

**The Massachusetts Adult Basic Education  
Performance Accountability Working Group**

**P A W G**

**FINAL REPORT**

**30 September 2002**

# The Massachusetts ABE Performance Accountability Working Group Final Report

This report is organized as follows:

1. **Overview:** Background, PAWG Statement of Purpose and Questions (*pages 2-3*)
2. **Purposes for the ABE Performance Accountability System:** laws and requirements according to WIA and the state, how well we are serving our students, and implementing continuous improvement (*pages 4-5*)
3. **Student Primary Assessment:** short- and long-term recommendations for testing and accompanying challenges (*pages 5-10*)
4. **Student Goals and Countable Outcomes:** both a chart and a narrative description are provided as well as a list of accompanying challenges (*pages 10-12*)
5. **A Cohesive System and Unfinished Business:** a description of how the system fits together and a presentation of issues we must resolve in its implementation, what remains, and the plans for a "PAWG II" in January 2003 (*pages 12-14*)

For more information on the topics within this document, please refer to the PAWG Notes posted at the SABES web site at <http://www.sabes.org>, or to the Assessment Policy Manual available on line from the Massachusetts Department of Education Adult and Community Learning Services at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/news.htm>.

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## 1. OVERVIEW

This summary report is intended for ABE practitioners and other stakeholders and interested parties in Massachusetts. It briefly outlines the work of the Performance Accountability Working Group (PAWG) over the past one-and-a-half years, focusing on how we arrived at and grappled with various ABE performance accountability issues, and they were resolved. It is intended to give the field a sense of how we dealt with the enormity of developing a statewide system of accountability. Of special concern to the PAWG was how to balance the demands of an accountability system that honors the "breadth" of our work (the diverse, rich and complex purposes that motivate our students to enroll) with the goal of keeping these demands as manageable for programs and staff as possible. To this end, the PAWG consistently found itself making compromises as it determined what elements to include in the performance accountability system.

The PAWG's recommendations cover two main components of the ABE performance accountability system we envision: Student ("Primary") Assessment, and Student Goals achieved or Countable Outcomes. It is important to keep in mind that the PAWG's work provides a starting point. We did not develop the whole system; we began to develop components of that system. We did not develop new assessments; we explored and selected from a variety of available assessments and recommended assessments that need to be developed consistent with the Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks. We did not finish our business; we set in motion a work-in-progress to fully develop an accountability system within our state.

We regard the next few years as an interim period that ensures we are in compliance with federal requirements while we continue to work steadily at building an effective ABE system of services in Massachusetts that reflects our values and the dreams and aspirations of our students.

## Background

In February 2001, the Performance Accountability Working Group (PAWG) was convened by the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE/ACLS). The immediate catalysts for its creation were performance accountability requirements already stipulated by the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) as well as related requirements that were beginning to emerge at the State level. The purpose of the PAWG was to make recommendations for meeting these federal and state requirements for performance accountability by July 1, 2002 with a system that was genuinely responsive to:

- our diverse student population,
- the multiplicity of reasons for their enrollment, and
- the continuous improvement of our programs and the services we provide.

The PAWG researched how other states have chosen to meet the WIA requirements with the result that Massachusetts compiled a comprehensive report of ABE performance accountability implementation in all 50 states<sup>1</sup>. We found that most other states have adopted standardized tests such as the TABE, the BEST, or CASAS, and that some are attempting to develop and implement a more inclusive approach to learner assessment: one that reflects more than the results of a paper and pencil test. Examples of these efforts include states such as Ohio that are in the process of standardizing a portfolio approach to assessment, or states that are adopting Equipped for the Future (EFF) to measure “educational gain,” such as Maine. Most states are using a statewide database built from the individual student level up, however, few honored goals that students might have for participating in the program (PAWG refers to these as “countable outcomes”) other than those stipulated by WIA. Massachusetts delayed making choices about assessments and countable outcomes until it analyzed the existing and emerging systems used by the other states.

Our research confirmed that Massachusetts had an important head start in defining the “universe of content” to be assessed. For more than five years, practitioners around the state have contributed to the development of the Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks and to the development of assessment and evaluation procedures that align with the Frameworks. These and other “home grown” or program-developed assessment materials, as well as commercially available tests selected by programs, have formed the basis for our accountability system in the past. This work by practitioners has been central to our system development. In addition, it has informed the work of the PAWG. The Curriculum Frameworks form a centerpiece of our system, and it is our intention to develop and adopt assessment tools fully aligned with the Frameworks. In many instances, this turns out to be a long-term goal. For the next few years, we must necessarily adopt assessments that fall short of this goal in order to be in compliance with state and federal requirements. These short-term recommendations are outlined in Section 3 of this document.

The PAWG employed several different processes and frameworks to help guide the work. These included small group structures to conduct research in different areas and a series of questions that helped provide a syllabus of sorts for us to follow. Following is the PAWG Statement of Purpose and guiding questions. A listing of PAWG members and small group make-up are found in Appendixes A & B.

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<sup>1</sup> Available on the ACLS web site at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/news.htm>.

## **PAWG Statement of Purpose**

*The Performance Accountability Working Group (PAWG) is a group of practitioners and Department of Education staff who are working together to develop a performance accountability system for adult basic education programs.*

To this end, the PAWG must attempt to answer and define the following questions:

1. What is the scope/breadth of what we mean by “ABE Performance Accountability?”
2. To whom and for what should the Massachusetts ABE service delivery system be held accountable?
3. What measures can and should be used to document performance in ABE?
4. What constitutes valid and reliable measures of student and program performance?
5. What level of proficiency must students attain in order to receive a “terminal degree” (i.e.: GED, AD/ED) within the ABE service delivery system?
6. What other benchmarks and associated levels of proficiency would be appropriate and useful for our students to attain?
7. To what extent are funded ABE programs responsible for student performance, including the attainment of performance benchmarks?
8. What levels of program performance are expected?
9. What support do programs need and deserve from the state, from SABES, and from each other in order to meet performance expectations?
10. What are the consequences of strong, average, and/or weak performance over time?

