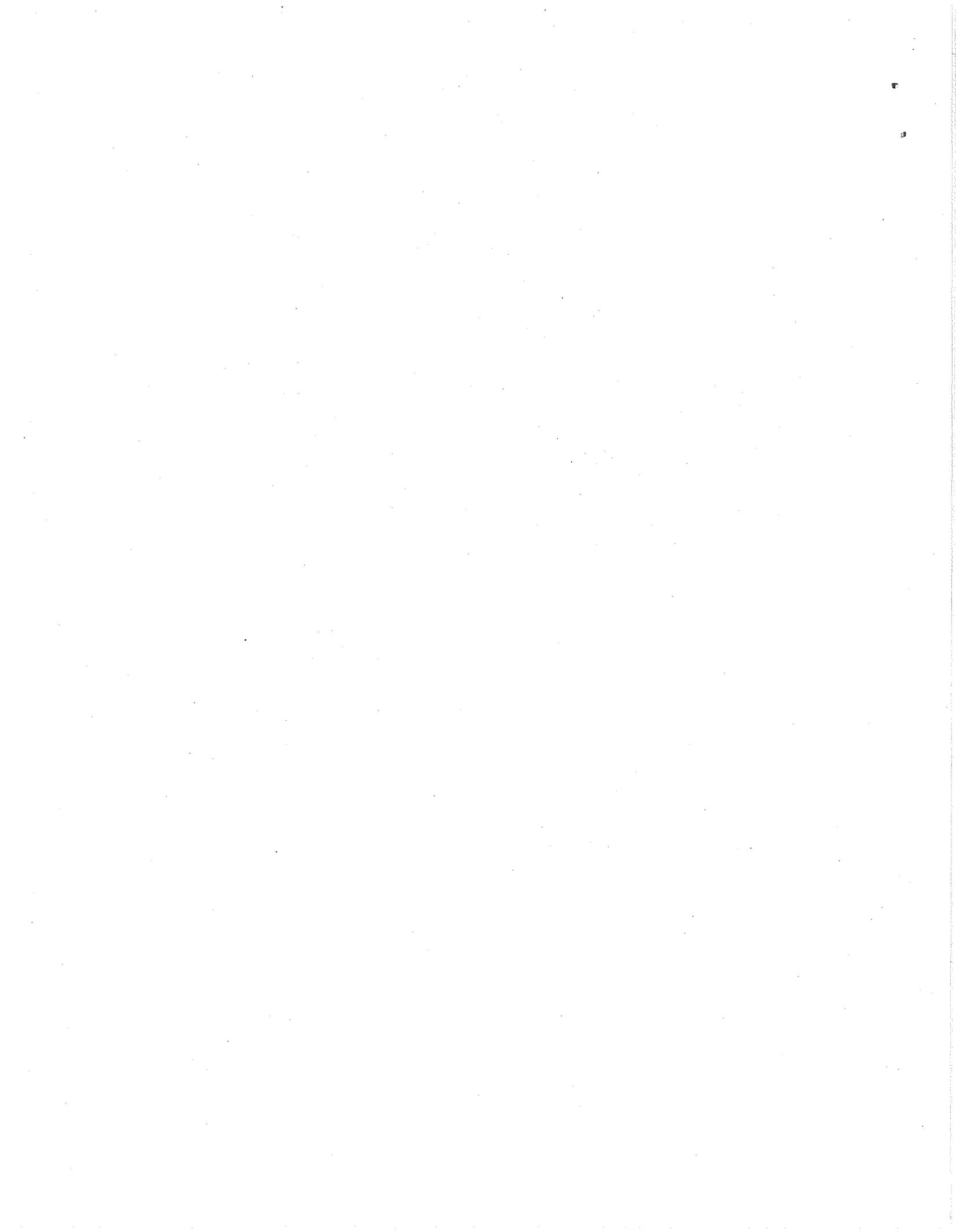


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Adult Basic Education Policy Task Force

**Report to the Minnesota Legislature
December 2002
Executive Summary**



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(2000-2002)
Report to the Minnesota Legislature
Executive Summary**

The Adult Basic Education Policy Task Force would like to thank the members of the Legislature for creating this task force as an opportunity to clarify specific policies and procedures in adult basic education in Minnesota. We found the process valuable as well as educational.

Adult Basic Education in Minnesota has seen phenomenal changes in the last ten years. Learner participation in programs has increased from 27,583 in 1990 to 82,778 in 2002. The participation growth has far exceeded the funding level that has led to growing waiting lists for many programs across the state.

