

Adult Education Block Grant CTE Assessment Field Committee

June 1, 2017 Meeting Notes and Comments

At the first meeting of the Adult Education Block Grant (AEBG) Career and Technical Education (CTE) Assessment Field Committee, the group began by reviewing the content of the white paper, “Defining CTE Programs and Measuring their Outcomes,” which provided background on the AEBG target population(s) and scope, data and accountability requirements, and alignment with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) performance indicators; a review of AEBG program areas related to CTE and workforce development, including key concepts such as short-term CTE, pre-apprenticeship, integrated education and training, and work readiness; and information on assessing and documenting measurable skills gains and completion in CTE.

Definition of CTE Programs

Credit Community College CTE Programs

The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) and the California Department of Education (CDE) had issued a preliminary recommendation that, for the purposes of AEBG reporting, information should be included on K12 adult education programs, community college noncredit programs, and community college short-term credit CTE programs. The CTE Assessment Field Committee expressed deep reservations about the inclusion of credit CTE for the following reasons:

- People served by adult education don’t think of themselves as college students, so they are much less likely to enroll in credit programs.
- Now that colleges are reimbursed for enhanced noncredit programs at the same rate as credit programs, many colleges are moving offerings that target adult learners to noncredit, or are developing new programs that are focused on this population. This shift should be supported, as free classes, open-entry-open-exit structures, opportunities to repeat courses and to not have grades count toward future GPAs, and enhanced support services are all beneficial for the target participants.
- Including credit programs in reporting may lead some colleges to argue that funding credit programs should be allowable, and as a result, AEBG may not address its goals of ensuring that colleges are serving adult learners with educational deficits or educational goals different than college.

Therefore, they recommend that credit short-term CTE programs should not be included in AEBG reporting.

Definition of Post-Secondary Programs

Both K12 and noncredit CTE adult education providers argued that their programs should be counted as post-secondary. For example:

- The content of adult education CTE programs may be equivalent to college credit programs

- For some K-12 adult school providers, in particular some CTE programs, a high school diploma is a pre-requisite for participation in CTE training programs
- Noncredit CTE programs are managed by post-secondary institutions
- Many adult schools are accredited by the Council on Occupational Education and participate in federal student financial aid programs and are considered postsecondary vocational institutions and report to the DOE NCES IPEDs data collection system. COE accreditation requires 60% program completion, 70% placement in the field, and 70% licensure attainment for CTE programs

The group also noted that their programs are intended, both in spirit and due to regulations, to support students in advancing along a career pathway. Often adult education programs are articulated to college credit programs in a way that accelerates progress toward a credit award. Therefore, the group determined that their second meeting should tackle what is meant by “transition to a post-secondary institution” in the context of CTE and how this relates to issues of articulation to credit programs. To prepare for this meeting, WestEd will research whether the intent of the legislation was to enable students to earn awards that qualify them for jobs that require more than a high school diploma or to provide a gateway to earning a credit college certificate, associate’s degree, or bachelor’s degree.

Overall Categories

The group recommended that the AEBG programs be simplified for the purpose of data collection. Adult education providers should upload information in a broad CTE category, which would include short-term CTE programs, pre-apprenticeship programs, and programs for adults or older adults entering or reentering the workforce. Analyses regarding pre-apprenticeship and participants entering/reentering the workforce should be calculated by the state, based on characteristics of students and programs that are included in the data uploads.

The group felt that attempting to create additional categories for interdisciplinary programs would be burdensome, and that simple guidance be issued such as: if there are any components of ABE, ASE, or ESL in the delivery of workplace or occupational training, courses/programs should be reported under those categories. All other courses/programs that include workplace skills or occupational skills should be assigned to CTE. The group noted that an external evaluation that examines the practices of adult education providers with very strong and very weak student outcome, would provide more valuable information on effective service delivery models than attempting to create additional program flags. Additionally, it was noted that college noncredit programs are seriously constrained by the lack of a TOP code for VABE programs.

Short-Term CTE

The group devoted careful attention to the definition of short-term CTE programs, as these lie at the heart of most adult education offerings. In canvassing the length of programs offered by committee members, the group noted that while the range of program hours was wide, most CTE programs could be completed in less than a year. Federal student aid does provide guidance on educational awards eligible for financial aid under Title IV. This includes guidelines on the minimum threshold for aid eligible programs (15 weeks or 600 clock hours) as well as an ‘award year’ (900 clock hours).