## **2. PURPOSES FOR THE ABE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM**

In recent years, several policy initiatives at both state and federal levels have shifted the focus of adult basic education programs from simply providing services to demonstrating the impact of the services provided and developing specific results. At the federal level, the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) called for the establishment of a comprehensive performance accountability system in each state to assess the effectiveness of federally funded ABE programs in delivering adult education and literacy services. States receiving federal ABE funding are required to express core indicators of performance in an objective, quantifiable and measurable form, and they must be able to show progress toward continually improving in performance. At the state level, the MADOE must be able to document program performance to the administration and to legislators in order to keep funds flowing to programs for services. The performance accountability system being developed in this state must not only allow the Department to make informed funding decisions and defend its requests for funding with reliable and valid data, it must ensure that the ABE related goals and aspirations of students remain at the heart of this work.

As indicated above, the purposes of the performance accountability system can be broken into two principal areas: to assess performance and to inform stakeholders. In the ABE field, we assess performance at a variety of levels and we inform a broad array of audiences. At the classroom level we assess student performance in order to guide curriculum development and instruction and to inform students and teachers of educational gains. Programs are accountable to students for providing meaningful instruction that enables students to meet their goals. At the same time, programs are accountable to funders for putting available resources to the best possible use in serving the maximum number of students in the most effective way. This requires programs to gather objective, quantifiable, and reliable data to report to the Department of Education. The Department, in turn, is accountable to the governor, the legislature, the U.S. Department of Education, Congress, and to the taxpayers for providing oversight to funded programs. MADOE must ensure that the outcomes of the ABE system in Massachusetts efficiently and effectively meet the needs of residents and other stakeholders (e.g., businesses, higher education, etc.) in the Commonwealth.

### **3. STUDENT PRIMARY ASSESSMENT**

An important portion of the PAWG's role was to develop recommendations for the Department on what aspects of student performance to assess and how to best assess them. The National Reporting System (NRS), which was developed in response to the requirements of WIA, identified core indicators of performance for ABE programs. These include educational gains in English literacy and numeracy skills and follow-up measures including entering employment, retaining employment, receipt of a secondary school diploma or GED, and placement in post-secondary education or training. There are also secondary outcomes and measures that represent broader goals that students might strive for through their ABE enrollment. (See Guidelines for the National Reporting System available on line at <http://www.air.org/publications/publications-set.htm>.)

The core measures of educational gains and follow-up measures described in WIA are those most important for federal reporting at the program level and, as such, were the source of a great deal of discussion and research activities among PAWG members.

A major concern for reporting in any system – be it for SMARTT, NRS, or in preparing a household budget – is that the data be valid, reliable and comparable. Otherwise, no significant conclusions can be reached or comparisons made with regard to the data collected; progress and accomplishments cannot be evaluated with confidence. For the data to be valid, they must accurately reflect the expected outcomes of the task. In education, the task is that students acquire a “universe” of knowledge, skills and abilities. This universe is generally articulated in the curriculum and/or a curriculum framework. Assessment items/tasks must be aligned with the learning standards of the Curriculum/Curriculum Framework in order to provide valid information about student acquisition of the knowledge, skills and abilities in question. Pre/post assessments aligned with the standards are needed to measure student learning gains. To be reliable, the data must be consistent when collected from similar sources using similar methods. What this means for ABE programs across the Commonwealth is that they must use a standardized process for assessing student performance and for reporting the results. There must be a pretest to determine where the student is at the beginning of instruction and a post-test to indicate any educational gains.

One of the primary tasks of the PAWG was to determine what would be tested using the primary assessments, what instruments would be used, and how the results would be reported. Three of the Working Groups within the PAWG (see Appendix B) were assigned the work of researching available tests

used both within Massachusetts and nation-wide, and making recommendations to the full committee based upon this research. The following process was used to develop the groups' recommendations<sup>2</sup>:

- The first step was to review the standards in the three basic skills frameworks: ABE Mathematics, ABE English Language Arts (ELA), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to determine which standards should be assessed on a statewide basis and which would best be assessed locally. Additionally, we determined if the standard was written in a form that could be reliably and consistently measured and made modifications where indicated.
- The next step was to compare available assessment instruments to the Massachusetts ABE Frameworks to see how completely they addressed the standards in the frameworks. Included in this research were the major tests used nationally by USDOE- funded programs as identified through a national survey conducted by MADOE<sup>3</sup>. The group also reviewed the "homemade" tests submitted by Massachusetts ABE programs in response to the Department's assessment crosswalk request.
- While the comparisons of the tests and Frameworks were being conducted, another review of the technical data and field trial results of the commercially produced instruments (TABE and BEST) was conducted by DOE staff to determine the level of validity, reliability, and comparability achieved through their test development processes.
- When the research was complete, each working group reported back to the group as a whole with both written reports and oral presentations. The PAWG then discussed and debated the results as a group and voted on recommendations for how the Department of Education should proceed – both on a short-term and long-term basis.

### **Recommendations for Assessing Learning Gains**

#### **A. SHORT TERM (three to five years) Assessment Recommendations for ABE Reading, Writing, and Mathematics:**

The PAWG researched and correlated the major tests used nationally (TABE, AMES, ABLE and CASAS) to the Curriculum Frameworks standards to see how well each assessment/test covered the standards included in the Frameworks. The commercially available assessment that came closest to alignment with the ELA and Math Curriculum Framework standards was the TABE. (The AMES test also was close to the TABE in its coverage of the learning standards, but there is some uncertainty right now in the publication of the AMES.)

