

# TWC Adult Education and Literacy Strategic Plan Progress Report Fiscal Year 2022

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## Background

When the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) program was transferred from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) under Senate Bill 307, 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2013), the legislature required TWC to create a statewide AEL strategic plan and to provide progress reports of the goals and objectives outlined in the plan every even-numbered year. This second statewide AEL strategic plan enhances the four original goals outlined in the previous plan and updates the corresponding objectives for each goal to support TWC’s mission, as follows:

“To promote and support a workforce system that creates value and offers employers, families, individuals, and communities the opportunity to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.” Executive Summary

TWC provides the AEL program with opportunities to leverage state and local workforce and educational resources. TWC is in a unique position compared to other states’ workforce development agencies in that the agency oversees the six core programs authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014: the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs; the AEL program; the Employment Service program; and the Vocational Rehabilitation program (VR). WIOA requires system integration of these core programs, and in Texas, TWC operates the statewide mechanism for ensuring seamless customer delivery to implement a One Workforce system, a vision promoted by the US Department of Labor (DOL) for workforce systems nationwide. The One Workforce vision, described in the Texas Workforce Consolidated 2021–2025 Strategic Plan, calls for increased integration of services, statewide partnerships and collaboration, and the use of accurate data for the purpose of improving workforce services for customers.

During the next two years, AEL will continue to find new ways to support students as they navigate barriers to education and employment, thereby helping them to achieve the economic prosperity that every Texan deserves. To be responsive and accountable to the AEL student, the AEL program will continue to serve its customers—including students, instructors, and program administrators—by working with its partners in the Tri-Agency initiative (TWC, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and TEA) and by collaborating with new stakeholders. This AEL strategic plan progress report outlines several key indicators of success and demonstrates how TWC is meeting its goals and objectives.

## An Overview of Progress

To support increases in employment, transition to postsecondary education and training, skill improvement, and secondary school credential attainment, TWC must use approaches that integrate workforce system services and leverage local and state partnerships to serve its customers. The following list includes highlights that show the continued improvement of the AEL program:

- Nearly 96 percent of AEL students pre- and posttested in Program Year 2021–2022 (PY’21–’22) were reported as showing a successful gain in English and math.<sup>1</sup>
- The AEL program has served 37,420 unduplicated students in career pathways programs since September 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> As reported in the National Reporting System, Table 4A, for AEL PY’20–PY’21

- The AEL program has doubled the percentage of students participating in distance learning since 2019, with 42 percent now following a state-approved distance learning curriculum.
- The AEL program has served more than 50 employers in providing workplace literacy programs statewide.
- The AEL program has continued to pilot new service strategies in order to integrate workforce system customers and stakeholders through initiatives such as Accelerate Texas, Employer Engagement, Family Math Literacy, and Pre-Apprenticeship Bridge programs.
- The AEL program created a three-pronged approach to its professional development (PD) system, enhancing opportunities to support program administrators and instructors, including establishing PD centers that focus on instruction and/or curriculum, career pathways, and distance education.

## Report on Goals

AEL staff considered many policies, plans, reports, and legislation during the development of the new [AEL 2021–2026 Strategic Plan](#). The strategic plan includes the following four primary goals designed to support increases in key indicator performance and innovation:

1. Increase Outcomes
2. Address Demand with Increased Access
3. Enhance Customer Experience with Increased Coordination
4. Improve Program Effectiveness

Within each goal are specific objectives and action items to ensure that TWC is responsive in meeting the identified needs of a workforce system that supports Texas job seekers and employers.

### Goal 1—Increase Outcomes

The AEL program aims to improve workforce, secondary, and postsecondary education and training outcomes as well as education and work-related outcomes through enhanced delivery and service integration.

AEL's focused efforts to integrate with workforce system partners such as employers, Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards), and community college systems have better aligned AEL customers' goals with local workforce needs. Since 2019, AEL programs have specifically worked to improve both the literacy and occupational training skills of approximately 37,500 customers in career pathways programs.

