

LWVMD Study – Fall 2008

Teaching Adults in Maryland to Read, Write, Speak and Understand English

Introduction

At the 2007 convention of the League of Women Voters of Maryland, delegates voted to do a new statewide study of English language services the State and private organizations provide for immigrants and adults of limited literacy. The first phase of the study was to focus on services for people for whom English is a new language. The second phase of the study was to focus on services for adults who speak English as their first language but lack skills in reading or writing English. For some adults the lack of English fluency and literacy is the result of poor training in school due to a learning disability or some other personal circumstance, or because they did not complete their schooling. For others, lack of English proficiency is because English was not spoken in their home or they were born in another country. Foreign born adults may or may not know how to read and write in their own language.

The services for individuals needing Adult Basic Education (ABE) and adult English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction are often provided by the same agencies and organizations. Also, both types of services are often funded by the same sources. Therefore, the LWVMD study committee decided to look at both kinds of adult education concurrently. The study committee did not address adult education services that are provided in correctional facilities.

Background

A basic level of literacy can be defined as having the skills to perform simple everyday literacy activities. The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) measures how adults use printed and written information to adequately function at home, in the workplace and in the community. Since adults use different kinds of printed and written materials in their daily lives there are three types of measurements:

- Prose literacy -The knowledge and skills needed to perform prose tasks, (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use continuous texts). Examples include editorials, news stories, brochures, and instructional materials.
- Document literacy -The knowledge and skills needed to perform document tasks, (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use non-continuous texts in various formats). Examples include job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and drug or food labels.
- Quantitative literacy- The knowledge and skills required to perform quantitative tasks, (i.e., to identify and perform computations, either alone or sequentially, using numbers embedded in printed materials). Examples include balancing a checkbook, figuring out a tip, completing an order form.

The Maryland State Department of Education has developed Standards for non-English proficient speakers at various levels from beginning to low beginning, high beginning, intermediate, high intermediate all the way to advanced. At each level, language skills such as listening, speaking, pronunciation, reading, writing and grammar are measured to establish the competency levels that have been achieved.

It is difficult to know exactly how many Maryland residents are currently functioning at a level below basic literacy or speak and understand English at the beginning level. However, according to “Quick Facts FY2007” published by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), nearly 800,000 adults over the age of 16 are out of school without a high school diploma or without the ability to speak English well. 77% of the Maryland foreign-born population speaks a language other than English at home and of those 22% self report that they speak English not at all or not well (US Census Bureau). Estimating ESL need based on census figures inevitably results in an undercount since foreign born individuals - especially those with limited English proficiency - are underrepresented in the Census counts.

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Of the 800,000 adults described above, approximately 35,000 to 36,000 are enrolled in some type of adult education program. That means that only about 5% of the adults who could benefit from classes that improve their ability to read, write and/or speak English are getting the help they need. An additional 5,000 have signed up to improve their literacy and speaking skills but are on waiting lists. Because not all Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs maintain waiting lists, it is very likely that the number of people seeking services without success is even higher.

Task Force on Adult Education

In 2001, the Maryland General Assembly created a task force whose assignment was to study adult education and report on the need for services, the impact of adult education on economic development, existing levels of service, current funding and how Maryland compared with other states. The task force recommended:

- A significant increase in public and private investment in the adult education system.
- The targeting of new resources for the improvement of adult education outcomes.
- Enhanced accountability to increase the return on investment.
- Improved services for the incarcerated and those on probation.

Since that report, the General Assembly has struggled with the issue of how to determine the level of funding to improve delivery of service. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) proposed a formula that was not adopted because the legislature felt that there was a lack of data to support the formula. Knowing that adult literacy was severely under-funded but not knowing what would be the proper amount, the General Assembly included \$1.2 million for adult education in the Bridge to Excellence Act (also known as Thornton).