Unfortunately, "closest" still only represents a 56% correlation of the TABE's test items with learning standards in the math framework and even less for alignment with the English Language Arts standards. Further, there are almost no items at the beginning literacy levels (GLE 0 to 1.9) that align with the learning standards in either framework. Finally, the TABE is also limited in the degree to which it meets the PAWG's third overriding goal as stated earlier - assessments must provide useful information to teachers and students. These are three of the reasons why the TABE is not recommended as a long-term solution for assessing ABE Reading, Writing and Math.

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<sup>2</sup> Note: To see how the PAWG's recommendations translated into assessment policy for the Department of Education you can download the Assessment Policies and Procedures Manual from the ACLS web site at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/news.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/news.htm>. 10-02-01

Therefore, for the next three to five years only, the TABE, Forms 7 and 8 have been recommended as the primary assessment for ABE reading, writing and math. It is not recommended, however, as the primary assessment for the beginning levels of literacy (GLE 0 – 1.9). Programs should use their previously approved crosswalk assessment tool for students identified as functioning at this level. (NOTE: If the program’s beginning approved literacy assessment tool was the TABE, please contact your SABES Curriculum and Assessment Coordinator for guidance in selecting a replacement.)

#### B. SHORT-TERM Assessment Recommendations for ESOL Assessments:

Two assessments that align quite well with the adult ESOL framework learning standards are two performance-based assessments: the BEST (Basic English Skills Test) for *speaking and listening*, and the REEP (developed by the Arlington Education and Employment Program, part of the Arlington, Virginia Public Schools) for *writing*. The PAWG was unable to recommend an assessment for ESOL *reading*.

The PAWG’s research showed that the BEST test’s ability to capture educational gain begins to “plateau,” (i.e., not test higher level skills) at SPL 5. We are also aware that administering this performance assessment one-on-one will be time consuming to administer – one of the “tradeoffs” the PAWG struggled with as it considered the strong validity of performance assessments but also the heavy demands they place on program and instructional resources.

Our research also showed that the REEP currently has only one prompt for placement and two prompts to assess educational gain that have been satisfactorily standardized. [NOTE: The Department of Education is entering into a partnership with the Arlington, VA program to develop and standardize additional prompts for the REEP writing assessment. We hope to have additional prompts available for FY 2004, and to potentially have at least one new prompt for the end of FY 2003.]

For the longer term, the PAWG recommends we evaluate the forthcoming BEST PLUS test, which is expected to be released in January 2003, as well as local assessments for their potential to be standardized for use at the state level. Members of the PAWG have asked the Department to analyze the BEST PLUS and the REEP to determine whether they can serve as our long-term solution for ESOL assessments (refer to following section). In addition, we strongly encourage programs to use other assessments, particularly performance-based assessments, for reading. Since new assessments require extensive standardization, it will take time before we can develop and use any new Massachusetts-specific assessments statewide to obtain reliable measures of educational gain.

#### C. GAPS in the short term assessment protocols

There were some areas of student assessment for which the PAWG was not able to find valid, reliable and comparable assessments even for the short term – several of these were apparent during the PAWG’s deliberations and other issues emerged as programs considered the new assessment policies. For the purpose of providing a more complete review, all the issues we are aware of at the time this report is published are covered in the following list. It is also noted when a conclusion is authored by the Department rather than the PAWG. Pending issues are as follows:

- (1) For ABE students at the GLE level 0 – 1.9, programs will continue to use the same instrument they used last year (consistent with their approved “crosswalk”) while the Department of Education determines valid and reliable assessments for this group of students (with the exception of TABE 5-6).

- (2) For ESOL Students who are at (or may enter) SPL 6 during the program year:  
Programs should administer the REEP writing assessment to these students regardless of whether “writing” is related to their goal(s) for enrolling in the program. This is essential because the original BEST appears to plateau at SPL 5 and is unable to provide reliable measures of educational gain beyond this level.
- (3) For ESOL Students who select reading as their primary assessment goal:  
The PAWG was unable to recommend a reading assessment that was valid and reliable. A new PAWG Working Group will be convened in January 2003 to research and make recommendations on a reading assessment. In the meantime, programs will need to select ESOL Speaking/Listening for students at lower levels, or select ESOL Writing (since this is included in the same area for NRS reporting purposes) for students at higher levels of proficiency.
- (4) For ESOL Students in Native Language Literacy (NLL) programs:  
Programs will continue to use the same tests as approved via the “crosswalk” process last year until a new PAWG working group can determine valid and reliable assessments for this group of students.
- (5) For Students in Transitions programs:  
NOTE: The Department determined that assessments selected for FY 2003 (TABE and BEST in particular) are not appropriate for students at this level; transitional programs will continue to use their approved crosswalk instruments for FY 2003
- (6) For Students in ADP/EDP programs:  
While the PAWG discussed upcoming challenges for ADP/EDP programs (particularly the impact of MCAS as a graduation requirement commencing 2003), it did not make specific assessment recommendations. NOTE: the Department has determined that if a student’s preparation for the EDP includes *any academic* instruction, then programs must administer the TABE test to measure educational gain.
- (7) For ABE and ESOL Students in Workplace Education programs:  
NOTE: The Department has determined that the TABE is not appropriate for students in the workplace setting. Programs may continue to use ABE assessments previously approved via the crosswalk process. The BEST and REEP do appear to be quite appropriate to measure learning gains for ESOL students in workplace education programs.
- (8) NOTE: The Department has determined that students enrolled in our state’s two “volunteer only” programs (Literacy Volunteers of Massachusetts and the Eastern Massachusetts Literacy Council) may continue to administer assessments previously approved by the Department two times a year, i.e., at least every 6 months.