#### **Employer Engagement and Partnerships**

**Employer Engagement Initiative**—In PY'21, AEL engaged employers by awarding a \$1.2 million AEL and Employer Engagement grant to three grant recipients. The purpose of the grant is to support partnerships in developing and implementing models that enhance workplace literacy activities for incumbent workers, workplace literacy activities with employer-provided training, and integrated education and training (IET) that leads to industry-recognized credentials. This tiered approach to services allows for a more employer-centric model that meets the changing needs of employers. As part of the initiative, grant recipients were required to develop curricula for workplace programs, which will be disseminated to workforce system stakeholders as educational resources for job readiness and

advancement within the industry sector. The three AEL grant recipients have partnered with six employers in the construction, transportation, and food production services industries in order to serve more than 400 employees through 2023.

**Digital Access and Resilience in Texas Project**—PY'21 saw the initial development of the Digital Access and Resilience in Texas (DART) project, funded through AEL's grant with the Texas Center for Adult Literacy and Learning (TCALL) at Texas A&M University and with Tyson Foods. DART, a curriculum for adults with low levels of literacy, focuses on building digital literacy and resilience. Specifically, this curriculum helps Tyson employees who have limited or no English abilities by teaching them the basics of computer technology, including logging in to the Tyson Human Resources portal, OKTA. Tyson shared the curriculum with TWC, AEL, and TCALL, and TCALL is now in the process of modifying the curriculum to include teaching students how to navigate the DART social media platform. This curriculum will be disseminated to AEL programs statewide and taught in Tyson plants where AEL programs are administered. A Training of Trainers (TOT) event will be held in January in Houston and will produce a cadre of 20 trainers who will then further the DART mission by training others.

### **Alternative Service Models for Students**

**Statewide High School Equivalency Virtual Provider**—In September 2021, TWC's three-member Commission (Commission) approved a \$3.8 million investment in an entirely virtual statewide high school equivalency (HSE) provider pilot program. The pilot supports AEL's goal of increasing the number of adults in Texas with a secondary school credential—that is, a high school diploma or an HSE. The funding provides an option for adults in Texas to receive virtual educational services leading to the attainment of the credential. TWC has initiated contracts with the University of Texas at Austin and Texas Tech University as the pilot's service providers. This initiative helps adults without a secondary school credential to obtain an HSE or high school diploma by:

- providing adults with flexible synchronous and/or asynchronous coursework options to receive secondary school credential preparation;
- creating and/or incorporating an interdisciplinary curriculum that is aligned with AEL content and industry standards; and
- developing and/or offering bridge programs to postsecondary education and training programs leading to college readiness.

**Accelerate Texas**—Accelerate Texas has awarded grants to expand the capacity of local service providers to develop and deliver IET programs across the state. Through a variety of education and training entities, including community colleges, education service centers, independent school districts, community-based organizations (CBOs), and Boards, grant recipients have served nearly 4,000 individuals, with approximately \$14 million invested in career pathways programs since 2016. The most recent grant awarded \$2 million to four entities to share best practices across the provider network to fast-track individuals into career pathways leading to in-demand occupational employment or furthering postsecondary education.

### **Enhanced Curriculum**

**Integrated Education and Training Design Camp**—In PY'20, TWC AEL staff and two representatives of local AEL grant recipients and providers participated in the rollout of a national series of technical

assistance webinars to state staff and local teams implementing the IET model within their AEL programs. The US Department of Education’s Office of Career and Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) offered the webinars in order to pilot resources that will support an increase in the number and quality of IET programs across the country. The IET Design Camp webinar and toolkit provided resource materials and tools for continued professional development and technical assistance on career pathways in Texas to local providers, coordinated through the Career Pathways PD Center.

**IET in Corrections Pilot Project**—In spring of 2021, AEL applied to OCTAE to participate in a yearlong technical assistance initiative to help correctional education programs develop and implement IET programs. AEL applied on behalf of stakeholders and in collaboration with the Windham School District (WSD), Lee College, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Dallas College, and the Greater Dallas Workforce Development Board, along with local Dallas County jail facilities and the Dallas County Sheriff’s Department Inmate Programs Division. WSD, Lee College, and Dallas College staff, along with AEL state staff, participated in the pilot project throughout 2021 and received customized technical assistance, coaching for local program staff, and peer mentoring with other AEL, correctional, and state staff. Lessons learned will be summarized in an IET manual to be released by OCTAE and RTI, Inc. (contracted technical assistance staff).