Beyond training timeframes, the group spent considerable time parsing other aspects of CTE programs and highlighted several characteristics:

- connected to a career pathway
- includes a sequence of courses such as the Perkins definition of Introductory, Concentration, and Capstone courses
- teach skills that lead to stable employment
- enable students to earn a credential that is recognized by employers
- includes a credential or licensure issued by the State, certification issued by industry third party, or certificate issues by school and endorsed by regional employers
- support participants in preparing for college credit or noncredit programs

While adult education programs work to align their offerings with high demand occupations, many programs lead to jobs that are below the regional living wage but nevertheless provide sufficient earnings increases to infuse greater stability into participants' lives.

Committee members also focused on the WIOA specification that credentials are industry-valued. Both K12 and community college CTE programs are subject to requirements regarding program development, which ensure that these programs are developed in partnership with local employers, based on labor market information, and have program content reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it is aligned with workplace needs. Therefore, the group recommended that any certificate that is issued by an adult education provider be considered locally industry-approved presuming that it is vetted and approved by an industry advisory committee. Given that this was an area of concern highlighted by the Data and Accountability Committee, WestEd will examine various regulations to document these policies, with CTE Assessment Field Committee members weighing in on that description. One recommendation by a participant was that AEBG document requirements such as the requirement for an industry advisory committee.

Pre-Apprenticeship

Discussion revealed that there is limited familiarity in the field regarding the federal and state definitions for pre-apprenticeship, especially related to the requirement that there be a formal agreement with an approved apprenticeship program. The group expressed concern that providers may be checking the "pre-apprenticeship" box in TOPSpro Enterprise (TE) who are not delivering services that meet this definition. Clearer guidance, and attention to the lack of flags for pre-apprenticeship in the California Community Colleges Management Information System (MIS), need to be addressed by the AEBG leadership.

Rather than delivering formal pre-apprenticeship programs, many providers are doing "pre-pre-apprenticeship," often in VABE/VESL **Comment (KA): need that top code** contexts, that are helping students be ready to engage in a pre-apprenticeship program. Therefore, one possibility would be to track which students successfully transition from other AEBG program areas into CTE and ultimately into apprenticeship programs (this information could be tracked through a data match with the MIS system, which includes information from the Department of Apprenticeship Standards).

Programs for Adults or Older Adults Entering or Reentering the Workforce

The group felt that adult education providers should not be required to do separate reporting on entering/reentering the workforce, given that this category is difficult to differentiate from participants in short-term CTE programs. They concurred with the Data and Accountability Committee, which recommended that attention be focused instead on disaggregating outcomes based on the WIOA barriers to entry categories. They also urged that results be examined based on student goals. If the state should need to report on the entering/reentering the workforce category to the legislature, they should calculate results for students who reported that their goal is employment-related.

Tracking CTE Participation

Multiple adult education practitioners reported difficulty with tracking CTE students in TE:

- Several K12 providers noted that while there is functionality built in for CTE students, the table structure is complex and local attendance systems may not be set up appropriately to create exports in the required format.
- One practitioner noted that they believed the TE student area has many more indicators that can be used that are not on the update form that could be used to disaggregate outcomes and that it would be helpful to see a screen shot of those
- Noncredit practitioners reported that they manage two systems: WIOA Title II students go directly into TE, but CTE students are recorded in a different system. They also noted that it was difficult and time-consuming to configure their CTE data to fit TE's table structure (which may require eight separate exports). Furthermore, they felt that MIS data are more accurate, as they had only reported students who were funded by AEBG, per the guidance for 2016-17. One noncredit program representative noted that they record all students both in TE and in MIS, resulting in duplication of effort.
- Other college representatives noted that the information they normally collect on CTE students does not align with the participant and demographic records that are required for TE, particularly the fields on the update form (with confusion expressed about the definition of terms on that form). They would prefer that these data points be captured across *all* systems, rather than have them only be available for adult education students who are in TE, and urged that the Chancellor's Office MIS system be amended so that these fields are collected universally. The group had several insights about how to do so:
 - The list of attributes that are not tracked in MIS, which was developed as part of the LaunchBoard Adult Education Tab Pilot, should be shared with the CTE Assessment Field Committee.
 - All colleges and non-credit schools should be required to capture the WIOA barriers to entry fields, so that more comprehensive datasets can be assured, and to prepare the state for likely shifts in Perkins reporting requirements.