## D. LONG-TERM Assessment Recommendations

- (1) For assessing ABE Reading, Writing and Math, the PAWG found no commercially available standardized assessments that were substantially well-aligned with the reading and writing standards of the Massachusetts ABE ELA and Math Curriculum Frameworks. The PAWG's long-term recommendation is that ACLS lead the development of a combination of both standardized tests and performance-based assessments that are fully aligned with these frameworks.

The PAWG's first recommendation is that the State develop a performance-based writing assessment that aligns with the Massachusetts ELA Curriculum Framework. While the REEP will serve on a short-term basis, the group recognized the need to adopt a writing assessment that can be used state-wide and that has sufficient prompts to ensure valid and reliable measurement of student progress when used in accordance with the Massachusetts ABE assessment guidelines.

The Math Working Group found that none of the standardized tests are a perfect match with the standards. Areas that are consistently not assessed adequately in current standardized tests include the following:

### Number Sense:

- understand meaning of operations

### Patterns, Functions & Algebra

- explore, identify, analyze, extend patterns
- analyze change in various contexts

### Statistics & Probability

- collect, organize and represent data
- describe data
- make and evaluate arguments and statements
- know and apply probability

### Geometry and Measurement

- use and apply geometry to describe physical world
- use symmetry
- specify locations
- apply appropriate techniques and tools

Predictably, areas that are adequately assessed are those that lend themselves to paper and pencil assessment and are traditionally viewed as important in math. These include:

### Number Sense

- represent and use numbers
- computation

### Patterns, Functions & Algebra

- represent numbers using equations
- recognize and use algebraic symbols

(note: these two standards are often seen as 'set-up' problems on the GED)

### Statistics & Probability

- read and interpret data

### Geometry and Measurement

- relate geometric ideas to measurement (perimeter, area, volume, etc)

Most off-the-shelf standardized tests do not include aspects of all 4 strands across all levels. For example, functions and geometry are usually not included in lower levels of tests, though they are included in the ABE Mathematics Curriculum Framework. On the other hand, measuring perimeter and area is often included in advanced levels of standardized tests but not in higher levels of the CF.

For the off-the-shelf tests that we looked at, there is not a good match between the various levels of the test and the levels outlined in the ABE Mathematics Curriculum Framework. This is obviously a problem if one of the purposes of the assessment is to measure when learners advance levels (for NRS reporting).

In light of the issues outlined above, the Mathematics Working Group recommended the following steps for long-term consideration:

- a) Field test the current form of the math CF, particularly for clarity of learning standards.
  - b) Develop a standardized test that more closely matches the math CF learning standards content and levels.
  - c) Begin to develop a performance based assessment for one or two of the strands least successfully measured by standardized paper and pencil testing. We recommend starting with statistics (particularly the standard – collect, organize and represent data ) and geometry/measurement (particularly the standard – apply appropriate tools to determine measurements).
- (2) The PAWG recommended that we explore the possibility of using the BEST PLUS for ESOL Speaking and Listening commencing fiscal year 2004. They also recommended reviewing Massachusetts’s program-developed assessments, which if used, would have to go through a standardization process for the purposes of validity, reliability and comparability. In addition, they suggested looking at the possibility of designing new performance-based assessments.
- (3) A majority of PAWG members concluded that a teacher cannot administer or score primary assessments for his/her own students and still ensure adequate reliability in a “high stakes” environment. Members discussed that teachers and/or counselor(s) may administer and score the assessments for other teachers’ students and that some programs may want to explore entering into agreements with other nearby DOE-funded programs in order to "share" assessment administration and scoring. Members felt that this would be a difficult requirement for many, particularly small programs to meet and recommended that the Department consider a transition period. NOTE: The Department has extended this transition period through February 2003. Beginning March, teachers cannot administer or score primary assessments for their own students.

#### **4. STUDENT GOALS & “COUNTABLE OUTCOMES”**

“Countable Outcomes” attempt to capture the major reasons that motivate students come to our programs in addition to increasing their basic skills in reading, writing, math, speaking, and listening. These include items such as attaining citizenship, getting a driver’s license, getting a job, helping children with homework, increasing income, or learning about health issues. Countable Outcomes are the stated goals of students who enroll in our programs. Throughout the 1990’s, Massachusetts ABE programs funded by the Department of Education recorded the reasons why students enrolled and persisted in their services, i.e., the students’ “goals.” Programs followed up with students and recorded which of these goals were being achieved. With WIA, the accompanying National Reporting System (NRS), and emerging state requirements, it became clear that student self-report would not be adequate to achieve sufficient levels of validity and reliability. The PAWG was confronted with finding the right balance between honoring the breadth of purposes that students pursue by enrolling in ABE and the burden that documenting such a large universe of goals and related achievements would place on ABE programs.

The compromise was to:

- (a) organize student goals into three categories (“A,” “B,” and “C”) with a decreasing burden on the program for goals organized into each category from A to C; ,
- (b) ensure that the diversity of purposes/“roles” are represented, i.e., the adult student’s roles as worker, life-long learner, family and community member.

Developing the Countable Outcomes section of our system was extremely challenging. PAWG members started work on this area by brainstorming the “things we do well” when working with adult students. What emerged was a list of some 40+ items that ranged from teaching reading, to helping people quit smoking. We then focused on how to hone down such an overwhelming list without losing or denying the rich and complex purposes for which our students seek our services. This paring-down process took well over a year and included its own challenges along the way.