**Content Standards**—All AEL-funded providers must align their curriculum with AEL program content standards. First developed in 2016, the content standards increased the rigor and relevance of adult education through alignment with established assessments and standards such as Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (TCCRS), State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) end-of-course exams, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency (TxCHSE), and Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA).

Reviewed approximately every three years, the content standards have been revised multiple times to ensure that Texas is responsive to the changing educational needs of adult learners seeking employment and postsecondary education options. The revisions are as follows:

- 2016—Texas AEL Content Standards (new academic standards)
- 2019—Texas AEL Content Standards v.2, Alignment to Industry Clusters: Advanced Manufacturing; Construction and Extraction; Healthcare Sciences; and Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics
- 2021—Texas AEL Content Standards v.3, Standards for Family and Civics
- 2023 (in progress)—Texas AEL Content Standards v.4, Standards for Digital Literacy

**Curriculum for Construction Trades**—In June 2021, the Commission approved a \$500,000 initiative to design a general construction trades basic skills curriculum to support and enhance contextualized math, digital literacy, and reading instruction as a resource for teachers in the AEL classroom. The materials are designed to address the needs of individuals with high school diplomas or HSEs who are seeking training and employment in construction-related careers. Three modules of construction-related basic skills content are currently in the final stages of development and publication. Tasked with project responsibilities, the Region 6 Educational Service Center will disseminate the curriculum, provide instructors with training on implementing the content, and provide PD on scaffolding instruction and delivery across a diverse group of learners. Materials include teacher guides and student workbooks, which will be made available to Texas stakeholders for use in AEL classrooms.

### **Student Supports and Quality Models**

**Support Services**—AEL Letter 03-21, issued May 17, 2021, and titled “Allowability of Funding Transportation Support Services with Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Funds,” outlines the allowability of AEL funds to be used for transportation services as one part of a comprehensive support service strategy. AEL grant recipients must coordinate with other agencies to provide support services that enable AEL customers to complete the program. This strategy aligns with WIOA’s objective of expanding access to services for individuals with barriers to employment so that they can succeed in a modern local economy.

**Best in Class Award**—In September 2021, the Commission approved a performance quality improvement award to recognize and reward programs that implement strategies focused on student outcomes. This award is weighted so that programs with the highest percentage of students earning a measurable skill gain or credential, such as an HSE or high school diploma, or individuals who earned a recognized postsecondary credential are more likely to achieve the Best in Class award. The award winners must have demonstrated achievement in the areas of recruitment, retention, and college and career navigation. The following are the amounts awarded to the top three winners at the 2022 TWC Annual Workforce Conference and total \$150,000:

- 1st Place—\$75,000
- 2nd Place—\$50,000
- 3rd Place—\$25,000

To further support best practices in order to improve secondary and postsecondary education and training outcomes, winners will be asked to participate in numerous technical assistance initiatives across the state, which reinforces Texas’ commitment to improving student outcomes.

### **Goal 2—Address Demand**

The AEL program aims to address the demand for AEL services in Texas by implementing strategies that provide current and future students with increased and streamlined access.

Adult learners require flexible educational models that take into consideration the competing demands of their time and resources. Expanding service models that provide opportunities and pathways for adult learners to receive services based on their availability and location allows them to succeed regardless of the individual challenges that they may face.

### **Expanding Service Models**

**Pre-Apprenticeship Bridge Program**—As part of TWC’s Ending the Middle Skills Gap Initiative, AEL solicited applications for a pre-apprenticeship bridge program within the construction industry. A \$500,000 grant was awarded to design and deliver a bridge program or IET that provides sufficient basic skills instruction that includes reading, math, and digital literacy to ensure that participants are prepared to succeed in a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP). The grant was awarded to Brazos Valley Council of Governments (BVCOG) in collaboration with the Brazos Valley Workforce Development Board (Brazos Valley) and in partnership with two RAPs—SSC Services for Education and BCA Electric LLC. BVCOG and Brazos Valley are working to advance regional opportunities to increase the number of electrician apprenticeships in order to meet the projected 14 percent growth in demand for qualified

electricians over the next 10 years. The grant recipient's existing partnerships with Brazos Valley, child care service providers, and VR will ensure that participants benefit from the appropriate supports and meet the project's overall goal to increase the number of individuals who qualify for and enter a RAP for electricians.

