



PROSPERITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Opportunities for AEBG to Strengthen
Systems and Communities

Executive Summary



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About this report

This research was supported by funding from the Division of Workforce and Economic Development at the California Community College Chancellors Office (CCCCO). The authors appreciate the contributions of interviewees and research partners on this project, including all of the CCCCCO and California Department of Education (CDE) practitioners and leaders who participated in this study as well as staff at other state agencies, and staff with CASAS, WestEd, IMPAQ, and OTAN. All of these professionals provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted this research, although they are not responsible for the views, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this report. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP).

About CLASP

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is a national, nonpartisan, anti-poverty organization advancing policy solutions that work for low-income people. With nearly 50 years of trusted expertise, a deeply knowledgeable staff, and a commitment to practical yet visionary approaches to opportunity for all, CLASP lifts up the voices of poor and low-income children, families, and individuals, equips advocates with strategies that work, and helps public officials put good ideas into practice. The organization's solutions directly address the barriers that individuals and families face because of race, ethnicity, and immigration status, in addition to low income. For more information, visit www.clasp.org and follow @CLASP_DC.

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Study goals and purpose

In January 2016, the Center for Law and Social Policy commenced an 18-month project to study the implementation of California’s Adult Education Block Grant (AEBG) initiative. AEBG’s purpose is “to improve coordination and better serve the needs of adult learners within each region.” CLASP set out to foster greater understanding of the implementation of California’s AEBG governance and direct service activities, analyze current and potential impacts of the AEBG initiative for partners and participants, and offer recommendations for potential policy and implementation changes in future rounds of AEBG funding and other coordinated funding streams, for consideration by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO), the California Department of Education (CDE), and other policymakers.

While CLASP has used study methods including surveys, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews, the project design also included intensive on-going communication with AEBG leaders and practitioners during the period of transition from AB86 planning to AB104 implementation. This iterative approach can be described as action research, modeling a reflective process of progressive problem solving to address issues and suggest potential solutions. In other words, CLASP did not observe AEBG implementation from beyond a research wall, and the project’s goal was not to conduct a formal “evaluation.” Rather, we actively engaged with California officials to improve the quality of the AEBG program through this study.

In July 2016, CLASP provided interim recommendations to CCCC and CDE leaders, many of which informed activity during AEBG’s second-year implementation. Our analysis and recommendations in this final report solely reflect CLASP’s independent opinion on how to maximize California’s investments in its greatest assets—the residents of the state of California.

Recommendations summary

The full report includes 19 detailed recommendations in four categories:

- **Clarify AEBG’s mission and vision;**
- **Use AEBG to drive a comprehensive pathways system;**
- **Tie AEBG accountability to impact through the establishment of a cross-system accountability structure;** and
- **Provide comprehensive technical assistance and professional development.**

Clarify AEBG's mission and vision so that leaders, practitioners, and community members can clearly identify and articulate the major differences between the legacy, pre-2014 adult education system and the AEBG structure envisioned by California law. The state should:

- Connect AEBG impacts to the identified community of need and evaluate the extent of strategically aligned work and the demonstrable impact of AEBG in a region's workforce development, human services, correctional education, school district achievement, and Community College successes.
- Improve AEBG data and accountability by leveraging existing data collection, performance measures, and goals to frame a new AEBG accountability system. Rather than a straight inflation adjustment in the AEBG appropriation, we recommend that the state provides an additional 6 percent (approximately \$30 million) in new funding for a targeted performance bonus system to give consortia incentives to improve services to their community of need.
- Strengthen AEBG governance and empower the AEBG office to issue joint guidance that is equally binding for Adult Schools and Community Colleges.

Use AEBG to drive a comprehensive pathways system by re-imagining adult education as a strategic partner in strengthening individual economic mobility and regional economic competitiveness through community-wide skill development. To make AEBG an integral part of California's talent development pipeline, the state should:

- Create educational pathways for adults through guidance on pathway strategies for the Adult School to Community College transition, including incentives for dual enrollment for Adult School students in Community College programs, credit for prior learning guidance for non-credit CTE courses to articulate into Community College credit awards, and guided pathway designs that include adult education students and bring the disparate departments in the CCCC together.
- Promote CCC internal alignment efforts for equitable career pathways by coordinating California's investments in the Community College Basic Skills and Student Outcomes Transformation Program, Student Success and Support Program (SSSP), and Student Equity Plans (SEP) to align with investments in AEBG and Strong Workforce initiatives.
- Create CCCC guidance on Ability to Benefit pathways, with the level of detail necessary to educate financial aid administrators on the components of a career pathway for adults without a high school credential, how the pathway should be developed and operated, and how the academics and training interact within the pathway.
- Design career pathways with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) core partners. The AEBG Office, with partners in the California Employment Department (EDD) and the California Workforce Development Board (CWDB), should jointly develop IET and co-enrollment policies and guidance for local providers to support best practice models of career pathways for low-skill, low-income adults.
- Strengthen the "priority of service" link among AEBG, WIOA, and Human Services. California's Employment Development Department (EDD) has drafted guidance for local workforce development

boards to provide guidance and establish the procedures regarding priority of service for recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient served with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) adult funds.¹ AEBG should create its own priority of service guidance to ensure that AEBG connects students to supports, including public benefits.