One of the biggest controversies regarding measuring Countable Outcomes was the issue of collecting social security numbers for data matching. Most PAWG members were very uncomfortable with this step, but the decision by the Governor’s Task Force to require data matching for students enrolled in ABE made this discussion moot. Henceforth, the PAWG’s discussions and concerns focussed on how to implement this new requirement with as much sensitivity and respect and with as little detrimental effect as possible<sup>4</sup>.

### **Recommendations for Countable Outcomes**

As you look at the Countable Outcomes Chart (refer to Appendix C), you will note that the items are familiar as most of them originated with our students, have been used for several years, and appear in the SMARTT ABE database. Be sure to read through the seven “Notes” at the top of the Chart. They orient the reader with important information regarding the columns and items. The Countable Outcomes Chart includes a five page document, also included in Appendix C, that outlines the definition and standards for measuring and documenting each item found in Columns A and B. The definitions and evidence outline denotes what is required of programs in working with students toward these goals and documenting outcomes.

#### **A. COLUMN A**

Column A includes goals for which standards of validity, reliability, AND level of performance must be set. This means that if a student selects a Column A item as his or her goal, the program will need to pay special attention to the standards for counting and documenting the goal as “achieved.” Further, the Department will be analyzing performance across programs and certain population sub-groups (e.g., homeless or incarcerated adults) and setting ranges of acceptable performance based on this analysis. Note that most items in Column A are required by the federal government under WIA except item 5c, increased earnings, which is required by the state (the Governor’s Task Force) and items 6 and 7 which were included by the PAWG to ensure that performance related to family (family literacy) and community (citizenship) are afforded equal visibility and weight as the other (primarily employment related) goal accomplishments are. By requiring our programs to collect *high stakes* information (information upon which crucial decisions are based, including funding eligibility and student advancement) in the areas of family literacy and citizenship, we are honoring the variety of student purposes that students have traditionally held as important. This model views the adult learner as a complex individual engaged in various life roles including worker, citizen, family-member, and life-long learner.

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix D *State of Concern Regarding Data Matching*

## B. COLUMN B

Column B includes items whose measurement and documentation must adhere to standards of validity, reliability, and comparability but no standards for levels of program performance are proposed at this time. Programs need to obtain and file documentation that these goals were attained. Acceptable evidence of attainment is described in the narrative accompanying the Countable Outcomes Chart.

## C. COLUMN C

Column C captures any student-stated goal/purpose that does not already appear in Columns A or B. Column C items are based on student self-report, and no standards are set for ensuring validity, reliability, or levels of performance. This column is included to acknowledge the many other purposes that students who enroll in our programs seek to pursue. While valid, reliable, and comparable data related to these goals would be useful, no such standards are set at this time out of respect and concern for the already substantial challenges/burdens that the ABE performance accountability system is placing on programs and staff.

## 5. A COHESIVE SYSTEM and UNFINISHED BUSINESS

As is current practice, programs will work with students to ascertain their primary reason(s) for enrolling, i.e., and their goal(s). These will be entered into the SMARTT system and will guide which program of study, including placement and pre/post assessments, is most appropriate. Given its central role in the ABE performance accountability system, the PAWG recommends that the Department convene a working group to provide a greater degree of guidance to the goal setting process. At a minimum, members felt that goal setting needed to ensure the student's voice is heard and recorded (e.g., not rushed during intake) and that the process is revisited periodically since one of the characteristics of participating in a strong educational program is that goals can change over time. Further, students need to be well oriented to the program *before* major/challenging activities like pre-testing for educational gain take place. NOTE: The Department has asked programs to wait two to four weeks after intake before administering the pre-test to students.

The Department has accepted the following recommendations from the PAWG with regard to which statewide assessment instruments are approved for measuring educational gain during the interim period:

- TABE for ABE & ASE levels, above GLE 1.9
- BEST Speaking/Listening for beginning ESOL, up to SPL 5
- REEP for ESOL writing.
  - (1) For students at SPL 4 and above whose primary assessment is writing. In special instances it may be administered to students at SPL 2 and above (see p. 25 in the Assessment Policies or Procedures Manual for details.)
  - (2) Or for students who are at or may enter SPL 6 during the program year regardless of whether "writing" is related to their goal(s) for enrolling in the program.

Beginning in FY 2003, all students - current and new - must be pre- and post- tested using one of these instruments and the resulting scores recorded as the students' "primary assessment." At the same time, the PAWG recommended that the Department begin development of the long-term ABE assessments and evaluate alternatives for the current versions of the BEST and REEP. The Department has accepted this recommendation and hopes to enter into a contract with the University of Massachusetts, Amherst to work in partnership with the field to begin this work.

Levels of performance related to educational gain and column A, Countable Outcomes, will be based on an initial and ongoing analyses of such performance across programs and the diverse student populations they serve. Ranges of performance that are acceptable, exceptional and under-performing will be based on these profiles of current performance. The primary purpose of comparing the performance of individual programs with these levels/standards is to support the continuous improvement of these services. The PAWG acknowledged that the Department would need to work with the Massachusetts ABE Directors' Council to establish a framework for how performance on these various measures would be combined to create a program profile and what the consequences of different levels of performance would be. The PAWG also recommended that another performance accountability working group should be convened ("PAWG II") to ensure that this work is thoroughly researched, debated and that various options can be evaluated and recommended.