The needs of the adults who are attending basic education classes have changed to match the world around us. For example, where computers used to be machinery used primarily for office communication and data storage, we are now seeing computers and the need to interface with computer technology at every turn in our daily lives. There are very few jobs one can secure today where some knowledge of technology isn't required. As our communities change, so do the skills needed to be a self-sufficient and contributing member of our society.

Adult Basic Education funding has enjoyed bipartisan support for a number of years by the Minnesota Legislature. This support is evident in the funding that has increased from \$10,000,000 in 1990 to \$34,990,000 in 2002. A significant number of under-educated individuals and people in poverty are turning to ABE programs to improve basic skills enough to access livable wage jobs and to enroll in vocational training. The greatest question facing programs across the state is how to serve the growing needs of learners with funding for adequate programming hanging in the balance.

Responding to these needs makes great economic sense for our communities. According to a study of the 2000 census data, immigrants were critical to the nation's economic growth in the past ten years, accounting for half the wage earners who joined the labor force. The study by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northwestern University shows that immigration is redrawing the profile of the workforce, sometimes transforming entire industries. ABE programs that prepare learners with the language skills to be successful in the workforce also save the State welfare costs.

The Legislative Charge

The Adult Basic Education (ABE) Policy Task Force was created by legislation (M.S. 124D. Sec. 42) in the 2000 session. The task force was in place from October 2000 to December 2002.

The task force researched and reviewed several elements that impact the operation of adult basic education programs around the state. The decisions and recommendations ensure sustainability for a statewide delivery system for adult basic education that includes both school districts and non-district entities. Furthermore, the decisions rendered by the task force are data-driven.

The task force was charged by the Legislature to address nine broad elements:

1. ABE Mission statement
2. Standard ABE policies
3. Curriculum and course offerings
4. Maximum contact hour level

5. Hourly rate for small programs
6. Cap on individual participation hours
7. Outcome-based funding
8. Weighted hours for non-school district programs
9. Review of supplemental services grant applications

These topics are covered thoroughly in the Adult Basic Education Policy Task force Report to the Minnesota Legislature. The entire report can be found by visiting http://www.mnlincs.org/PTF_FINAL_report.doc

History of the ABE Education Policy Task Force

In 2000, the Minnesota Legislature directed the Department of Children, Families & Learning (CFL) to convene an Adult Basic Education Policy Task Force to address seven specific items. According to the legislation, the nine-member task force was established to make recommendations to the legislature on program and funding policies for adult basic education. Even though only required to meet twice a year, this task force met 21 times during its tenure. Since the law did not allow for reimbursement of expenses or a per diem, one can conclude that the time invested in this process by members was an example of their commitment to adult basic education.

Policy Task Force Recommendations

We have selected the following three recommendations to highlight in this summary:

- **Adult Basic Education Mission**

An ABE mission statement was presented to a joint meeting of the House Family and Early Childhood Education Finance Committee and members of the Senate E-12 Education Budget Committee on January 17, 2001. Eventually, CFL modified and adopted the statement to the following:

The mission of Adult Basic Education in Minnesota is to provide adults with educational opportunities to acquire and improve their literacy skills necessary to be self-sufficient and to participate effectively as productive workers, family members, and citizens.

- **Outcome-Based Funding**

Outcome-based funding for ABE is a complex issue that engenders numerous opinions and emotions. The ABE Policy Task Force collected information on this issue from ABE funding systems of other states as well as querying other states to see if funding for any other community education programs are outcome-based. We also polled the field through a variety of electronic communications and face-to-face meetings. Our discussions have led us to conclude that in order to proceed on this issue, much more concentrated research and study need to be done. We would suggest that a starting point would be to complete a longitudinal study on former learners (or current learners) to see what factors could reasonably and realistically be used to determine progress through ABE. This type of study would require additional funding. (For a full explanation of this recommendation, please refer to page seven of the Adult Basic Education Policy Task Force Report to the Minnesota Legislature.)

Primary reasons for this recommendation include the fact that ABE learners come into programs with varying starting ability levels and capacities to achieve. A narrowly defined performance level system might unfairly disadvantage or penalize programs that serve low level students. Additionally, currently available standardized assessment tools are culturally biased and suffer from validity problems. Thus, it is difficult to quantify learner progress in an accurate manner, which is a prerequisite for outcome-based funding.