- Promote immigrant integration by issuing joint guidance with the Office of Immigrant Integration to further career pathways for immigrant workers.

Tie AEBG accountability to impact through the establishment of a cross-system accountability structure. This requires a number of barriers to be addressed:

- Delineate and distinguish “populations” from “services” in fund reporting on AEBG’s seven program areas by using data tags within TopsPRO Enterprise for individual participant characteristics (individual with disability, English language learner, justice-involved adult, etc.) and for course characterization (pre-apprenticeship, workforce re-entry, Career Technical Education (CTE), family literacy, etc.). Creating these data tags will provide a more precise picture of who is receiving AEBG services and what those services are.
- Clarify fund reporting on AEBG’s five objectives, specifically the categories for *Gaps in Service* and *Accelerated Learning*. *Gaps in Service* accounted for the majority of resources but given stable future funding, either the spending in this category should drop dramatically, or else it be relabeled as *sustainability of service provision*. Similarly, *Accelerated Learning* needs refinement to promote the powerful Integrated Education and Training (IET) acceleration strategy, so as to avoid incentives for creating more short-term training that leaves low-skill individuals without clear career pathways.
- Align data definitions and processes among AEBG, WIOA title II, and Community College providers. The AEBG Office should use multiple versions of progress to accommodate the different providers and the non-credit and credit structures at CCC.
- Maximize the use of WIOA Measurable Skill Gain in AEBG by allowing consortia to submit data on *all five types of* Measurable Skill Gains defined in WIOA regulations, plus the sub-components of Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gains described in the National Reporting System (NRS) but not covered by a standardized test.
- Clarify transition to postsecondary education across reporting for AEBG, WIOA title II, and LaunchBoard, to support efforts between Adult Schools and Community Colleges to truly build bridges from Adult Schools to college level postsecondary education.
- Measure progress on mandated objectives in AEBG regional plans through reporting on integration of existing programs to create seamless transitions into postsecondary education or the workforce; activities implemented to address gaps in service delivery for community needs; joint strategies employed to accelerate progress toward academic or career goals; building staff capacity for program integration and improved student outcomes; and leveraging existing regional structures including

workforce development boards, local public agencies responsible for social services, libraries and other community partners.

Provide comprehensive technical assistance and professional development. The AEBG professional development technical assistance provider can greatly enhance capacity for comprehensive capacity building, including strategies to:

- **Amplify senior leadership messaging and build capacity of leaders at all levels.** Professional development must build the skills of local leaders to collaborate across agencies and to articulate the opportunities in and barriers to such collaboration to system leaders, in order to develop, scale, and sustain supportive cross-agency policies and collaborative practices.
- **Establish common standards across providers.** AEBG requires local programs to address the “qualifications of instructors, including common standards across entities that provide education and workforce services to adults” [CA Education Code 84906 (b) (8) (C)]. This delineation of regional common standards for those working with low-skill adults, in Adult Schools, Community Colleges, and in any of the regional adult education and workforce service providers, should lead to quality indicators that can be embedded into staffing decisions regardless of other specific institutional requirements. AEBG technical assistance providers should initiate a state working group to frame a set of common standard qualification criteria for consideration by local AEBG consortia.
- **Support and strengthen consortia structure.** AEBG professional development must build the capacity of local consortia leaders to understand the other adult-serving systems in their region and develop a vision for an adult service strategy with partners. Targeted capacity building is needed for practitioners serving low-skill adults under Community College credit-based developmental education, Community College non-credit CTE and Community College basic skills; WIOA title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act providers; AEBG basic skills and other non-credit CTE providers.
- **Incentivize faculty-led models and learning communities.** The AEBG Office and professional development team should provide guidance and on-going support for inter-institutional professional learning communities to help embed collaboration in AEBG consortia’s way of doing business and to scale best practices.

AEBG is an unprecedented effort to align California adult education across systems and providers in order to support participants’ educational and economic mobility and communities’ prosperity. CLASP offers this study to support California system leaders as they work to bring AEBG to its full potential.

¹ “Workforce Services Draft Directive Transmittal,” Employment Development Department, State of California, June 2015, http://www.edd.ca.gov/Jobs_and_Training/pubs/wsdd-119.pdf