It is the Department's intention to implement the PAWG's recommendations and convene a second Performance Accountability Working Group (PAWG II) during FY 2003, perhaps as early as January. Following is a listing of the pending items that will be included in the charge to PAWG II:

- (1) Developing statewide assessment tools: As noted above in the discussion of Student Primary Assessment, the selection of available tools to measure achievement toward learning standards in the Massachusetts Math, ESOL, and English Language Arts Curriculum Frameworks is not adequate for the long-term. PAWG has recommended that statewide tools be developed and a process will be designed to proceed with this work.
- (2) ELA and ESOL Curriculum Frameworks revisions: Through the research conducted by PAWG members, it became clear that pieces of these two Frameworks needed revision so that the universe of content was complete and so that the standards would actually be measurable as stated in the Frameworks. A process to accomplish this will be put in place.
- (3) Inter-rater Reliability: We must establish protocols to ensure adequate levels of inter-rater reliability for high stakes performance assessments such as the BEST and the REEP.
- (4) Native Language Literacy (ABE 0-1.9 GLE): Presently there are no known valid and reliable assessments that can be used to determine achievement in NLL. PAWG II will explore this issue further.
- (5) Adult/External Diploma Programs: At this time, the Department is considering delaying the requirement that adult students must pass the MCAS exam to earn an "alternative" or "extended" high school diploma (ADP/EDP).
- (6) Transition-to-College Programs: PAWG II will continue to explore ABE 0-1.9 assessment and the unique assessment needs of transition programs within the state.
- (7) Workplace Education: As with other special populations, basic education sited in the workplace has additional goals that should be assessed. Currently, there is no recommended statewide ABE assessment tool for these programs.
- (8) Goal-Setting Process: Because student goals are a central piece to our accountability system, the PAWG recommends that the goal-setting process be strengthened and perhaps, become more uniform across the state. We need to ensure that students have the strategies and support to articulate their own goals and that what is recorded represents the genuine goals and aspirations of the students.

- (9) Evaluation of the interim tools and processes: Over the next few years must construct ways of examining how programs are adapting to the changes and learn from the experiences of using the goal setting process, capturing countable outcomes, and administering the REEP. Likewise we must continue to develop constructive ways to support them in accomplishing these goals.
- (10) Setting program standards for performance: The process for evaluating program performance agreed to by the ABE Directors' Council and the Department must be evaluated and various options for how/where to set levels of performance developed.
- (11) Learning disabilities: We must determine how to appropriately assess/test students with learning disabilities.

Other next steps for the longer term:

- (12) We need more appropriate assessment tools for literacy learners with high oral skills but low or no literacy skills
- (13) There are few (and, perhaps, no) appropriate tools for emerging or basic literacy.
- (14) Developing our own valid, reliable and comparable assessment tools requires clearly stated, measurable learning standards in the Curriculum Frameworks; some standards may require further clarification.
- (15) Performance-Based Assessments can provide a higher degree of "authenticity"/validity; we need to expand their use, always being cognizant of the resource demands they place on students, staff, local programs and the state.
- (16) We need to continuously strengthen the student's role at the driving force in ABE performance accountability through the goals they articulate and other means.
- (17) We need to determine the connections among student literacy gains and their attainment of countable outcomes.
- (18) We need to learn how to measure/capture metacognitive and executive function skills (e.g., critical thinking, learning to learn skills, etc.).
- (19) We need to learn how to measure/capture the program's contribution to students' self-confidence and motivation.

Finally, The Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE/ACLS) would like to express its gratitude to the PAWG members for their hard work and commitment to the working group. We look forward to the work that lies ahead.

## APPENDIX A

### *PAWG Participants and Dates of Service:*

#### **Shelley Bourgeois**

Director of Education, Jackson Mann Community Center.....**January 2001 – January 2002**

#### **Lino DeSousa**, Counselor/Facilitator, Adult Continuing Education,

New Bedford Public Schools.....**May 2001 – June 2002**

**Stacy Evans**, Coordinator, Project Link, Berkshire Community College.....**January 2001 – June 2002**

**Marie Hassett**, Consultant.....**January 2001 – December 2001**

**Chris Hebert**, Director/Counselor, Quinsigamond Community College.....**January 2001 – June 2002**

**Marcia Hohn**, Director, Northeast SABES .....**January 2001 – June 2002**

**Andy Nash**, Staff Development Specialist, NELRC .....**January 2001 – June 2002**

**Mina Reddy**, Director, Community Learning Center; Director of SABES.....**January 2001 – June 2002**

**Tim Sappington**, Director, N. Central Mass Workforce Investment Board..... **January 2001 – June 2002**

**June Sekera**, Agency Vice President, Corporation for Business Work and Learning .....**January – December 2001**

**Anne Serino**, Director, Operation Bootstrap..... **January 2001 – June 2002**

**Judy Titzel**, Program Developer, World Education.....**January 2001 – June 2002**

**Bill Toller**, Assistant Superintendent, Hampden County Sheriff's Department ..... **January 2001 – June 2002**

#### *Staff:*

**Bob Bickerton**, Director, ACLS .....**January 2001 – June 2002**

**Dineen Casilli**, Administrative Coordinator, ACLS..... **January 2001 – June 2002**

**Marie Cora**, Staff Development Specialist, SABES.....**January 2001 – June 2002**

**Robert Foreman**, Education Specialist IV, ACLS..... **January 2001 – June 2002**

**Judi Pregot**, Team Leader, ACLS.....**January – December 2001**

**Jane Schwerdtfeger**, Curriculum and Assessment Development Specialist, ACLS.....**August 2001 – June 2002**

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Work Groups for Researching Options and Presenting Recommendations:**

#### ESOL Assessment:

Mina Reddy  
Chris Hebert  
Andy Nash  
Robert Foreman  
Jane Schwerdtfeger

#### ABE Assessment/Math:

Shelley Bourgeois  
Lino DeSousa  
Stacy Evans  
Judy Titzel

#### ABE Assessment/ELA:

Anne Serino  
Judi Pregot  
Marie Hassett  
Tim Sappington  
Bill Toller  
Jane Schwerdtfeger

#### Countable Outcomes:

Marcia Hohn  
June Sekera  
Marie Cora  
Bob Bickerton

## APPENDIX C – Countable Outcomes Chart

**Notes:**

1. **Column A:** Standards will be set for ensuring validity and reliability; standards will be set for levels of performance.
2. Items 6 and 7 in Column A will undergo pilot year during FY 2003; standards developed based on pilot; programs not accountable during pilot.
3. **Column B:** Standards will be set for ensuring validity and reliability; NO standards will be set for levels of performance.
4. Item 3 in Column B “Negotiated Outcomes”: program will decide goals and outcomes in consultation with ACLS; this data will be collected.
5. **Column C:** Items will be based on self-report; NO standards for V&R or performance levels will be set.
6. “Unanticipated outcomes” (student accomplishments not stated as goals) will be collected within any Column.
7. Levels of performance may be set differently for certain population sub-groups (homeless, incarcerated adults).