**Family Math Literacy Initiative**—In PY'21, the Commission approved the Family Math Literacy Initiative, funded with \$500,000 from AEL state leadership funds, for the purposes of enhancing and developing math supports for families in Texas by:

- assisting English language learners and their family members with advancements in math;
- offering math services through interactive instruction conducted via a phone or computer application;
- offering math series that are accessible to AEL learners and their family members, including participants with limited broadband connections; and
- enhancing students' digital skill building, as required by Rider 46.

Services will be offered by nonprofit organizations statewide, which will refer families to and support the use of the math family literacy call center to provide statewide math and digital skill-building services to participants and their families. The call center initiative was funded on October 1, 2022, with anticipated service delivery to begin on December 1, 2022. Approximately 400 participants will be served each month, with no fewer than 4,800 30-minute tutoring sessions conducted annually. Harris County Department of Education is the grant recipient, with a planned subrecipient contract to Sylvan Learning Center.

### **Distance and Remote Learning**

**Distance Education Professional Development Center and Distance Learning Call Center**—In PY'21, the Commission approved a \$1 million investment to expand alternative methods for students to connect to AEL services. The Distance Education Professional Development Center (DEPDC) focuses on distance education, which includes remote learning, distance learning, digital literacy, and more. A major component of DEPDC is the Distance Learning Call Center and website ([txdistanceedhelp.com](http://txdistanceedhelp.com)), both of which provide services to all AEL instructors and students, with the goal of participants finding and being successful in jobs that require digital skills. The call center addresses the post-pandemic need for flexible online models and increases access to services both for instructors who are challenged with simultaneously conducting online and face-to-face classes and for students who must attend their online classes after hours. DEPDC is available seven days a week from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. and employs 15 tutors with expertise in the 37 Approved Distance Learning curricula, Zoom, Google Classroom, and other platforms. DEPDC is developing cutting-edge PD methods on hybrid and blended learning models, and, most recently, TWC authorized \$200,000 of additional funding to create digital literacy content standards for all AEL programs to adopt. In May 2022, DEPDC hosted an annual Distance Learning and Technology Integration Symposium in San Antonio, and they also conduct a monthly webinar for all AEL Distance Learning Leads, a position required of all core grant recipients. The webinar provides guidance, insight, and an opportunity to actively participate in a Community of Practice (CoP), an organization providing the opportunity for information and best practices to be shared. DEPDC also produces and updates the Distance Learning Academy models that are offered as both in-person and

online modules. All staff members who participate in distance learning are required to take Module 1, which covers the state AEL Distance Learning Policy and best practices for conducting online learning.

**North Star and Essential Education Licenses**—At TWC’s direction, DEPDC purchased statewide digital literacy curriculum licensing available to all AEL grant recipients and subrecipients for the minimal investment of \$60,000. DEPDC purchased Northstar Digital Literacy and Computer Essentials after releasing a Request for Applications (RFA) process through the summer of 2022. Northstar released licenses to the field on October 1, 2022, and the Computer Essentials licensing (a component of Essential Education) is scheduled for release in winter of 2022. Statewide webinars to train AEL staff on the implementation of these new curricula are currently taking place. To ensure the accurate amount of seats, AEL program staff used a base of 10 seats for staff members from all programs and then prorated the total number of seats by the same methodology that TWC uses for funding allocation. The digital literacy skills that AEL students have gained are invaluable to those with low literacy skills and instructors that may be challenged by their own need for digital literacy. Solid digital literacy skills are imperative for advancing in today’s workforce and educational environments. Data from AEL’s Texas Educating Adults Management System (TEAMS) shows that students who engage in distance learning in addition to traditional instruction have a much higher rate of measurable skill gains. The licenses will expand AEL instruction using a blended learning model that will result in increased opportunities for students and workers to succeed.