Superintendent's Panel on Excellence in Adult Education

In 2004, the Joint Chairman's report on the budget requested that MSDE submit a proposal to the budget committees for an ongoing method of funding and providing adult education services that would reduce the waiting list for these services. That year, Dr. Nancy Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools, established the Superintendent's Panel on Excellence in Adult Education. It was composed of state and national leaders from business and labor, government, adult education, local school systems, community organizations and higher education. Montgomery County was represented by then council chair, Tom Perez who is now the head of the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. Their findings, published in December of 2005 in a document titled *Stepping Up to the Future*, were:

- The need for adult education in Maryland is immense - 927,264 out of school youth need literacy skills, a high school diploma, or to become proficient in the English language.
- The demand for adult education in Maryland significantly exceeds capacity – there is an annual waiting list of 5,000 residents.
- Maryland is seriously behind other states' investments in adult education – Maryland spent an average of \$77/student in FY 03 while other east coast states averaged \$477 per student in state funding. Out of the fifty states, Maryland was 44th in spending per student.
- Current funding does not support a qualified instructional workforce for adult education.
- Additional investment in the quality of adult education is essential to maximize return on investment.
- Adult education is an economic issue – it is a strategy to reduce unemployment, incarceration, and health issues.
- Adult education programs have been demonstrated to achieve results.
- The best system for delivering adult education services encompasses community colleges, local school systems and community based organizations.
- It is the state's role to provide adequate funding.
- Adult education has a significant return on investment.

The Panel made the following recommendations:

- Increase the investment in evidence based adult education.
- Establish, in statute, a state funding formula.

- Consolidate the existing state funding streams for adult education within MSDE.
- Encourage workplace partnerships with businesses and provide incentives.
- Publish an annual state performance report on the adult education program to document accountability.

Kinds of Adult Literacy and English Language Services Currently Provided

In order to get an idea of the kinds of programs and services that are currently being provided state-wide, the LWVMD study committee asked local Leagues to do an informal survey of services in their communities. Although this is by no means an exhaustive study of the status of service provision, it gives us some idea of the variety of services and some of the unmet needs. Leagues from around the state were asked to provide information about publicly and privately funded providers of adult education. The information gathered by twelve Leagues is summarized on the following tables.

PUBLICLY FUNDED PROVIDERS OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND ENGLISH INSTRUCTION

	Major Providers	Number of Persons Served/year	Waiting List?	Class Size	Number of Locations	Convenient to Transportation?
Allegany	Allegany County Board of Education	150	3 weeks	5 - 9	7	Data not available
Anne Arundel	Anne Arundel Community College, Board of Ed.	AACC - 1000 BoE - 350	no	20 - 25	12	No public transportation after 9 pm
Baltimore City	Baltimore City Community College,	BCCC – 7, 500	BCCC -100 students;	BCCC 15 - 20,	BCCC 65	Data not available
Baltimore County	Community College of Baltimore County	3035 ABE 1084 ESL	ESL a few wks to 4 mos. ABE 300 students between sessions	5-15	19 ESL 31 ABE	Some locations are convenient
Calvert	College of Southern Maryland, Library	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Central & Southern Calvert, Charles Co.& Calvert Library	Data not available
Carroll	Carroll Community College	300 (3 X more than in 2003)	yes, but get in next semester	15	5	Data not available
Garrett	Garrett College, Western Maryland Consortium	150 - 200	No	12-15 (min. of 5) individual curriculum	7 (in Oakland)	Data not available
Harford	Harford Community College	1400 from 49 countries	sometimes several months depending on funding	8-12	7	Data not available

	Major Providers	Number of Persons Served/year	Waiting List?	Class Size	Number of Locations	Convenient to Transportation
Howard	Howard Community College, Project Literacy, Howard Co Public School PACE	HCC – 1800 Project Literacy – 250 PACE - 25	HCC 300 students, 1-12 wks, Lit. Proj.20-30 students PACE –no list	HCC 15-25 Project Literacy, 1 – small group PACE approx 8	HCC 6 Project Literacy 1: Howard Co. Lib., PACE 1 or 2 schools/year	Yes, on major bus lines
Montgomery	Montgomery College	23,000	1000	Varies, usually 16-20	20	yes
Prince George's	Prince George's Community College	1,600-1,700	No data available	No data available	Five high schools	Some sites
St. Mary's	Adult Ed of St. Mary's Public Schools College of Southern MD	St. Mary's Pub. Sch.350 College of Southern MD 50	30 students for ABE No waiting list for College classes	Limited to 12 College classes 10-12	Public School – 7 locations College classes – all 3 campuses	All except evening class at Chopticon High School