COLUMN A	COLUMN B	COLUMN C
<p><b>Performance Accountability Items</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1a. Obtain GED (WIA)</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;">b. Obtain ADP/EDP (WIA)</li> <li>2a. Entered training (WIA)</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;">b. Retained training (WIA)</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;">c. Completed training (WIA)</li> <li>3a. Entered transitional education (WIA)</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;">b. Retained transitional education (WIA)</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;">c. Completed transitional education (WIA)</li> <li>4a. Entered post secondary education (WIA)</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;">b. Retained post secondary education (WIA)</li> <li>5a. Entered employment (WIA)</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;">b. Retained employment (WIA)</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;">c. Increased earnings (Gov’s Task Force)</li> <li>6. Read, write, do mathematical problem-solving with child, and/or help child with homework (PAWG)</li> <li>7. Attain citizenship (PAWG)               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Receipt of application</li> <li>b. Notice of citizenship Interview</li> <li>c. Passed exam</li> <li>d. Received certificate</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>Reporting Items</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-Advocacy           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Get a driver’s license</li> <li>b. Get and use a library card</li> <li>c. Register to vote</li> <li>d. Vote in federal, state, or local elections</li> <li>e. Locate and/or use community agencies</li> </ol>           or            services           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>f. Participate in community activities</li> <li>g. Obtain more satisfying/appropriate employment</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Financial Literacy Gain           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Open a checking/savings account</li> <li>b. Obtain stable housing</li> <li>c. Buy a domicile</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Negotiated Program Outcomes           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Health</li> <li>b. Civic participation</li> <li>c. Family literacy</li> <li>d. Workplace education</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>Student Goals not listed in Columns A or B</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Economic           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Retain current job by meeting new requirements</li> <li>b. Get industry-related certificate</li> <li>c. Be removed from public assistance</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Educational           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Increase computer literacy skills</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Health           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Quit smoking</li> <li>b. Improve personal health</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Parenting/Family Literacy Learning           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Increase participation in school activities</li> <li>b. Join an organization at your child’s school</li> <li>c. Have greater involvement in child’s schooling</li> <li>d. Improve family communication</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. Societal           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Enhance household management skills</li> <li>b. Enhance financial management skills</li> <li>c. Reconnect/reintegrate to community after institutionalization</li> <li>d. Learn about U.S. culture</li> <li>e. Attain legal residency</li> </ol> </li> <li>6. Other</li> </ol>

Column A		
Measures Requiring Valid & Reliable Data and Performance Standards		
NAME	DEFINITION	REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION
1(a) Obtain GED	Achieves score that qualifies for GED.	Will use data matching with GED database.
1(b) Obtain ADP/EDP	Determined by local school committee (may require passing MCAS or some “equivalent” in future). The Department is exploring options for how these students might meet the new (2003) “competency determination” requirements; some of these options may only apply to students 25+ years of age.	Currently ascertained via self-report/follow-up for up to 12 months. A copy of the diploma must be kept in the student’s file.
2(a) Entered Training	Training is defined as educational activity that does not include matriculation towards a degree (Associates, Bachelors, etc.).	Currently self-reported during enrollment or ascertained via follow-up for up to 12 months after exit. A letter or other document signed by the student and kept on file at the program should be of sufficient reliability in the absence of a data match. Unclear whether data matching will be used to answer this in future; this would only cover training programs that are part of the state supported education, employment and training system; would only resolve validity and reliability for students entering this segment of training opportunities.
2(b) Retained/Training	Defined as retained in training for at least 3 months after enrollment.	Since student verification alone may be of questionable reliability and since most trainings are relatively short term, it might be advisable to collect “completed training” instead and use a copy of the certificate issued and kept on file as documentation. Same issues as regards data matching described in 2(a) above
2(c) Completed Training	Defined as completing training requirements that qualify for receipt of certificate.	Refer to description in 2(b) above.
5. Transitional Education Including Occasional Courses	Defined as enrollment in a program specifically designed to increase a student’s likelihood of succeeding in post-secondary education and/or enrollment in one or more courses that do not qualify the student as matriculating toward a degree.	A copy of an acceptance letter or other written verification on the school’s letterhead must be kept in the student’s file.