**Math Assistance Call Center**—The Math Assistance Call Center initiative provides \$477,000 to the StudentNest Foundation in order to operate the Math Assistance Call Center (MACC) with virtual support in mathematics and word problems. The service provides live tutor support for students to prepare for the HSE exam, the Texas Success Initiative Assessment, and the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. Call center staff uses online tutoring software to provide visual support to students, in addition to phone support and online chat. MACC currently has provided 1,250 30-minute tutoring sessions monthly, and student satisfaction surveys indicate a 98 percent satisfaction rate. The call center is open seven days a week from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. to address the demand for and create access to this valuable AEL service. MACC promotes its services through memoranda of understanding with 37 AEL providers that garner direct instructor-to-student referrals, present at conferences, and host a series of online webinars in order to maximize effectiveness.

### **Community-Based Partnerships**

**Professional Development Support for Nonprofit Adult Literacy Organizations**—The Professional Development Support for Nonprofit Adult Literacy Organizations project provides PD and capacity-building services to nonprofit and community-based adult education providers, as well as to federally funded AEL grant recipients, Boards, Workforce Solutions Office staff, and VR program staff. Primary participants are tutors, instructors, program administrative staff, and trainers of nonprofit adult education providers in Texas. TWC recognizes both the importance of building capacity for nonprofit community- and volunteer-based literacy providers that serve AEL students and the value that these entities offer as part of the AEL provider network. The project supports PD and the integration of services for providers and underscores TWC’s commitment to enable the expansion of these services. In PY’21–’22, Literacy Texas, the TWC-funded grant recipient for this program, served 898 instructors, tutors, and other staff members for a total of 15,780 PD hours by hosting eight regional symposia and an annual conference. In 2022, the TWC Annual Conference hosted 265 attendees representing 97 adult



and family literacy organizations across Texas. Literacy Texas serves as a referral pipeline between the nonprofit sector and the AEL providers, serving to refer students, once prepared, from the nonprofit sector to the AEL provider, thereby moving forward in a more formal learning environment and either seeking out a career pathway or furthering their education.

### **Goal 3—Enhance Customer Experience with Increased Coordination**

The AEL program aims to enhance the workforce customer experience through increased coordination and integration between state and local workforce system stakeholders.

Over the past several years, TWC’s efforts to increase coordination between workforce system partners and various educational stakeholders have remained focused on the AEL customer. The work of AEL programs and workforce partners continues to elevate the experience for thousands of learners who are navigating complex systems.

#### **Cross-Agency Coordination**

**Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency Subsidy Program**—In partnership with TEA, TWC continues to administer the TxCHSE subsidy program, which is worth \$1,500,000, biennially, as approved by the 86th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2019). Through the TEA-funded TxCHSE program, TWC may subsidize an HSE exam for a Texas resident age 21 and older, thereby removing the financial barrier to obtaining an HSE, which provides more opportunities for job placement, admission into postsecondary education and training, and access to financial aid for higher education. Funding for this subsidy program is available through the end of Fiscal Year 2023 (FY’23) unless extended. As of August 2022, TWC has administered approximately 10,000 vouchers. During FY’20 and FY’21, the program was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in testing center closures and thus prohibiting individuals’ ability to access testing services. Beginning in FY’22, TWC and TEA’s coordinated marketing campaigns reenergized the state’s effort to ensure that eligible Texans are aware of the opportunity and how to participate in the subsidy program. More than 10,000 individuals who lacked only one HSE test to earn a credential were sent email messages publicizing the program and encouraging them to take advantage of it. The funding for and coordination between the two agencies is critical to addressing the number of individuals in Texas who lack a high school diploma or HSE.