PRIMARILY PRIVATELY FUNDED PROVIDERS OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND ENGLISH INSTRUCTION

	Major Providers	Number of Persons Served/year	Waiting List?	Class Size	Number of Locations	Convenient to Transportation?
Allegany	None					
Anne Arundel	Literacy Council, Churches	Literacy Council 80 Churches 250	No	Literacy Council one on one, churches 8-10	Lit.Council any convenient location, Churches, 8-10	No public transportation after 9 pm
Baltimore County	Literacy Works, Inc.	300-400 (some in Baltimore City)	Data not available	No more than 15	4	Some locations are convenient
Calvert	Literacy Council, Faith-based	Data not available	Data not available	One on one	Data not available	Data not available
Carroll	Literacy Council	60	Approx. 2 months	Literacy Council: one	6 or 7	Data not available
Garrett	Literacy Council is on the books but not active					
Harford	none now	None currently, Average was 100	Data not available	Formerly 8-12	Formerly 4 or 5	

	Major Providers	Number of Persons Served/year	Waiting List?	Class Size	Number of Locations	Convenient to Transportation?
Howard	Foreign-born Info.& Referral Network (FIRN) (some public funds), Churches, Senior Centers	FIRN – 180 Others –no data available	FIRN -35 students	FIRN - 20	FIRN - 3	yes, on major bus lines
Montgomery	Literacy Council, Churches, Employers, non-profits (over 60 private providers)	12,500	Approx. 350	1-25	Over 200	yes
Prince George's	Literacy Council	1,492	Less than six months	10-12	20 sites, churches and other	Some, not all
St. Mary's	Literacy Council, Churches	Literacy Council 77, Cornerstone Presbyterian Church 80	Approx. 15	Mostly 1 some small group	3 libraries, occasionally in homes	Libraries on Bus Line, bus stop in walking distance to church

Publicizing Adult Education Classes

Local Leagues were also asked to report on how adult education classes were advertised. In almost all cases print was used. Community College class schedules, which list ESL courses, are sent to all homes in their jurisdiction. Flyers are distributed or posted at churches, local businesses, libraries and ethnic cultural centers. In Baltimore and Prince George's County, public service announcements are used. In general, the surveys seemed to indicate that potential students would not have great difficulty finding out about classes. None-the-less, in 2008, the General Assembly passed a bill requiring MSDE to compile a list annually, by county, of adult education and literacy services. MSDE must distribute the list to the local boards of education and superintendents of schools, and must post the list on its public web site. However, in that same session, the General Assembly passed a bill transferring adult education to the Department of Labor Licensing and Regulation. Given the more comprehensive nature of this bill, the future of the "Annual List" is uncertain.

Fees for Classes

The price an adult education student pays for classes varies depending on the program and the level of instruction the student requires. The beginner and advanced beginner ESL courses at community colleges or public school adult education programs are usually free. There may be a registration fee of up to \$30. Some courses require students to purchase materials which can cost \$20-\$30. The price for publicly funded ABE courses is similar.

Courses for more advanced ESL students at community colleges require the students to pay the regular tuition which can range from \$300 to \$700 per course depending on the number of credit hours earned. Graduation Equivalency Degree (GED) courses offered at community colleges are not considered to be Adult Basic Education. They are not as expensive as credit courses but can cost around \$250.

Privately provided instruction for ESL students has a wide range of costs. Churches and other non-profits may charge little or no fee while private language schools may charge \$1,500 or more for instruction. Literacy Council instruction for both ESL and ABE students is generally free but may have a registration fee of \$15 or so. The cost of materials varies widely.