- All metrics in AEBG should be aligned with the other CCC initiatives, and guidance should be given regarding how to integrate AEBG and the Strong Workforce Program into the other initiatives such as SSSP, Basic Skills, and Equity.
- Given that many colleges use CCCApply as their intake form (59%), committee members noted that it would be very helpful to adapt the state's common application so that it captures the fields necessary for adult education. However, there were several recommendations about how this adaptation should be implemented.
 - Applicants should not be asked if they are citizens in CCCApply. In this political environment, many students will refuse to engage with systems where information could be used for the purpose of deportation.
 - All of the AEBG goals need to be included in CCCApply.
 - A branching form may be more appropriate, so that the relevant questions are asked based on a student's goal. The application form is already very long and complex, which would be a barrier for enrollment to many, particularly those with limited English skills. Many colleges do not use CCCApply for just this reason.
 - A second approach would be to have two points of entry into CCCApply, both feeding the same MIS system, but which would capture data which may be more specific to the adult ed population(s)

Assessing CTE Outcomes

Measurable Skills Gains

A key insight of the group was that skills should be assessed based on mastery of competencies, rather than counting contact hours. However, the group was wary of introducing testing for CTE, both due to the wide range of competencies that are taught in CTE programs and skepticism about testing as the best way to measure these competencies.

After carefully considering all of the allowable measurable skills gains under WIOA, the group felt that none captured the types of skills-building done by adult education CTE program participants. Therefore, the group suggested an alternative measure, which aligns with spirit of the WIOA measures: participants who master occupational or workplace skills in at least one course, as verified using a competency-based assessment that would be aligned to that occupational or industry competency. This would not be a standardized competency assessment applied to all CTE students regardless of industry or pathway. One example was that if a student completes the intro and concentration courses of a pathway they would count as a skills gain, if they completed the capstone they would be counted as a completer.

The group recommended that any assessment selected by an adult education provider should be recognized by AEBG. The validity of these assessments could be verified by examining participants' employment and earnings outcomes, which provide validation of whether the adult education program is teaching the skills and offering the supports necessary for improving economic outcomes. It was not discussed whether there would be any norming of assessments by industry or occupational target.

The group also spent time considering whether the state should capture information on the attainment of workplace skills (workforce preparation). While all agreed that these competencies are critical and

highly valued by employers, there was skepticism about whether these skills could be measured meaningfully, concern that attempting to track workplace skills would impact the capacity of adult education providers to measure participant characteristics and completion outcomes, and questions about whether the work it would take to capture this information would provide a sufficient return on investment.

Given that there are numerous approaches being tested currently, ranging from career readiness tests to digital badging, the group recommended that the AEBG leadership establish a pilot to assess workplace skills, with a focus on evaluating which approaches led to valid data, without unreasonable effort required to collect the information.

Completion

The first issue tackled by the group was whether there should be a minimum participation threshold for completion metrics. Minimum thresholds are common in federal programs, such as the 300-hour floor for Perkins funding and the WIOA exclusion of credentials in workplace skills and health and safety certifications like OSHA. However, the group noted that the length of training required is highly dependent on the specific program of study, employer demands, and the target population, and could identify contexts (such as CompTIA certifications) where a single course could prepare a participant for a high-value third-party credential.

While there could potentially be some overlap between skills-gains and completion for very short-term programs, the group felt that any CTE certificate given by an adult education provider should be accepted for AEBG, particularly given the extensive program requirements regarding labor market alignment.

The group indicated that third-party credentials should count and noted the widespread confusion regarding the difference between education certification, third-party certifications, and state licenses. However, there was insufficient time to delve into the issue of capturing information on third-party credential attainment. This issue should be raised in the second meeting.

Employment and Earnings

While this meeting was not focused on employment and earnings, the issue was touched on by the group. Topics included:

- It is unlikely that a match to EDD's wage data will generate comprehensive information on participants' employment and earnings outcomes, given that social security numbers are available for only a small percentage of participants and asking for social security numbers in this political environment could deter participants from accessing programs. The state should think about the feasibility and weigh the cost of other approaches, such as surveys.
- Not all participants complete or seek to complete CTE programs, so it is valuable to include employment and earnings information to fully track the impact of participation. Similarly, not all participants in programs are seeking employment. Therefore, participant goals should be taken into account when determining who to include in employment and earnings metric calculations.