpretation of documents for signature, helping children with homework, filling out a job application, or casting a vote in a polling booth. Insuring that all residents have basic skills education is an essential communal investment for the State of California.

APPENDIX A

NOTES

1. California Department of Education, Adult Education Office. California Adult Education Student Progress and Goal Attainment Report. Program Year 2005–2006.
<https://www.casas.org/home/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.viewFile&MapID=2220>.
2. California Department of Education. California Annual Performance Report on Federally Funded Workforce Investment Act Title II Programs. Program Year 2006.
<https://www.casas.org/home/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.viewFile&MapID=1975>.
3. California Community College Chancellor's Office. Data retrieved from
<http://misweb.cccco.edu/mis/onlinestat/ftes.cfm>.
4. California Department of Education. Based on preliminary data regarding 2006-2007 performance in Workforce Investment Act, Title II programs. Obtained via e-mail from Wendi Maxwell on November 14, 2007.
5. California Community Colleges' Chancellor's Office. Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges: Draft Report A Report to the Legislature, pursuant to AB 1417, October 2007.
http://www.cccco.edu/divisions/tris/rp/ab_1417/ARCC_2008_Draft_Oct07.pdf

APPENDIX B

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)										
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.