#### **TWC Coordination and Alignment**

**Coordinated Performance Measures**—In October 2021, the Commission approved a modification to one of the Board-contracted performance measures, Choices Full Work Engagement. Choices Full Work Engagement measures how well Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Choices participants were meeting their participation requirements as well as how the requirements were met. Before the modification, only time spent in actual employment was counted in the measure (except for high school students). This influenced service providers to focus almost exclusively on activities that would rapidly result in employment—even if an individual might benefit from education or skills training prior to finding employment. The performance measure modification addressed this unintentional consequence by counting time spent in training and education activities as part of their performance. Training and education activities include AEL services such as, but not limited to, basic education, HSE, and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. This modification strengthened local efforts to integrate Board and AEL partnerships in the coordination of services to workforce system customers. The number of customers coenrolled in TANF/Choices and AEL services more than doubled from PY’21 to PY’22, likely

as a result of the performance measure modification and provider support of coenrollment strategies as well as renewed post-pandemic class offerings.

**Coenrollment Award**—In September 2021, the Commission approved a performance quality improvement award that focuses on the alignment and integration of adult education and literacy with Board-operated programs. The following are the awarded amounts for the top three winners announced at the 2022 TWC Annual Workforce Conference, which total \$150,000:

- 1st Place—\$75,000
- 2nd Place—\$50,000
- 3rd Place—\$25,000

The award emphasizes successful local efforts to create a more robust referral system and wraparound service model in which AEL students gain access to Board-operated programs and services, including, but not limited to, job search, job placement, work preparation and job readiness, support services, career counseling, and WIOA Title I workforce training.

### **Student Ambassadors**

**TWC AEL Scholar of the Year**—In September 2021, the Commission approved an award that recognizes an AEL student’s outstanding dedication, persistence, and leadership. This nonmonetary award is presented to up to six scholars through a nomination-based process. Grant recipients may nominate up to two students each year. The winners were recognized at the AEL Fall Institute in Austin in September 2022 and the TWC Annual Workforce Conference in November 2022. The scholars will be highlighted throughout the year in TWC-sponsored social media marketing and will act as ambassadors for adult education and literacy in Texas.

### **Goal 4—Improve Program Effectiveness**

This AEL program goal is to improve program effectiveness, which includes accountability and fiscal integrity, and to provide tools to communicate the AEL program’s impact to AEL stakeholders.

The foundation of any quality model is accurate and transparent data. Data assists TWC in identifying statewide and local performance trends as well as in developing more efficient program models and technical assistance.

### **Collaborative Professional Development System**

**Statewide Professional Development Center**—Since 2015, TWC has made significant investments in funding a statewide PD center to serve the more than 3,700 adult education administrators, instructors, and staff. In 2021, TWC increased its investment to \$2,500,000 annually. In the most recent solicitation, TCALL was awarded to function as AEL’s primary PD center, serving 9,432 attendees at state and regional events during PY’21–’22. These events ranged from hosting an AEL meeting before the TWC Annual Workforce Conference, to facilitating the AEL Fall Institute every September, to conducting regional trainings on the AEL content standards rollouts.

The statewide PD center act as the lead coordinator of communication between the Career Pathways and Distance Education PD centers, including scheduling a statewide calendar of events and hosting the Texas AEL PD Portal. This portal houses all online PD course offered across the state. The PD Portal has

more than 3,500 active users and serves as the hub of PD activity, with an average of 15,000 online course completions each year. Additionally, the PD Portal automatically maintains transcripts as documentation of PD hours accrued by each staff member to ensure compliance with TWC Chapter 805 Adult Education and Literacy rule §805.21. A total of 37,823 PD hours were accrued in PY'21-'22. In the current program year, almost 300 PD Portal participants were added to the system for access to Windham School District, a key stakeholder in the AEL program.

The PD center employs full-time PD specialists who work individually with their respective AEL programs and have spent 446.5 online and virtual hours assisting those programs with program performance. PD specialists help develop programs' annual PD plans that guide professional development based on the need, as evidenced by performance data and a needs assessment conducted each spring. Statewide PD recommendations are published by the center after conducting the needs assessment and careful research of evidence-based best practices occurring nationwide and within Texas as well as considering input from TWC staff regarding the programs, both individually and collectively. With this \$2.5 million investment, program effectiveness and improvement are the constant focus, strategically addressed in a multifaceted approach.