NAME	DEFINITION	REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION
4(a) Entered Post-Secondary Education	Defined as enrollment in a program leading to an Associates or Bachelors degree, i.e., a matriculating student.	Currently self-reported post exit from ABE program. In the absence of data matching, a signed letter or other document on the school's letterhead should be of adequate reliability. Undecided whether data matching will be used to answer this in future; many believe this would be desirable and it appears to be on the agenda for the Board of Higher Education. Would only address validity and reliability issues for students enrolling in public higher education in Massachusetts.
4(b) Retained in Post-Secondary Education	Defined as actively attending courses and maintaining matriculating status for 6 months after enrollment.	Same issues, re: validity and reliability, as "entered post-secondary education." Similar concern as with "retained training," re: reliability of student self-report. However, "completion" is too far in the future to use standard follow-up procedures.
5(a) Entered Employment	Defined as getting a job and earning wages during enrollment in a program, or within 3 months of exit from the program.	Will use data matching. Classification of full vs. part-time will most likely require "self report" by students of hours of employment.
5(b) Retained Employment	Defined as retaining employment for 6 to 9 months after obtaining employment.	Will use data matching.
5(c) Increased Earnings	Defined as an increase in earnings as identified through a data match with the state's unemployment database.	Will use data matching. Based on quarterly earnings.
6. Read, write, do mathematical problem-solving with child, and/or help child with homework, for not less than 30 minutes, or twice per week, and for a minimum of four consecutive months.	Adult caregiver tracks work within a portfolio (log of what materials are used/worked on, date and time duration of each interaction, showing sustained duration over 4 months).	Measures tracked by self-report. Will undergo pilot year during FY 2003; standards developed based on pilot; programs will not be held accountable during pilot.
7. Attain Citizenship	Eligible applicant completes required activities for attaining U.S. naturalization, as outlined by Immigration and Naturalization Services. (An eligible applicant is one who has held a Permanent Resident Card for 5 years.)	Individual produces all required documentation issued by INS (see below). Will undergo pilot year during FY 2003; standards developed based on pilot; programs will not be held accountable during pilot.

7(a) Receipt of Application	INS sends Receipt Notice within approximately 2 months to applicant; (this document is important: it is the only acknowledgement given by INS upon receipt of application; it contains information regarding the next steps in the procedure for attaining naturalization.)	A copy of Receipt Notice must be kept in the student's file.
7(b) Notice of Citizenship	INS sends Citizenship Interview Notice to applicant; (document schedules the individual for an oral and/or written exam on the person's basic knowledge of reading and writing English, as well as the person's working knowledge of American history and current events.)	A copy of Citizenship Interview Notice must be kept in the student's file.
7(c) Passed Exam	INS sends Approval of Exam document to applicant.	A copy of Approval of Exam document must be kept in the student's file.
7(d) Received Certificate	Applicant receives certificate at Oath Ceremony in which candidate is sworn in as a naturalized citizen.	A copy of certificate must be kept in the student's file.

Column B		
Measures Requiring Valid & Reliable Data – No Performance Standards		
NAME	DEFINITION	REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION
1(a) Get a Driver's License	Student completes requirements for obtaining a driver's license.	Student provides copy of driver's license to program.  The driver ID number must be blacked out prior to placing a copy in the student's file in order to ensure confidentiality; driver's licenses often contain social security numbers.
1(b) Get and Use Library Card	Student brings library card and materials withdrawn from library to program.	A photocopy of the library card and the material(s) must be kept in the student's file.
1(c) Register to Vote	Student completes requirements for registering to vote.	1. Newly registered voters are provided with a card or letter that confirms their registration; a copy must be kept in the student's file. 2. Currently recorded based on student self-report; will need to obtain documentation for reliable official confirmation.
1(d)Vote in Federal, State, or Local Elections	Student completes requirements for voting in elections.	Based on student self-report.
1(e) Learn About and/or Use Community Agencies	Students will collect in a portfolio: Brochures/flyers or other descriptions from agencies or groups detailing their purpose, services and/or materials, AND/EITHER Descriptions in writing, or by video or audio tape, about experience with the agency, not disclosing purpose of visiting agency but using guiding questions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who did you talk with?</li> <li>• How were you treated?</li> <li>• Were you pleased, or not pleased, with the interaction, and why?,</li> </ul> (continued) AND/OR Reflect on and demonstrate knowledge, skills and	Portfolio must be kept in student's file.

	<p>abilities gained by any one or combination of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentations to other students (including Student Councils, Student Health Teams, and other appropriate student leadership groups at their own or at another program);</li> <li>• Preparing materials for display at programs;</li> <li>• Holding discussions with other students in small groups.</li> </ul>	
1(f) Participate in Community Activities.	<p>Descriptions in writing or by video or audio tape regarding experience with the community activity;</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>AND/OR</b></p> <p>Reflect on and demonstrate knowledge, skills and abilities gained by any one or combination of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentations to other students (including Student Councils, Student Health Teams, and other appropriate student leadership groups at their own or at another program);</li> <li>• Preparing materials for display at programs;</li> <li>• Holding discussions with other students in small groups.</li> </ul>	Student-produced materials must be kept in the student's file.
1(g) Obtain More Satisfying/Appropriate Employment	<p>Job schedule and/or duties are a better fit with worker needs and circumstances. Examples of evidence include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• job provides learning and growth;</li> <li>• job puts worker on a career path;</li> <li>• job allows worker to work within their profession (i.e., as a trained person from another country);</li> <li>• job is more compatible with the student's health/physical needs/limitations, etc.</li> </ul>	Based on customer satisfaction/self-report. Student provides a letter or other brief description, video or audio tape of why this is true.

NAME	DEFINITION	REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION
2(a) Open a Checking/Savings Account	Student completes requirements for opening a checking and/or savings account.	Student provides copy of a blank check or deposit slip printed with student's name and with the account number(s) blacked out.
2(b) Obtain Stable Housing	Student negotiates definition with teacher.	Based on self-report.
2(c) Buy a Domicile	Student completes requirements for purchase.	Student provides copy of appointment letter for closing; copy of letter confirming home-owners insurance; or copy of a water/sewer bill.
3(a-d) Negotiated Program Outcomes	<p>Applies to categorically funded special projects that are group-oriented.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Civic participation</li> <li>• Family literacy</li> <li>• Workplace education</li> </ul>	Program will decide goals and outcomes in consultation with ACLS; this data will be collected.