- **Ensuring full distribution of ABE Appropriation**

Currently, the ABE funding formula, M.S. 124D.531, applies two revenue caps (one cap on program revenue growth and one cap on total revenue per contact hour) to local programs after the total aid appropriation is allocated. By law, the returned funds that result from the program revenue growth cap are reinvested in the ABE formula. However, the contact hour cap (four times the base contact hour rate) funds revert to a little-used community education reserve account for one year and then are returned to the state general fund. This year (FY 2002), \$376,000 was diverted from the total ABE appropriation in this manner.

Additionally, ABE-appropriated monies are returned back to the state at the end of the year due to local program under-spending. Although this pot of turn-back money is expected to decrease over time as local programs begin to trust their revenue award letter (past ABE formulas only estimated program revenue), some monies will always be unspent due to conservative fiscal practices.

The following list of recommendations distributes allocated ABE funds to the contact hour component of the formula that impacts all programs:

1. Beginning in fiscal year 2003, adult basic education aid from M.S.124D.531 that remains unallocated after the application of revenue caps in M.S. 124D.531, Subd.4 (a) and (b), shall be reallocated annually to all approved adult basic education program providers to increase their contact hour revenue. The reallocation amount each year shall be distributed to the approved providers in proportion to their prior year contact hours. (This proposed reallocation concept is similar to Title I, Elementary and Secondary Education Act -ESEA.)
2. Beginning with fiscal year 2002, adult basic education aid allocated under M.S. 124D.531 that is unspent at the end of the year, shall be reallocated annually to all approved adult basic education program providers to increase their contact hour revenue. The reallocation amount each year shall be distributed to the approved providers in proportion to their prior year contact hours.
3. Repeal M.S. 124D.515, Subdivision 3 (b). (This refers to: contact hour weighting at 1.03 for non-base consortia).

- **Effectiveness of Supplemental Services**

Currently M.S.124D.522 requires that two percent of the state ABE allocation be set aside to fund state-wide supplemental services. Though referred to in legislation as "supplemental", these services are essential to ABE programs because they address issues that locally have low incident levels and are expensive to address by individual programs. Examples of the populations that are served through training by these agencies are people who are deaf and hard of hearing, victims of closed head injuries, and adults suffering from learning disabilities. Additionally, training for volunteers who assist both in classrooms and individually with high need learners, as well as training for all ABE staff is included in the supplemental service category.

Twice during its tenure, the policy task force met with current providers of the supplemental services grants to review their work, assure that there were no duplication of services and, in an effort to ensure that the resources were used efficiently, to encourage the agencies toward more collective planning and training sessions. By sharing the training state-wide with all programs through centralizing training sessions, the model improves access to information that better serves the ABE participant. More advanced study in these areas is available to programs that schedule it, however in an era where information is power this model allows for even the smaller programs to have the "power" to serve their community.

The policy task force urges the Legislature to continue providing this funding for supplemental services. The task force believes that this training model in adult basic education in Minnesota is both an efficient as well as effective use of state resources.

Conclusion

The adult basic education policy task force believes that ABE's current placement in the Department of Children, Families and Learning is appropriate to serve the basic educational needs of low functioning adults. By aligning with public schools, adults throughout Minnesota have universal access to ABE services. Though most programs are connected to public school districts, that does not limit their collaborative connections within the community. ABE programs are cooperatively located in community colleges, workforce centers, community-based organizations, corrections, county programs, non-profit organizations, community education centers and faith organizations.

The task force believes the opportunity to have a role in addressing issues important to the state-wide delivery of adult basic education services was valuable both personally as well as professionally. The task force provided a venue to talk thoroughly about issues and make some difficult recommendations to CFL as well as to the Legislature.

Though the term of this task force is now complete, there are a few areas that need further discussion:

- Continue to improve the ABE eligibility criteria. There is a need to write/clarify policies involving visas and participation by students in post-secondary education at community colleges.
- Exploration of the impact of adult diploma programs on ABE. The adult diploma allocation has been on the chopping block in the past two legislative sessions. If this resource goes away, what will happen to those learners and will that impact ABE programs?
- Explore viability of the GED Testing Center system. ABE programs provide organized classes to prepare adults for this exam, but testing centers across the state are having a difficult time making ends meet. It is worth exploring a more cost-effective way to provide this service to learners.
- Evaluate weighted hours for non-school district programs. Non-school district programs have access only to the contact hour allocation in the ABE formula. As the contact hour rate decreases this will become a growing problem.
- Develop a list of acceptable curriculum content for workforce education. Establish a boundary for workforce literacy content to assure that ABE provides services that are not currently available to learners.

In conclusion, the ABE policy task force would once again like to thank the Legislature for creating this body and charging it with taking a closer look at issues that impact the adult learners in Minnesota.

ABE Policy Task Force

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