**Career Pathway Professional Development Center**—In PY'20, TWC re-procured the Career Pathway Professional Development Center (CPPDC) with the goal of improving program effectiveness and quality across the AEL system for all career pathway models. The \$750,000 grant was awarded to Region 6 Educational Service Center to support quality career pathway models through PD for AEL teachers and staff and to support integration across WIOA programs that serve priority populations through stakeholder group cross-training that enhances employment and postsecondary outcomes. CPPDC provides research-based PD on the following core AEL career pathway services:

- Integrated Education and Training (IET)
- Services to English Language Learners (ELL) who are Internationally Trained Professionals
- Workplace Literacy and employer engagement
- Corrections and re-entry services for justice-involved individuals

In PY'21, CPPDC hosted seven PD events with an attendance of 536 participants receiving 650 PD hours. Services focused on IET through statewide webinars presented by national trainers on designing, developing, and implementing the IET model. CPPDC holds an annual statewide Career Pathway Symposium and in May 2022 presented a three-day, three-track symposium, with 12 hours of focused content on each of the following topics with state and national subject matter experts:

- Building IET Pathways for English Language Learners (ELL)
- Designing Comprehensive Services for Internationally Trained ELL learners with credentials from their home country
- Designing Re-Entry and Post-release Services through Partnerships with Windham School District and Higher Education

In PY'22, in collaboration with Train PD as the content development lead, CPPDC staff members and 15 state trainers will complete a Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop series building expertise in the design of services to ELLs who are Internationally Trained Professionals. The TOT model of PD builds a stronger pipeline of subject matter experts available to train at the local and regional levels in order to expand the capacity of programs to scale services for this population. Nearly 20 percent of individuals enrolled

in AEL identify as ELLs with degrees from their home country. Expanding the expertise of local AEL grant recipients and providers to design effective services that address the unique needs of this population, enables participants to reestablish their career paths in the United States or to identify and train for related occupations through intensive ESL, work readiness, additional job training, or articulation of degrees. This focus supports the goal to increase program effectiveness and ensures that members of this population have access and the opportunity to contribute their knowledge and skills in the workplace.

**Quality Assurance and Performance Accountability**—As part of ongoing efforts to ensure the highest quality data collection and reporting, AEL grant recipients are required to staff two positions, one focused on quality assurance and one focused on performance accountability. The AEL program has developed a community of practice to support these important roles. Quarterly meetings are held with AEL grant recipient staff and AEL program staff to discuss best practices on internal monitoring and data analysis to support the improvement of performance outcomes. Over 100 practitioners from across the state participate in these events each quarter in order to build capacity for increased local compliance monitoring and improvement in performance outcomes.

### **Evaluation and Research**

**Evaluation Project**—In July 2022, the Commission approved a \$500,000 evaluation project to assist with future enhancements of adult education services statewide. With WIOA reauthorization underway, staff has identified a need to evaluate the current state of AEL service delivery in order to provide data that will further improve the statewide AEL system over the next several years. The approved funding will help TWC with analyze the following program elements:

- Integration and coenrollment among WIOA Titles I, II, and IV programs
- Student retention, persistence, and skill gains and credential achievement
- Program staffing and organizational structures
- Service models
- Access to AEL services

The RFA for this initiative is in development.

### **Data System Collection and Analysis Enhancements**

**Texas Educating Adults Management System Work Groups**—Over the past two years, TWC has facilitated several TEAMS work groups to discuss system enhancements in order to support better data collection and management. Accurate and reliable data are crucial components in the development of both performance and management-level reports in TEAMS. Both canned and ad-hoc reports are necessary to ensure that AEL grant recipients are able to analyze their local data in order to determine program effectiveness and support strategies for improvement. More than half of the AEL grant recipients statewide have representation in the work groups, and TWC took care to ensure equity across both large and small urban and rural providers in the work groups. Texas has regional challenges that make this representation crucial for new user enhancements.

**Visual Performance Dashboards**—As part of TWC’s commitment to transparency and to meeting data-driven performance measures, AEL state staff worked closely with TWC’s Division of Information, Innovation, and Insight (I|3) to design a data visualization dashboard that would provide just-in-time

enrollment and performance reports for AEL programs. In January 2022, TWC launched Tableau®, interactive data visualization software, to support just-in-time data tools and visualizations. The tools are available through a secure access point to more than 3,000 users and will continue to be enhanced to best meet the needs of end users. Some of the features include nightly data updates, demographics, and performance indicators. The data shows trends in student enrollment, breaks down services offered to students, and class-level attendance. The ability to break down information by demographics and barriers to employment allows AEL grant recipients to be responsive to local needs to assist students in meeting their goals.