Attempts by the General Assembly to Address Unmet Needs

The Superintendent's Panel on Excellence in Adult Education pointed out that Maryland spent less per pupil on educating adults than all but 6 states making it 44th out of 50 in this type of investment. Therefore, in 2006, following the issuance of the report, HB 1130/SB 650 was introduced. This legislation would have instituted a funding formula that would have dramatically increased the level of state funded adult education services. The legislature gutted the bill and instead amended it to say that in 2007 the Governor must include an increase of \$1,500,000 over the FY 05 appropriation to fund ABE and ESL instruction. In 2007, another attempt to dramatically increase funding for adult education, HB 130 passed the House, but was never brought up in the Senate due to the looming fiscal crisis. In that same year, HB 38 which would have given tax breaks to businesses for providing adult literacy services passed the House, but once again, due to fiscal constraints was never brought up in the Senate.

HB 978/SB 647 - Education - Funding Formula for Adult Education and Literacy Grants (Hixson et al/Kasemeyer et al) was introduced in the 2008 session. It too would establish a formula for funding adult literacy programs similar to the Thornton funding formula for K-12 education. Under this bill, jurisdictions would receive funding based on local adult education enrollment and local wealth per capita. Local revenues from State aid for adult education would increase by an estimated \$2.7 million in FY 2010 and by an estimated \$29.8 million by FY 2014. To be eligible for the State grants, local expenditures for adult education programs would have to total an estimated \$5.0 million in FY 2010 and an estimated \$22.5 million in FY 2014. However, due to the fact that the state of Maryland was generating less revenue than projected expenses required, and because it did not seem likely that local jurisdictions would be eager to fund mandated increases in spending, the legislature had no desire to pass a bill carrying new financial commitments.

Recognizing that significant overlap may exist between the populations in need of adult education and workforce development programs, the 2008 session of the General Assembly passed SB 203 which transferred adult education and literacy services (and education programs for correctional institutions) from MSDE to the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation (DLLR) on July 1, 2009. As a result of the transfer, which was recommended by the Governor's administration, adult education programs will be under the same agency as workforce development programs. This change won't necessarily affect the amount of money available for adult education services; however advocates for the change believe it will improve service delivery for incarcerated youth and adults as well as for adults trying to improve their employment options. There is concern about the impact on literacy services for parents/family members who are not actively seeking employment.

SB 203 also established a Workforce Creation and Adult Education Transition Council to make recommendations for the best way to transition programs from MSDE to DLLR. The Secretary of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation and the State Superintendent of Schools will serve as co-chairs of the council, which is composed of members of the legislature and various stakeholders in the adult education, higher education, and workforce development communities. The Transition Council will be responsible for the development of the first State Plan for Adult Education and Literacy Services that DLLR will submit to the U.S. Department of Education. The State Board of Education will continue to issue Maryland high school diplomas to graduates of the Adult External High School Diploma program. Diplomas for students who complete the GED program will be issued pursuant to regulations developed by the Secretary of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation and the State Board of Education.

Funding for Adult Education

Until the passage of SB 203, the Maryland State Department of Education distributed competitive grants for adult education and literacy services in accordance with the State Plan for Adult Education and Family Literacy. These grants are funded by state and federal funds. The grants were based on need and performance. A minimum state funding level of \$6.9 million was mandated by the General Assembly in FY 2006 for fiscal 2008, but there is no

minimum amount for fiscal 2009 or thereafter. The state grants generally use a 75% State to 25% local split of the total funding level for adult education programs. The local share may come from private, federal, or local public funds. The state grants are distributed to local adult education providers. As described above, local school systems or community colleges generally apply for the state grants to provide adult education programs. In some jurisdictions community groups use state funds to provide the services. For example, in Howard County, Project Literacy uses public funds to run a program in the public library system. Some programs such as FIRN in Howard County use both private and public funds to provide adult education.

Current grants and funding contracts for the adult education program which were awarded through MSDE prior to July 1, 2008, will continue through fiscal 2009 and 2010 without rebidding unless a grantee or contractor requests otherwise. Any grants awarded during fiscal 2009, the transition year, must be made in consultation with MSDE and DLLR. When DLLR becomes the funding agency it will do so based on the State Plan for Adult Education and Literacy Services which in the initial year will be drafted by the Transition Council.

Federal funding that is currently distributed through MSDE, comes as a result of the Federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. This act reformed federal employment, adult education and vocational rehabilitation programs. Title II of WIA provides funding for Adult Basic and Literacy Education State Grants and English Literacy and Civics Education State Grants. In 2007, Maryland received approximately \$9.2 million in these federal funds. The amount is projected to go down about 1% in 2008 and 2009.