**Performance Management Reports**—Over the past several years, multiple canned reports have been created in TEAMS to support better analysis of program performance, including:

- The Measurable Skill Gain (MSG) Management Report—identifies adult learners who count in the performance denominator for the US Department of Education to ensure that MSGs are earned each program year to support increases in literacy and numeracy gains.
- The Period of Participation (POP) Report—identifies individuals who are in the denominator for exit-based outcomes measures. Features include first and/or last instructional hours, workforce training hours, days since the last instruction, class-level data, and demographics.
- POP Exiter Management Report—provides users with a management tool that lists true exiters (last service date + 90 days) by reporting quarters and whether they have earned a credential and have enrolled in postsecondary education, or employment in Quarters 1–4 post-exit. This allows grant recipients to manage follow-up on each of the performance-related elements in order to maximize performance outcomes. This report is in development and is planned to launch in PY'23.

**Statewide Service Transparency**—TWC has made considerable enhancements to TEAMS to ensure that AEL grant recipients across the state have secure access to participant-level data. Because students often participate in multiple programs as they relocate throughout Texas, TEAMS needed to clearly show what services each student received. This gives grant recipients a comprehensive view of each student's participation and services as well as diminishing duplication of services, including support services. For this reason, system enhancements to collect and store support services data and participant notes were added to provide the best possible continuity of care for students statewide. The enhancements allow TEAMS to track wraparound supports such as transportation services, HSE vouchers, and transcription of foreign credentials. Additionally, the Participant Notes feature allows grant recipients to add comments to the participant record in three categories: General, Support Service Justification, and Exemption Justification. Only staff members in designated roles may modify or delete notes after 30 days. Notes that are saved are visible to all grant recipients regardless of which staff member entered the data so all users have a holistic view of the services that a participant received.

### **Data Accuracy and Reporting**

**Technical Assistance**—The technical assistance that TWC continuously provides to AEL programs ensures that the data programs report is reliable and accurate and provides transparency with AEL programs seeking to identify performance gaps and track student progress. Each month, TWC staff

reviews TEAMS data reports for each AEL grant recipient and specifically analyzes the number of AEL participants being reported, measurable skill gains achieved by the program, and students who may be ready to take a posttest in order to monitor whether they have improved their literacy or math skills, among other performance-related and quality checks. Continued data monitoring allows TWC staff to identify performance trends, such as significant increases or decreases in enrollment from the previous month, and any trends in student retention to assist AEL programs in reaching out to students to continue program participation.

**Coordinated WIOA Data Validation**—TWC’s Subrecipient Monitoring Department (SRM) conducts data validation testing for all AEL grant recipients to ensure that the data being reported has appropriate source documentation and meets federal and state requirements. Beginning in September 2022, in coordination with TWC’s Fraud Deterrence and Compliance Monitoring Division’s Business Support department, SRM developed a dedicated database to capture testing results while allowing TWC to generate testing outcomes for each AEL grant recipient. TWC’s I|3 performs error-checking audits designed to meet DOL reporting requirements. SRM has implemented remote data validation audits and conducts data validation for all AEL grant recipients. In FY’24, SRM will divide the total contracts issued into a five year cycle.

## In Conclusion

This initial progress report of the 2021–2026 AEL Strategic Plan is a testament to how TWC has met its goal to drive innovative, customer-focused AEL service models that address AEL’s mission:

“To support increases in employment, postsecondary education and training transition, skills, and secondary school credential attainment through demonstrated approaches that integrate workforce system services and leverage local and state partnerships.”

TWC’s investments in innovation continue to support the demand for a comprehensive, connected, and transparent adult education system that focuses on meeting students where they are. Texas’ continued efforts to increase the literacy, numeracy, and employability skills of its population remain the focus of TWC’s core AEL system.