Although community colleges and public schools are the main conduit for public funds, agencies and organizations that are often thought of as “private” may receive some public support as well. For example, Literacy Councils, which operate in most jurisdictions of the state, are private non-profit organizations but many conduct their classes in public libraries. In addition, in St. Mary’s County, for example, the public library provides office space, free of charge. Some local governments, such as Montgomery County, make grants to private non-profits such as Literacy Councils or CASA de Maryland, who provide ESOL classes.

Barriers and Potential Remedies for Adults Learning to Read, Write and Speak English

1. Many immigrants, like many low and moderate income native-born Americans, must work 2 jobs to pay their basic expenses, especially now with the pervasive effects of soaring fuel costs. This leaves little discretionary time to attend classes or study. Worksite classes that are made available on lunch hours are one solution. Sometimes dedicated vans are used to transport folks to a worksite. One state has had some success with playing educational videos on those half-hour trips.
2. Since many Maryland residents with low literacy or English proficiency levels are low income, they tend to live in neighborhoods where safety is a concern. They may work during the day, but be afraid to go to evening classes due to crime in the area. Literacy and ESL classes in low income and/or subsidized apartment complexes are one possible solution.
3. Lack of child care prevents many parents from attending classes. Family literacy programs can be very beneficial in such circumstances. Some professionals in the field are concerned about what will happen when the responsibility for adult education moves from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor and Licensing. With the emphasis on work-force development they wonder if such classes will still be held.
4. Those attempting to get to evening classes often find that public transportation is not available at times needed for classes. They may lack their own private transportation, and thus be stymied in getting to and from class. Holding classes in convenient locations at times when public transportation is accessible would help.
5. Folks with limited literacy and limited English skills are more likely to be uninsured or underinsured and thus more prone to prolonged or chronic untreated illnesses among themselves or their families. This makes attendance at classes sporadic at best. Access to affordable health care for all Marylanders is the only solution to this barrier.

Conclusion

Among states, Maryland consistently ranks in the top two for the number of adults with a college degree and is a national leader in school reform for K-12 education. Yet, approximately 19% of the population is out of school without a high school diploma or the ability to speak English well.

Research indicates that investment in teaching adults how to read, write and speak English pays off in terms of increased earning power. Within 18 months of attending adult education programs students have significant wage gains compared to their earnings before entering the program. Minimum wage workers increased their annual earnings by \$1,817 to \$2,579, an 18% - 25% gain. ABE and ESL and students who remain in programs between 120 and 180 hours have 42% higher wage gains than other students.

Yet, repeated attempts to more adequately fund basic education and English language instruction for adults have fallen far short of the recommendations made by the Superintendent's Panel on Excellence in Adult Education. Given the current lack of on-going state revenue to fund existing services, it is hard to predict whether any significant changes to the way Maryland supports adult education will take place in the near future. With the imminent retirement of the baby boom generation, however, workforce needs may drive interest in adult education reform.

Consensus Questions

1. Should free or low cost basic English language instruction be available for adult Maryland residents who are not proficient in reading, writing, speaking and understanding English?

2. Who should provide funding for these services? (Select as many as appropriate)
 Federal Government _____ State Government _____ Local Government _____
 Non-profit agencies _____ Employers _____ Churches _____ Students _____
 Please specify which, if any, of the above have the primary responsibility?

3. Should the state, or local government provide tax credits or other monetary incentives to employers who:
 - a. provide paid work release time for employees to attend ESL or literacy classes? Y _____ N _____
 - b. make space available at the worksite for ESL and/or literacy classes? Y _____ N _____
 - c. contract with qualified professionals and/or community colleges to provide worksite ESL or literacy classes? Y _____ N _____
 - d. If the answer is yes to any of the above, who should have the primary responsibility for offering such incentives? State Government _____ Local Government _____ shared equally _____

References

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LWVMD Adult Literacy and English Fluency Study committee members: Carole Conors, Patricia Hatch, Judith Heimann, Carla Satinsky, Nancy Soreng, Chair